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NIGERIA-NIGER RELATIONS: BETWEEN CORDIALITY AND BRINKMANSHIP, 2015-2023

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Abstract
Nigeria and Niger Republic are two West African neighbours with geostrategic interests. Nigeria's fraternal relationship with Niger Republic draws its breath of life from more than just her Afrocentrism. It is rooted in their histories. The peoples of both countries were hitherto territorially yoked before European scramble for African territory unbundled them in 1884/1885. Yet, cordiality between Northern Nigerians and Nigeriens survived colonial sundering and deepened in the post-colonial period. Blood ties between the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani people in Nigeria and Niger plus their historical socio-economic contact took Nigeria-Niger cordial relations to new heights. Hence, Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari arguably drew closer to Niger due to his Fulani roots. But in 2023, under President Bola Tinubu Nigeria-Niger relations deteriorated to knife-edge brinkmanship partly due to leadership personality and perception changes. This paper interrogated how this development challenged Nigeria's Afrocentrism and open new remedial foreign policy options. Using the historical research methodology and the constructivist analytical framework, this study chronicled the changing nature of Nigeria-Niger relations. It found that cordiality in Nigeria and Niger relations was anchored on their response and adaptation to internal and external factors. Cordiality peaked in 1985 when Buhari as serving Nigerian Head-of-State defied international relations common sense. He voted for a Nigerien as OAU Secretary-General instead of his Nigerian opponent. It continued in 2023 when Buhari government constructed a railway line to Niger Republic and partly funded its government. Brinkmanship later set in when Niger's military coup threatened Western democratic and economic interests and infringed upon ECOWAS Protocol. At the brink of war, this paper conclude that Nigeria-Niger historic socio-cultural ties and Nigeria's Afrocentrism prevailed and cleared the path for cordiality to return.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Niger Republic, Cordiality, Brinksmanship, Afrocentrism*

Introduction

Nigeria is located in the West African sub-region of the African continent. It occupies a territorial landmass of 923,773km^2 that lies between the geographic coordinates of 10 00 N, 8 00 E (Nigerian Embassy Vietnam, n.d.). This land is naturally blessed with varied vegetation and soil types that are suitable for a variety of agricultural purposes (Falola and Matthem, 2008). Nigeria is divided into three major geographical sections

namely West, East and North by the River Niger and River Benue that flows through with the Republic of Cameroon in the west, Niger and Chad Republics in the south and the Republic of Benin in the North East. The country borders the Gulf of Guinea between Benin Republic and Cameroon with a coastline that stretches 853km. Nigeria has a total land boundary of 4,477km that is distributed among her neighbours as follows: Benin 809km, Cameroon 1,975km, Chad 85km, and Niger 1,608km (Nigerian Embassy Vietnam, n.d.). Studies on Nigeria's relations with her neighbours remain a fascinating research field because Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world with a total population of about 239,321,412 people (Worldometer, n.d.). In Africa, Nigeria is also arguably one of the most endowed with resources in the continent. Thus, efforts to understand how Nigeria is (under) utilising these advantages in her relations with her West African neighbours can never be out place. Focus on Nigeria-Niger relations in this study is apt because both share a lot in common. Nigeria and Niger are culturally diverse secular states with deep historic connections. The Nigerian state is a conglomerate of over 250 ethnic groups with different languages and religions. While the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo people are the major ethnic groups in Nigeria; other ethnic groups such as the Esan, Annang, Isoko, Itsekiri, Anioma and Igbanke among others serve as the minority ethnic groups.

Politically, Nigeria is divided into thirty-six (36) states and administered as a federation. This satisfies the desire and allays the fear of the minority ethnic groups in the country. Since 1946, State creation has been a nation building political masterstroke. From Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) created in 1991, inter-group and inter-personal relations of the peoples of Nigeria are daily steered away from brinksmanship to cordiality. This system of promoting nation building and internal harmony in statecraft is also the anchorage of Niger Republic drive towards national unity in diversity. Therefore, beyond the socio-cultural similarities between both Nigeria and Niger, federalism is another political bond uniting them. Both countries share so much in common except colonial legacy and date of independence. While Niger gained her independence from France on August 2, 1960; Nigeria gained hers from Britain on October 1, 1960. Nigeriens and the Hausa speaking people of Northern Nigeria are culturally related and homogenous. However, the foundation of Nigeria and Niger relations goes beyond the fact that they are geographically contiguous states. Without doubt, the people of northern Nigeria and Nigeriens were hitherto one and the same people before they were partitioned in the 19th century. European scramble for territories in Africa that was resolved in the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 was what put asunder to a people that had been yoked together for long. The congress diplomacy presided over by Otto Von Bismarck of Germany sundered Nigerians and Nigeriens by establishing the modalities for the effective occupation and ownership of their territories by different European powers. It also established the rights of passage and privileges of other European powers in territories controlled by their rivals.

Beyond paving the way for French colonialism of Niger, the partition and creation of Niger set in motion the wheel of Nigeria-Niger relations. The brotherliness and camaraderie that bound Nigerians and Nigeriens together was reinforced in the post-colonial era through Nigeria's Afrocentrism. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the determinants of and patterns in Niger and Niger relations in the twenty-first century. The study interrogates the change and continuities in Nigeria-Niger relations from 2015-2023. The year 2015 is significant in this study because it marked the return of Buhari's pro-Niger (Fulani) foreign policy disposition as a civilian President; while the year 2023 marked the end of the Buhari led statecraft and Nigercentrism. Within the period, the paper explores the extent to which trade, security, and cultural exchanges formed the bedrock of Nigeria-Niger relations until the 2023 military coup d'état in Niger ruptured it. From economic cooperation and collaboration under President Muhammadu Buhari, that resulted in Nigeria opening a direct economic corridor to Niger by constructing a railway line to link both countries, this paper

would interrogate how Nigeria-Niger relations reached brinkmanship under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023. Hence, the study examines the internal and external factors that informed Nigeria's foreign policy of ultimatum and brinkmanship in her relations with Niger. It demonstrates that the General Tchiani led coup d'état completely rewrote the script of Niger relations with ECOWAS and Nigeria. It estranged the country from ECOWAS and placed her on a war path with Nigeria. Furthermore, the paper explores the role of Nigeria's historic connections with Niger and Afrocentric disposition in de-escalating the tense situation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically underpinned on the theory of constructivism because of its suitability and aptness with the descriptive and explanatory research design. The theory of constructivism was first developed in the 1950s as a learning theory. It enables learners and scholars to construct and expand the frontiers of knowledge rather than accepting existing knowledge hook line sinker. The thrust of the constructivism theory is that scholars and learners build on their existing knowledge foundation to birth new information and reshape their own understanding they are engaging in constructivism. The first application of the theory of constructivism to international relations phenomena was done by Nicholas Greenwood Onuf (1989) in his book "*World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*". In his constructivism, Onuf examined how human norms affect and create new patterns of international relations. However, the theory of constructivism as a budding international relations analytical framework was later popularized by Alexander Wendt (1992) in his article "*Anarchy is What We Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*". Alexander Wendt (1999) further expanded the frontiers of the theory of constructivism in his book "*Social Theory of International Politics*". Applying the praxis of the learning theory of constructivism to international relations, Wendt argued that the understanding of concepts in international relations studies is subject to human perspective than nature. Hence, the theory of constructivism promotes the view that international relations as well as other phenomena in the international system are best understood when they are constructed in the context of the milieu that informed them. This implies that paying attention to the political, economic and socio-cultural dynamics of states is critical to understanding their behavior towards other states.

Therefore, the theory of constructivism makes the interpretation and explanation of international events very fluid. It is a rethinking theory of international relations that allows scholars space to contend and reposition dominant international relations perspectives. It provides an alternative theoretical framework to the dominant analytical perspectives of international relations that are anchored on what is and what ought to be (realism and idealism). In Nigeria and Niger relations from 2015-2023, the constructivism theoretical framework is employed to probe beneath surface of the screaming headlines and debates on the threat of war that appeared on the mainstream media during the period. By deconstructing and reconstructing the dominant narratives that surrounds the ruptured Niger Republic relations with Nigeria, ECOWAS and her former Western development partners the researchers were able to gain insight into how foreign national interests interacted with leadership personality and perception in Nigeria to foster brinkmanship in the international relations of West Africa's culturally connected neighbours. This constructivist narrative fittingly complements other realist and idealist perspectives in making sense of the post-coup Nigeria and Niger behaviors. Furthermore, from 2015-2023 the constructivist analysis framework was employed to reconstruct the extent to which the Afrocentric orientation of Nigeria's foreign policy was used to manage, pre-empt and reverse brinkmanship in post-colonial Nigeria and Niger relations; and its deployment in the pursuit of cordiality. Therefore, this study constructed the determinants and nature of Nigeria-Niger Republic relations based on the acquired knowledge of the researchers, data analysis and

interpretation. Hence, the theory of constructivism as adopted in this study engendered creative thinking or the "Thinking-outside-the-box" approach to the study of international relations. It entails paying attention to how existing knowledge and prevailing social conditions explain new phenomenon; and to innovative and novel ways of explaining and understanding existing knowledge. This makes constructivism a safeguard against the analytical monopoly and hegemony of realism and idealism in understanding international phenomena.

Methodology

This study is carried out using the historical research method. It used the explanatory research design to achieve its objectives. The chosen methodology of study is apt because it enabled the researchers to examine Nigeria-Niger Republic relations in historical perspective. Thus, the research problem of how foreign national interests interacted with leadership personality and perception in Nigeria to engender either cordiality or brinkmanship in Nigeria-Niger relations was chronicled over time and space. From the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period, the historical research method made it possible for the researchers to measure change and continuities in Nigeria and Niger Republic relations. It also facilitated our assessment of their degree of responsiveness and adaptation to their changing domestic milieu; and how this changing internal dynamics affect Nigeria-Niger relations from 2015 to 2023. Discussions in this study were also based on the researchers' observations of how Nigeria's Afrocentrism shaped the country's attitude and response to the 2023 military coup and Nigeria-Niger Republic post-coup relations. The data used in this study were majorly secondary materials. They include textbook, journal articles, newspaper, and internet (online) materials. They were complemented with primary sources such as speeches of key state actors and government or state agency publications. Data gathered from both sources were analysed and interpreted by the researchers through textual analysis, and inductive and deductive reasoning. However, some the limitations in analysing data using these techniques are the problem of bias and distortion of facts. To overcome this data analysis challenge, the researchers used the technique of cross-examination and cross-referencing of data. This means that narrative in one source was used to corroborate and validate narratives in other sources. By doing this, the research was able to achieve scientific objectivity in the presentation of findings.

Land and Human Geography of Niger Republic

Niger Republic is located in the West African sub-region of the African continent. It is a landlocked country bounded on the northwest by Algeria, northeast by Libya, on the east by Chad, on the West by Burkina Faso and Mali, and on the south by Nigeria and Benin Republic (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). The territoriality of Niger spans 750 miles (1,200km) from north to south and about 930 miles (1,460km) from east to west. The topography of the country, that got its name from the River Niger that flows through its southwestern part, is dominated by arid highlands. It is also pertinent to note that, while the north of Niger is nearly a desert; the south of the country usually enjoys increased rainfall (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

The geography and climate of Niger account for the division of the country into three economic zones. There is the desert zone in the north where economic activity hardly exists. The cultivated zone in the south where large percentage of Niger's population is concentrated and the intermediate zone in the center of the country were nomadic pastoralist rear cattle. In the northeast of Niger, there are series of high plateaus that form a bridge between the Ahaggar Mountains of Algeria and the Tibesti Mountains of Chad. There are also the Plateaus of Djado, Mangueni and Tchigai that dots the landscape of Niger from west to east (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

The people of Niger Republic are as diverse as the people of their Nigerian neighbor. They are mostly Black Africans mixed with small group of Arabs, Tuareg and other minorities. These people are organised into more than 200 ethnic groups.

The total population of Niger is about 26 million, with an estimated annual growth rate of 3.3% (Study.com, 2023). Although the country like its Nigerian neighbour is a secular state, religion holds sway in Niger. The people of Niger Republic are predominantly Muslim, with 98% of the population practicing Sunni Islam. In terms of their settlement pattern, 60% of the people of Niger Republic are living in rural areas. The rural lifestyle sustained by agriculture is prevalent in the country accounts for the estimation of the life expectancy of Nigeriens at 62.5 years. The ethnic demographics of Niger revealed that Hausa people make up 54% of the population; the Songhai people who are the second largest ethnic group make up to 21% of the total population. The Tuareg people make up 10%, the Fulani people make up 6.5%, and the Kanuri people make up 4.6% of the population (Study.com 2023). Agriculture as the economic mainstay of these people is environmentally determined. Despite the presence of natural resources such as uranium in Niger, the people of the country are one of the poorest in the world. This is partly because they majorly practice small scale farming; and because Niger Republic is heavily dependent on Nigeria, her big and rich West African neighbor and France, its former colonial power.

History and the Making of Nigeria-Niger Relations

Nigeria and Niger are two countries that derived their name from the River Niger. This means that the history of earliest inter-group relations between the peoples of Nigeria and Niger can be traced to the River Niger. The river was arguably the earliest point of contact between both neighbours who use it. To some extent, these people tie their survival to the river. The waterways of the River Niger facilitated social contact, mobility and economic cooperation in the harvesting of the fish resources of the river Niger. In pre-colonial times, the Tuaregs, who partly makeup modern Niger Republic, exist and thrive along the middle reaches of the river Niger around Timbuktu (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). They were part of the Songhai Empire who had relations with Kanem-Borno in Northern Nigeria. The dominant peoples of northern Nigeria during this period were the Hausa, Kanuri, Bolawa, Ngizim, Menga, Margi, Buduma. Kotoko, and the Fulani (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). However, it was the people of Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani that engaged in state formation in northern Nigeria (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.) which enabled them to have relations with other West African neighbours (Niger people).

Without doubt, the Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani peoples of Nigeria have blood ties, socio-cultural ties, and ancestral relationship with Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani people elsewhere in West Africa. Hence, part of Nigeria's rich historical heritage includes the fact that, its Kanuri people are closely connected with the people of Kanem in the eastern part of Lake Chad, where a kingdom comprising many small states emerged in circa 9th century (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). This was before the emergence of the Sefawa dynasty in 774AD that came to dominate the whole of the Lake Chad region. The historic roots of structured relationship between the people of Nigeria and Niger can be traced to the rise of the Mali and Songhai empires that incorporated some of the Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani peoples of Niger. The relations of Kanem-Borno with these societies at the macrocosm and microcosm levels engendered contact between the people of Nigeria and their Niger neighbours was enhanced by the fact that before 1884/1885 there were no well defined boundaries and border walls that demarcated them. Hence, Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani people freely interacted with their counterparts elsewhere in West Africa through the practice of nomadism.

In the course of time, the incident of colonial rule in Nigeria and Niger paved the way for the establishment of formalised relations between both countries. When Niger gained political independence from France on August 3, 1960; and Nigeria did the same from Britain on October 1, 1960; the historical antecedent of bilateral relations between both countries continued in many fronts. International cooperation and collaboration between Nigeria and Niger after their attainment of sovereignty was pursued through the United Nations (UN), the

Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It has also been pursued through direct bilateral cooperation such as aid and grants from Nigeria to Niger. It is against this backdrop that this study would interrogate the extent to which Nigeria's Afrocentricism served as a balancing act between cordiality and brinkmanship in Nigeria-Niger relations across different spectrum in the post-colonial period.

Cordiality in Post-Colonial Nigeria-Niger Relations: The Determinants

It follows from the foregoing that the first determinant of Nigeria-Niger's bilateral relations in the post-colonial era was their shared history. The socio-cultural affinity and blood ties that exist between Kanuri, Hausa and Fulani people in northern Nigeria with their counterparts in Niger is by far one of the post-colonial determinants of cordiality between both countries. It was even the biggest solo factor that propelled Nigeria's pro-Niger foreign policy in the Francophone world. This means that in French West Africa, Niger Republic is Nigeria's closest neighbor and ally. The pro-Niger Republic behavior of Nigeria's leadership and cordiality between both neighbours was evident in General Muhammadu Buhari as Nigeria's military Head of State voting against Nigeria in favour of Niger in the OAU Secretary-General Election in 1985. Buhari voted for Ide Oumarou, a Fulani man from Niger, in opposition to Peter Onu, a Nigerian from the Igbo tribal extraction (Vanguard Newspaper, 2017). The Vanguard reported that,

> Between 1983 and 1985, Peter Onu was the acting Secretary-General of the OAU. But at the 1985 summit in Addis Ababa, Peter Onu went up against statesmen like Ide Oumarou, Julius Nyerere, the President of Tanzania campaigned for Onu's election as the substantive Secretary-General of the OAU, but his candidacy was blocked by his own Head of State, Muhammadu Buhari, who campaigned against him. Buhari secured the election of Ide Oumarou; and became the first and only Head of State in the modern history of international relations to vote against his country in favour of his tribe (Vanguard Newspaper, 2017).

Aside from blood ties and socio-cultural linkages, Nigeria-Niger relationship was also determined by their geographical proximity. Nigeria and Niger share border at the south. And this had made it possible for both countries to carry out seamless cross-border economic transactions. Cross-border trade between Nigeria and Niger was also deepened by the ECOWAS policy on free movement of people and free trade across West Africa. In the twenty first century, towards engendering cross-border relations between Nigeria and Niger, President Muhammadu Buhari initiated the construction of a railway line to Niger Republic. This construction project was justified on the ground that, the railway line would enable Niger access Nigeria's seaports for its import and enable Nigeria reap the benefits of economies of scale from Niger.

The foreign policy of reciprocity of Niger is another determinant of Nigeria-Niger relations. Since independence in 1960, Niger has been pursuing a pro-Nigeria foreign policy. This is partly because Nigeria is conceived as the rich uncle of Niger Republic and the Giant of Africa under whom Niger can seek refuge. Thus, intoxicated by the big-brother illusion, Nigeria has often been prioritising the interest of and cordiality with her West African neighbors (i.e. Niger Republic) over its immediate national interest. As Niger Republic look to the south from where her help is coming, Nigeria for her part has been bent on rewarding Niger's dependence on her through its Afrocentric foreign policy. Afrocentrism in Nigeria's foreign policy means that the interest of West African states and other African states in general comes first and second in the order of importance in Nigeria's foreign relations. Afrocentrism also means that Nigeria would prioritise solving the problems of her West African neighbours and African brothers elsewhere before anything else. It is an Africa for

Africans foreign policy framework that also seeks to promote and uphold the political and economic sovereignty of African states. Hence, it can be rightly said that the cordiality experienced in Nigeria-Niger relations from 2015 under President Buhari of Nigeria was partly informed by Nigeria's Afrocentrism. It had over the years, engendered mutual respect between Nigeria and Niger, and deepened their ideological commitment to democracy and the non-Alignment movement.

The last but not the least determinant of cordiality in post-colonial Nigeria and Niger relations is the long run national interest of Nigeria that her friendship with Niger serves. This national interest for both countries is both economic and security against terrorist and militia groups. It is arguable that since Niger is a very poor country, one of its core interests in drawing close to Nigeria is to gain access to opportunities, goods and social amenities that are scarce in Niger. This interest also includes how their shared national resources, the river Niger, can be exploited for the benefit of both countries. Thus, the Niger Basin Commission (NBC) as a collaborative and development framework in Nigeria-Niger relations owes its existence to the desire of both countries to effectively manage and utilize the shared natural resources. The shared national interest of Nigeria and Niger in the River Niger explains why Nigeria supplying electricity to Niger, this is due to the fact that being the rich uncle (big Brother) Nigeria has the financial power to construct and maintain dams (the Kainji dam and the Shiroro dam) from the River Niger; while Niger Republic who does not have a dam benefit in the form of energy supply from Nigeria. Even though the energy demand of its citizens is far from being satisfied, Nigeria has been supplying electricity to Niger through the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) because of the country-to-country arrangement that exist among Nigeria, Niger, Benin, and Togo.

Six percent (6%) of the electricity produced in Nigeria is exported to these West African neighbours because Nigeria has dammed the River Niger, so to prevent these countries that are upstream of the River Niger from damming it, Nigeria has to export electricity to them. This is a strategic partnership because, if these states that are upstream of the River Niger are to dam the River, Nigeria that is down below will experience water shortfall in its dams. In the long run, Nigeria expressed interest in her relationship with Niger is her national security. However, Niger Republic buying electricity from Nigeria has a comparative cost advantage. It is cheaper for the country to buy from Nigeria than to construct her own dam. While for Nigeria, satisfying the electricity need of Niger is also vital for preventing the country from looking elsewhere and building new partnership that could threaten Nigeria's interest. Therefore, Niger in West Africa is arguably Nigeria's weak neighbor and a poor cousin that she can afford to ignore to her own detriment.

Boko Haram Terrorism and Cordiality in Nigeria-Niger Military Relations

The emergence of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria's domestic politics was a 2002 phenomenon. It was the political economy misfortune of the country that was responsible for the skyrocketing rate of poverty and misery in northern Nigeria was that partly triggered the formation of Boko Haram. At inception, the Boko Haram group was led by Muhammed Yusuf and its goal was to challenge the political economy structure of Nigeria breeding poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment in the north. This was embodied in its ideology that "Western Education is a Sin" (Olojo, 2013). Beyond this, Akinola Olojo (2013) traced the remote origin of Boko Haram to the year 1995, when it was believed that the group was formed as a religious body known as "*Shabaab*" led by a Muslim youth called Lawan Abubakar. At this stage, the group mainly sought to engender religious reforms in the teachings and practices of Muslims in Northern Nigeria. But when Lawan departed to Saudi Arabia to further his studies in the University of Medina Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf ceased the opportunity to become the substantive leader of the group (Olojo, 2013, p. 3). Under him, Boko Haram became a weapon exploited by disgruntled politicians to undermine the authority of the state. Responsively, the Nigerian

government initiated efforts to contain Boko Haram which paradoxically ended in the killing of its leader under the custody of agents of the Nigeria state. This incident paved the way for leadership baton-change within Boko Haram and for the ideological repositioning of the group. When Abubakar Shekau emerged as the leader of Boko Haram in 2009, under him, Boko Haram was committed to revenging the killing of the founding leader of the group on Nigeria. It was under this circumstance that, Boko Haram experienced an identity rebirth to become a terrorist organization. In the years that followed Boko Haram's ideological and philosophical transformation to terrorism, the group unleashed a reign of terror in northern Nigeria that shook the country to its foundation, even in the south.

Its campaign of suicide attacks against soft and hard targets in northern Nigeria in defiance to Nigeria's military efforts to end the group pushed Nigeria to seek outside help. Niger, being a close door West African neighbor and also a victim of Boko Haram terrorism, was one of the countries Nigeria partnered with to combat Boko Haram terrorism. This national and international security imperative took Nigeria-Niger cordial relations from 2015-2023 to a new height. The new bond that was formed was manifested in the creation of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to push back and eliminate Boko Haram terrorism. Crisis Group (2020) reported that the MNJTF is an effort by the Lake Chad basin states: comprising of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, to pull their resources against Boko Haram, Jihadist threatening them. This anti-terrorism military cooperation and collaboration framework came into full force in 2015, when members of the group deployed over 8,000 troops to combat Boko Haram terrorists (Crisis Group, 2020).

Since it came to life in 2015, the Multinational Joint Task Force has carried out periodic operations that usually involve troops from one country fighting Boko Haram in the territory of other member states. By working together under the platform of the MNJTF, Nigeria and Niger have been able to engender cross-border cooperation and improve their tactical coordination. To a large extent, collaboration between Nigeria and Niger with the active involvement of other member states of the MNJTF was responsible for the success recorded in stemming the spread of Boko Haram between 2015 and 2016. The counter-terrorism campaign of the MNJTF also contributed to the squeezing of the group which partly forced Boko Haram to splinter into three factions (Crisis Group, 2020). Furthermore, from 2017-2019 short MNJTF offensives and other sustained operations led to the rescue of civilians captured by Boko Haram terrorists; the retaking of territories controlled by Boko Haram; and the facilitation of the delivery of humanitarian aid.[15] However, in March 2020, Boko Haram fought back in its biggest attack against the MNJTF that led to the death of some 90 Chadian troops (Crisis Group, 2020).

It should be noted that Nigeria and Niger relations through the Multinational Joint Task Force was incapacitated by the fact that Niger was only committed to a light-touch coordination in all their offensives; and also by the fact that some Niger officials as well as some officials from Chad opposed greater cooperation. In fact, in December 2019, Chad withdrew 1,000 of its troops fighting with the MNJTF in Nigeria. Despite, the challenges of military cooperation in the fight against Boko Haram terrorism kin Nigeria, what is significant here is the fact that, through early cordial relations that was responsible for the success of operations such as "*Operation Gama Aiki*" meaning "Finish the Job in Hausa" (2016); "*Operation Gama Aiki II*" (2017); and "*Operation Amni Faka*" meaning "Peace at All cost in Hausa" (2018); and "*Operation Yacin Tafki*" meaning "Lasting freedom in Hausa"; Nigeria-Niger partnership with the collaboration of their other West African development partners helped to temporarily tame and cage the Boko Haram monster.

Afrocentrism and Cordiality in Nigeria-Niger Economic Relations, 2015-2023

Since 1960, Afrocentrism has been the international relations framework of Nigeria towards her West African neighbours. Through Afrocentrism, Nigeria arguably pursues and secures her national interest prioritising the

investments as cross-border investments associated with a resident in one economy having control or a significant degree of influence on the management of an enterprise that is resident in another economy. As at the Q3 of 2023, Nigeria's capital importation was about $654.65 million (USD) (National Bureau of Statistics 2023). Since 2022, Premium Times (2022) reported that some of Buhari administration capital exportation went into the financial servicing of the politics and governance of Niger Republic. This spending was anchored on the grounds that, Nigeria has the duty to support its immediate neighbours, to enhance their security as it relates to Nigeria. This foreign largesse to Niger perfectly reflects the spirit of Nigeria's Afrocentrism. Thus, the Buhari administration approved, purchased and donated vehicles worth ₦1.4 billion to Niger Republic (Premium Times, 2022). The Nigerian President through his Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, insisted that such spending was in the national interest of Nigeria. The spending policy was justified as part of Nigeria's foreign policy to its West African neighbours to help them deal with insecurity (Agbakwuru, 2022).

Afrocentrism and Brinksmanship in Nigeria-Niger Relations

In 2023, Nigeria had a general election that produced Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the President of the country and Chairman of the ECOWAS Head-of-States meeting. Tinubu's tough stance on the issue of military coups in West Africa paved the way for Nigeria-Niger relations to rupture significantly on the political front and reached brinkmanship. This was caused by the July 26, 2023 military coup d'état in Niger Republic that toppled the constitutional government of President Mohamed Bazoum. On the basis of the rising insecurity in Niger, a group of soldiers formed the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) to rescue and salvage the situation. These officers (majorly palace guards of the President) initiated a palace coup by detaining Bazoum in his office. General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the chief of the Presidential Guards, was the one who carried out this coup after foiling several others himself in the past (VOA 2023). Following the success of this coup, in a televised broadcast on July 26 Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane announced the end of the Bazoum leadership and the start of a new regime. Then on July 27 General Abdourahamane Omar Tchiani appointed himself as the new Head-of-State of Niger Republic (Aljazeera, 2023).

Figure 1: General Abdourahamane Omar Tchiani



Source: VOA News, "General Tchiani: Shadowy Army Veteran who Seized Power in Niger", VOA News (July 28, 2023), https://voanews.com/a/general-tchiani-shadowy-army-veteran-who-seized-power-in-niger/7202611.html/ Accessed February 3, 2024.

Figure 2 above shows President Bola Ahmed Tinubu at the second ECOWAS meeting on the Niger coup held in Nairobi, Kenya on August 10, 2023. The Nigerian President espoused the principles of Nigeria's Afrocentrism and he outlined the remedial diplomatic steps his government took reverse the brinkmanship in Nigeria-Niger relations. This was expressed in his speech thus:

> Regrettably, the Seven day ultimatum issued during the first summit has not yielded the desired outcome. We also made diligent efforts through the deployment of various ECOWAS mediation teams to engage the military junta for a peaceful resolution of the situation… Other diplomatic initiatives included dispatching Special Envoys to non-ECOWAS nations such as Libya and Algeria to prevail on the junta to restore constitutional order in Niger (Tinubu, 2023).

Implicit in this speech is the real perception of the Nigerian President of the imposed sanctions and threat of military action against Niger. They were Afrocentric ways of forcing Niger's military government to the negotiation table and find a diplomatic solution to the West African problem. This ECOWAS war posturing also reflected the personality of the Nigerian President is known to be a dogged statesman and astute politician domestically. It also reflects the never say-die-spirit of President Tinubu that guides the pursuit of any goal he sets his mind on achieving. Hence, unlike his predecessor President Buhari who was mild and fatherly in his relationship with Niger, Tinubu was not afraid to step on Niger's toes. While it is doubtful that President Buhari would have taken the path of war over the 2023 coup in Niger; it is certain judging by Tinubu's later actions that he also wanted to avoid war.

Figure 2: President Tinubu Delivering his Speech at the Second ECOWAS Summit



Source(s): Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Speech at the Second Extra-ordinary Summit of ECOWAS on the Socio-Political Situation in Niger Republic, August 10, 2023. PM News Retrieved from:https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2023/08/10/full-text-of-tinubu-speech-at-ecowas-summit-on-niger-coup/ Accessed November 11, 2025.

Figure 2 above shows President Bola Ahmed Tinubu at the second ECOWAS meeting on the Niger coup held in Nairobi, Kenya on August 10, 2023. The Nigerian President espoused the principles of Nigeria's Afrocentrism and he outlined the remedial diplomatic steps his government took reverse the brinkmanship in Nigeria-Niger relations. This was expressed in his speech thus:

> Regrettably, the Seven day ultimatum issued during the first summit has not yielded the desired outcome. We also made diligent efforts through the deployment of various ECOWAS mediation teams to engage the military junta for a peaceful resolution of the situation… Other diplomatic initiatives included dispatching Special Envoys to non-ECOWAS nations such as Libya and Algeria to prevail on the junta to restore constitutional order in Niger (Tinubu, 2023).

The above statement of the Nigerian President revealed that while Nigeria-Niger relations was at the brinks, there were corresponding and simultaneous efforts to restore cordiality between both countries through ECOWAS multilateral diplomacy and Third Party interventionism. Therefore, instead of rushing to war with Niger the Nigeria hoped to exhaust all avenues of engagements to ensure a swift return to constitutional governance in Niger. Furthermore, the Nigerian Senate as the highest foreign policy formulation institution arguably voted against Nigeria going to war with Niger for the sake of preserving regional peace in West Africa and Nigeria's Afrocentric doctrine. In the long run, it can be said that the decision of the Nigerian Senate was aimed at keeping Nigerians and Nigeria safe because, since 1960, Afrocentrism had been the framework through which Nigeria sought to protect her citizens at home and abroad by looking out for the interest of its West Africa neighbours.

With this Senate vote, the Nigerian State openly yielded to public opinion and decided to permanently explore other political and diplomatic options of restoring cordiality with Niger instead of military invasion. In their study "*Niger's Military Intervention and Nigeria-Niger Bilateral Relations*", Agunyai, Ebirim and Olomitutu (2025, pp. 52-62) observed that this new approach was as complex and unclear as the diplomatic, economic and security cooperation Nigeria seeks to reestablish with Niger. However, it is still undeniable that this new effort to move from brinkmanship to cordiality was a triumph for Nigeria's Afrocentrism over Western covert and subtle pressure on the country to restore the democratic government of Bazoum, by war if necessary. It hit the reset button in post-coup Nigeria-Niger relations. Although this did not immediately restore Nigeria-Niger relations back to the cordiality that was experienced before the coup, it was still a step in the right direction. The Nigerian State has a lot to learn from this event going forward. Akubor (2025) observed that Nigeria must always ensure that she separates foreign interest from her own personal economic interest in her dealing with Niger and other West African States. This means that country must refuse to be the pawn in another country's chess board. Therefore, Nigeria's Afrocentrism must be repositioned as a means of promoting and achieving her economic interest. In the case of Niger, Emmanuel Akubor argued that between 1995 and 2021 Nigeria export to Niger increased at an annual rate of 6.05%, from $39 million (USD) to $180 million (USD) (Akubor, 2025, pp. 478-480). This Nigeria stands to lose if she had gone ahead with her war plans with Niger.

Granted, the military government of Niger had already withdrawn its ambassador from Nigeria, dissociated itself from ECOWAS and formed new friendships in West Africa and beyond. However, the hope of restoring cordiality in Nigeria-Niger relations is not permanently lost. It only means that Nigeria now has a lot of work to do mend the broken fences in ECOWAS organisation and reshape her Afrocentrism to bring back Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. For now, the mismanaged Nigeria-Niger brinkmanship is partly responsible for the sixteen (16) member state international organisation being reduced to thirteen (13). Consequently, for the first time in her post-colonial history Niger has drifted the farthest away from Nigeria her most strategic neighbor and most important development partner. But there is no doubt about the fact that, as far as Nigeria still remains committed to her foreign policy of Afrocentrism there is still hope of restoring and getting her relationship with Niger back on track. To this end, Nigeria needs to stop allowing Western interest disguised as African interest influence her relations with her West African neighbours in the Sahel. She must learn to side with the oppressed and marginalised peoples of West Africa than with the corrupt and rejected democratic governments backed by the West. This is the true spirit of the Afrocentric foreign policy established by the founding fathers of the Nigerian State. The policy mandates Nigeria to fight against neocolonialism and foreign domination of any kind masked as strategic international partnership with African States. When the statesmen and foreign policy makers of Nigeria in the twenty-first century are guided by this entrenched national philosophy (Afrocentrism), anti-imperial military coups in

West Africa approved by the people would stop being a thing for the Nigerian State to fear, they would only serve as a wake-up call to all existing democratic governments in the sub-region to be alive to their duties and obligations to the people under the social contract.

Conclusion

Post-colonial Nigeria-Niger relations pre-date the attainment of sovereignty by both states. The people of both societies right from their autonomous existence as city–states, kingdoms and empires have been in touch economically and socio-culturally. Although Nigeria and Niger relations slowed during the colonial period as both states were colonised by different European powers; it bounced back in the post-colonial era. However, during this period the blood ties that existed between Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani People in Nigeria and Niger plus their socio-economic contact and dependence that was forged overtime repositioned and accelerated Nigeria-Niger relations. Findings in this study showed that cordiality in Nigeria and Niger relations was sustained by Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy. By virtue of her Afrocentrism, Nigeria prioritized relations with her West African neighbours, and specifically the development and stability of Niger Republic. From 2015-2023, Afrocentrism fostered unparalleled economic cooperation (cordiality) under the Buhari administration; and pre-empted unparalleled diplomatic breakdown in Nigeria-Niger relations during the period of brinkmanship over military take-over of government in Niger Republic. Despite the fact that the 2023 Niger coup succeeded in creating a political barrier rift in ECOWAS and soiling Nigeria-Niger age long socio-cultural fraternity, Nigeria's Afrocentric disposition still facilitated their return to the negotiation table. It presented the best hope for righting the wrong in Nigeria-Niger relations, reversing it from brinkmanship to instituting sustainable peace.

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