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Fighting the Scourge from Abroad: Anti-Corruption War in Nigeria's Foreign Policy under the Buhari Administration, 2015 to 2019

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Abstract

Anti-graft war represents a major policy thrust of the Buhari-led administration. Perhaps, given the many high-profile cases involving politically-exposed persons pursued by the government, the anti-corruption programme has been more studied from domestic angles. However, analysing the programme from a domestic angle limits an elaborate analysis of the anti-corruption programme given that the government also employs an international approach, through the instrumentality of foreign policy, to achieve its objectives. The paper aims to evaluate the international dimension of the anti-corruption programme in the first term of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015 to 2019). The article analyses the anti-corruption goals and strategies in foreign policy and further identifies the outcomes of the strategies. The article

enumerates constraints obstructing the government's realisation of its anti-corruption goals.

Keywords: *Anti-Corruption Policy; Corruption; Muhammadu Buhari; Nigeria's Foreign Policy; Foreign Policy Analysis*

Introduction

Corruption represents one of Nigeria's foremost problems, which has distorted the development aspirations of the country's founding fathers. The 2018 report of the Corruption Perception Index by the Transparency International (TI) ranked Nigeria as the 148th (of 180 countries) in the perception of corruption (Olawoyin, 2018). Another research conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) discovered that in Nigeria "almost one bribe is paid by every adult citizen per year to public officials and that the average amount paid in cash for a bribe is equivalent to a fourth of the average monthly salary" (UNODC, 2017). Incredible stories of corruption have emerged from the country. For example, a government official claimed in February 2018 that a snake mysteriously swallowed \$100,000 when asked to account for the missing money (Adedigba, 2018). In another case, a whopping \$ 43 million was discovered in an empty flat in Lagos, kept by unknown persons who are supposedly government officials (*Vanguard*, 2017).

Tackling the overwhelming problem of corruption has been campaign rhetoric of many administrations in Nigeria. Despite the existence of laws and institutions to fight the scourge, successive governments have been enmeshed in massive corruption cases. The previous Jonathan-led administration (2010-2015) was sacked partly because of his lackadaisical attitude towards corruption. President Muhammadu Buhari built upon the frustration of the people to promise Nigerians that fighting corruption would be a focal agenda of his administration during his campaigns. Having being perceived as a "no-nonsense" military leader who fought corruption in the 1980s, Buhari is believed to have won the 2015 presidential election on the strength of the anti-corruption (and anti-terrorism) agenda in his campaigns. Since his assumption of office as president, President Buhari's administration

has increasingly become synonymous with an anti-corruption war, which has been vastly applauded and also severely criticised.

On the one hand, the anti-corruption policy of the government is acknowledged as effective and significantly reversing the trend of pervasive corruption in Nigeria. However, there are mounting claims of insincerity in the anti-corruption policy in the sense that the government has been alleged to display a high level of selectivity and politicisation in the implementation of the policy). It is argued, based on this perspective, that the policy is an instrument to persecute the government's opposition.

While this paper is not primarily focused on the controversies and politics around the policy, it is useful to state that the anti-corruption programme of the Buhari administration has gradually become a topical issue attracting scholarly interests. Therefore, the paper studies the international dimension of the anti-corruption programme of the Buhari-led administration in its first term (2015 to 2019). The paper demonstrates how anti-corruption goals represented a focal point of Nigeria's foreign policy under the Buhari administration. Furthermore, the paper enumerates the outcomes of the government's strategies on its anti-corruption foreign policy. The paper further identifies the constraints that obstructed the government's realisation of its anti-corruption goals.

Foreign Policy Analysis: The Leadership Factor

Scholars have sufficiently argued that both external and internal factors are major drivers of a state's foreign policy (Rosenau, 1967; DeHaven, 1991; Wittkopf, Jones & Kegley, 2008). They suggest that the behavior of nation-states is largely determined by a cluster of factors in their domestic and external environments. With regards to the external environment, a state's foreign policy is conditioned by factors including power structure in the international system, nature and behaviors of international actors, geographical location, international economic structure, prevalent issues and events in the international environment, and world public opinion (Hossain, 2009). On the other hand, the internal factors determining states' behaviors include the structure of the economy, regime type, the character of leaders, political structure, bureaucratic procedures, population size, interest groups, public opinion, and societal composition of the state concerned (Hossain, 2009).

In the domestic context, the role of leaders, who are at the center of decision-making, is one major variable that explains the direction of the state's foreign policies. In leadership literature, it is established that the success or failure of all aspects of a state largely depends on the leadership (Preston, 2010). This has made the factor of leadership a strong variable in the analysis of foreign policy. Particularly in presidential democracies and authoritarian systems, where the executive has immense power in the conduct of foreign affairs, the role of the leader and state elites is a strong basis to analyze the state's foreign policy. This argument is captured by Rosenau (1967) as the idiosyncrasies of decision-makers in the foreign policy-making process, which are characterized by personality, beliefs, ideological orientation, attitude, and past experiences of the decision-makers involved in foreign policy formulation (Ra'ees, 2010). In his contribution, Hudson (2005) argues that human decision making, either singly or as a group, plays a significant role in the interactions of nations. He argued that "only human beings can be true agents, and it is their agency that is the source of all international politics and all change therein" (Hudson, 2005: 3).

The significance of leaders is underscored in the levels of analysis framework popularly used in the field of International Relations (IR) (Waltz, 1959). In the framework, the role of individuals – leaders and decision-makers – including their traits, ideologies, backgrounds, beliefs, and values are factors that are taken into consideration in analysing foreign policy (Breuning, 2007). However, Breuning (2007) cautions that leaders do not have an equal influence on the foreign policy of their states because of different circumstances. The circumstances might concern the individual skills and orientations of the leaders or the institutional structure in which the leaders operate.

Emphasising the significance of leaders as an important agent in the foreign policy process does not neglect the importance of structures going by the agent-structure debate in IR (Wendt, 1987; Carlsnaes, 1992). However, it is useful to stress that the weakness of institutions and the immense power in the hands of executives in African states make the leaders very focal in analyzing governmental processes, including foreign policy. In his extensive review of literature on foreign policy in Africa, Quinn (2010: 3) observes that "foreign policy formation was normally in the domain of the chief executive, given the personalisation of power common throughout the region" to such extent that paying attention to bureaucracies and the legislature would not produce a useful result. In

Nigeria, besides the reality that the structure of its federal system makes the president excessively powerful, the constitution gives the president a considerable control of the foreign making processes. The president appoints the ministers, ambassadors, heads of agencies, and special advisors related to foreign affairs which directly report to him. Also, the president, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, has full control over matters related to security and defense of the country (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The legislature only plays a secondary role by scrutinizing and approving appointments, budgets, and providing legislation on international treaties negotiated by the presidency (Arowosegbe & Akomolafe, 2016).

The above structure makes the character, personality and unique styles of the leaders in power a major driver of Nigeria's foreign policy since the post-independence era. This is more encouraged by the fact that Nigeria's state institutions are weak and are more dependent on the whims of the executive or ruling elites (Ake, 1985). Although Nigeria has a set of foreign policy objectives clearly articulated in the constitution, each leader has pursued those principles based on their interpretations and skills, which have defined the changing direction of Nigeria's foreign policy over a while (Akinboye, 1999; Gambari, 2008).

Corruption and Nigeria's Image in the World

At a Commonwealth conference on anti-corruption held in London in May 2016, the world was astonished that President Buhari refused to demand an apology from Prime Minister Cameron following his derogatory comments on the level of corruption in Nigeria, which was caught earlier on camera while Cameron had an informal discussion with the Queen. As much as some diplomats see that as a major gaffe and a lost opportunity to launder his country's image, Buhari's action can be viewed as a demonstration of the enormity of the problem of corruption inherited by his administration and a call for international support in confronting the problem. Indeed, at other international platforms, the president has often expressed his frustration with the extent of corruption and crime associated with his country. In February 2016, the president, while in London for an international conference on the Syrian conflict, had an interview with the *Telegraph* where he stated that: "Some Nigerians claim that life is too difficult back home, but they have also made it difficult for Europeans and Americans to accept them because of

the number of Nigerians in prisons all over the world accused of drug trafficking or human trafficking” (Freeman, 2016).

Expectedly, the local opposition describes the president’s regular allusion to corruption and crime in Nigeria at foreign events as a “de-marketing” of the country. For instance, former President Jonathan remarked that: “I would not go outside the country and say Nigerians are the most corrupt people because not only is that unhelpful, I am also indicting myself” (Nwosu, 2017). The critics insist that the president’s statements are capable of driving away potential investors. However, it should be stressed that Nigeria’s corruption problem has been a major concern and topical issue in the international sphere. To start with, Nigeria is currently ranked 148 of 180 countries in the Corruption Index of Transparency International, making the country one of the most corrupt states in the world (www.tradingeconomics.com). A special report by *Telegraph* noted that Nigeria had lost £220 billion to stealing and misappropriation by past leaders, which is estimated to be an equivalent of 300 years of British aid for the whole continent and equivalent of six Marshall Plans for Africa (Blair, 2005). Many years of corruption have shattered and frustrated development plans of the country to such extent that Nigeria – Africa’s largest economy and largest exporter of oil – has infamously gained a reputation of the location of the world’s highest number of extremely poor people, according to Brookings Institute’s World Poverty Clock (Adebayo, 2018).

Besides the catastrophic effects it has had on the Nigerian economy and society, corruption has had a telling effect on the state’s image in the international arena. Foreign policy objectives of the country have become difficult to achieve amid a very negative image (Mustapha, 2008). As argued by Tella (2017), corruption has prevented foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country and frustrated Nigeria’s leadership ambitions in the African region. Tella wondered if Nigeria would have the moral authority to demand accountability and good governance from other African countries, following its huge cases of corruption. Also, the Nigerian international passport has become worthless as Nigerian citizens have lost respect in foreign lands and treated with much suspicions and condescension. Given this, they have increasingly suffered racist and xenophobic attacks in other countries. It is, therefore, not unusual to find Nigerians hiding their national identity, and claiming other African countries, in foreign countries.

Successive governments have spent some fortunes on laundering Nigeria's image against the rising perception of corruption in the country, without any substantial success. For example, in the aftermath of a 1995 documentary aired in the American electronic media to expose grand corruption in Nigeria, entitled "Corruption, Inc.," the Abacha-led government launched the "Not in Our Character: Enough Is Enough in this Calculated Attempt to Smear Our Image as a People and Nation" aired in the media to counter the U.S. media (Smith, 2007). In 2009, Nigeria's Minister of Information Dora Akinyuli also introduced a project, "Rebranding Nigeria" with the major aim of redeeming the country's battered image. However, these projects never achieved their aims as they did not tackle the source of the problem. They were programmes that only aimed at covering the rot of corruption in the country from the external world. While the propaganda was vigorously pursued, humongous stories of corruption still emerged from the country daily. Ironically, some of the campaign programmes, ostensibly aimed at laundering the image of the country against the perception of corruption, even got enmeshed in corruption scandals.

Buhari's Agenda against Corruption

Fighting corruption is declared as the second major agenda of the Buhari administration. Buhari's campaign mantra was hinged on "Change," which symbolises the transformation of Nigeria's attitude of corruption and ridding the country of an endemic system of corruption. During his presidential campaigns, Buhari was popular for the statement that "corruption will kill Nigeria if Nigeria does not kill corruption." Indeed, at the point of his emergence as president, the country's international image was at a low ebb, courtesy of corruption-related stories. There was a major scandal following the suspension of the head of Nigeria's apex bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, after raising an alarm that \$20 billion oil money was missing from the national treasury. International partners had also become frustrated that the war on Boko Haram was failing as a result of the diversion of arms fund for the project (it was later discovered that a \$2 billion arms fund was siphoned by military chiefs and political elites (O'Grady, 2015). For instance, an analyst with the US Council of Foreign Relations noted that: "decades of unchecked corruption have left the Nigerian military hollowed out and ill-equipped to handle Nigeria's many internal challenges, including the long-running

Boko Haram insurgency that has killed tens of thousands of people” (Page, 2016). In the midst of numerous scandals, the Jonathan-led government displayed a somewhat lethargic attitude towards dealing with the problem.

Upon assumption of office, the first step taken by the Buhari-led government was to effectively use the anti-corruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), to investigate and prosecute grand corruption cases involving the ostensibly “untouchable” people in the upper class. Notable military chiefs were arrested to answer questions on the looting and misappropriation of defense budgets. Numerous other cases were opened against former ministers and politicians. By May 2016, a year after the commencement of the administration, the anti-corruption agency, EFCC, claimed that it had secured over 140 convictions and recovered billions in foreign currencies (Ogundipe, 2016).

The Whistleblowing Policy and Treasury Single Account (TSA) are two major instruments used by the government for its anti-graft war. The Whistleblowing policy was introduced to encourage voluntary disclosure of looted funds, recovery of stolen government assets, and discourage other forms of corrupt practices to the government, attracting a reward of 2.5 to 5% of recovered money or value of properties for the whistleblower (Sanni, 2016). On the other hand, the TSA is a financial model that involves the concentration of state revenues into a single account at the Central Bank of Nigeria. Although it was introduced by the Jonathan-led government; it was not implemented until the government of Buhari came on board as a means to prevent corruption in the public sector. Before its full implementation, different government agencies operated numerous accounts in different banks, which encouraged embezzlement of state funds. Through the TSA, the government was able to take full control of an estimated USD 15 billion a year after its commencement (Komolafe, 2016).

It should, however, be noted that there are increased concerns about the existing policies of the government in its bid to fight corruption. The issues are discussed in subsequent sections of the paper.

Anti-corruption Goals and Strategies in Nigeria’s Foreign Policy

To achieve its objectives, the Buhari-led administration strategically prioritizes the incorporation of the anti-corruption campaign in its

foreign policy. This is most important as Nigeria's stolen assets are mostly kept in foreign banks and used to purchase choice properties in foreign countries; hence, the government's approach of constructively engaging the outside world in its anti-graft war. The approach aims at achieving three major goals: (a) to recover stolen wealth kept in foreign countries; (b) to block avenues for keeping stolen assets in foreign countries, and (c) to redeem the image of Nigeria by showing the seriousness of the government in fighting corruption. The strategies towards achieving these goals can be analyzed under the following sub-headings:

Diplomatic visits

Shortly after his inauguration on 29 May 2015, President Buhari's major steps were to embark on foreign trips to engage the world on the actualization of his administration's major agendas: fighting terrorism, fighting corruption, and rebuilding the economy. One such auspicious visits was his special invitation to the G7 Summit held in Germany in June 2015 to address the global powers on his agenda for Nigeria. The world powers were more interested in his anti-terrorism plans, given the apparent failure of the Jonathan-led administration to contain the Boko Haram and explore ways of cooperating with the government. President Buhari used the opportunity to seek support for his anti-corruption crusade in his intended goals at the meeting (*Vanguard*, 2015).

After that occasion, President Buhari was in Washington, DC, on the invitation of President Obama to strengthen bilateral relations between both countries. This came after relations between both countries had deteriorated under the Jonathan-led administration following concerns in Washington about the poor management of the Boko Haram crisis, which was also linked to the issue of corruption. During the visit, President Obama promised his Nigerian counterpart that: "We're looking forward to discussing how we can be helpful in addressing some of the corruption issues that have held Nigeria back" (Sotubo, 2015). In his visits to other countries, including China, South Africa, France, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, and others, Buhari emphasized his agenda against corruption to boost the confidence of foreign investors in Nigeria and seek foreign cooperation on fighting corruption.

Signing of bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements

The president's diplomatic shuttles were characterised by signing remarkable agreements to promote his anti-corruption goals, including seizing of looted funds and assets stashed in foreign countries and blocking avenues for movement of stolen funds. The most significant was the signing of four different agreements with the United Arab Emirates, when the president visited the Arab country in January 2016. The agreements with the Arab country were based on the following: mutual legal assistance in criminal matters; mutual legal assistance in civil and commercial matters; on the transfer of sentenced persons; and on extradition. This came against the backdrop of increasing global concerns that the UAE had become a destination for the movement of illicit financial transactions because of the country's liberal and secretive financial environment (Transparency International, 2018). Therefore, the bilateral agreements were important to both the UAE and Nigeria. For the UAE, it was an opportunity to redeem its image as a hub for stolen money, and for Nigeria, the agreements very useful in the government's anti-corruption drive because many corrupt Nigerians had found the UAE a haven to hide stolen wealth while trying to avoid western countries where they could easily be detected and apprehended.

In the same vein, President Buhari, in March 2018, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Switzerland and the International Development Association (IDA) for the repatriation of illegally acquired assets to Nigeria (Onuah, 2018). The government saw this as a great opportunity to recover Nigeria's stolen wealth as Switzerland represents a major country where a huge amount of Nigeria's stolen monies are kept. For instance, an estimated \$1.2 billion stolen by the former military leader, General Sani Abacha, was kept in Switzerland alone (BBC, 2017). Nigeria's president also appended his signature to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and became the 70th country to join the global initiative against corruption and promote transparency in government. The OGP came into being in 2011 as a global initiative to seek partnership between governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) with the principal aim of promoting inclusive and accountable governments.

Engagement of multilateral institutions

The government also realizes the significance of multilateral institutions in actualizing its anti-corruption objectives; hence, its engagement of such institutions in its anti-corruption campaign. In this regard, the United Nations has been usefully engaged by the president. At the 70th and 71st General Assembly of the United Nations held in 2016 and 2017, President Buhari in his address at the occasions used the opportunity to brief the world about his anti-corruption agenda, sought global support for it, and advocated for strong global efforts to tackle the problem of corruption. At the 70th General Assembly, for instance, which represented his first attendance as the president of Nigeria, President Buhari informed the world leaders that:

Nigeria is ready and willing to partner with international agencies and individual countries on a bilateral basis to confront crimes and corruption. In particular, I call upon the global community to urgently redouble efforts towards strengthening the mechanisms for dismantling safe havens for proceeds of corruption and ensuring the return of stolen funds and assets to their countries of origin (*Premium Times*, 2015).

Similarly, at a Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Summit held in London in 2016, President Buhari used the opportunity of his keynote address to bemoan the challenges the country has been facing in recovering stolen assets in foreign countries. He complained that: “repatriation of corrupt proceeds is very tedious, time-consuming, costly and entails more than just the signing of bilateral or multilateral agreements” (Punch, 2016). Therefore, he requested for an international conference that would principally address the bottlenecks countries face in the process of recovering stolen assets and money (Punch, 2016). At the summit, the president further emphasised the need for all member-states of the United Nations to sign up for the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

The president took his campaign to the International Criminal Court (ICC) after being invited to deliver a keynote address at the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute of the ICC and demand “action by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on corruption cases and illicit financial flows by state actors.” He advocated for strong mechanisms at the ICC for the prosecution of “serious cases of corruption by state

actors that severely compromise the development efforts of countries and throw citizens into greater poverty” (*Premium Times*, 2018). At the continental level, President Buhari at the 30th Assembly of the African Union (AU) in January 2018 implored his fellow African leaders to take collaborative and decisive actions against corruption, which has been a hindrance to the development of countries in the region.

Gains and Constraints

Apparently, the government’s anti-corruption foreign policy has yielded some outcomes that appear positive. One measure of success, as argued in governmental circles, is that there have been a global acknowledgement and growing respect for Buhari’s anti-corruption efforts, which is gradually transforming Nigeria’s international image and strengthening its soft power in the African region. This can be gauged from some of the statements made by world leaders concerning the president, taken as an appreciation of, and willingness to support the president’s war on corruption. For example, President Trump told President Buhari during his visit to Washington, D.C. that: “Nigeria has a reputation for very massive corruption. I also know that the President has been able to cut that down very substantially” (Ogundipe, 2018). A more celebrated achievement for the administration’s anti-corruption policy was the unanimous endorsement of President Buhari in 2017 as the Champion of anti-corruption in the AU. In this regard, he led the 2018 AU Summit on corruption under the theme: “Winning the Fight Against Corruption: Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation.”

Abuja also hosted the Association of the Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa (comprising 19 countries), where President Buhari gave the keynote address. At the end of that conference, Ibrahim Magu, the head of Nigeria’s foremost anti-graft agency, the EFCC, was appointed the chair of the association (*The Nation*, 2018). The special invitation of the president to the ICC as the only state leader to partake in the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute has also been linked to the new image Nigeria has earned under Buhari, as claimed by government officials. Nigeria’s Ambassador to the Netherlands, for example, argued that the invitation is “indicative of the high regard in which Nigeria is held” because of Buhari’s anti-corruption agenda (Olowolagba, 2018).

The increasing international acknowledgements appreciating the president's anti-corruption crusade have translated into some meaningful foreign collaborations and assistance for Nigeria. For instance, after the president's meeting with President Trump in April 2018, the United States through its agency, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in August 2018 announced a funding of \$25 million to "strengthen good governance by supporting state governments' efforts to bolster Nigeria's Open Government Partnership commitments to improve transparency and fight corruption" (*Sabara Reporters*, 2018). The US Department of State also included Nigeria as one of the four focus countries (including Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Ukraine) to benefit from a \$1 million funding given to the World Bank and UNODC's Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR), for technical assistance on asset recovery cases. The U.S. government also funds Nigeria's OGP Support Unit from a joint grant between the Department of State and USAID on collaborating with civil society and governments to promote global anti-corruption efforts (US Department of State, 2017).

In supporting the government's policy, the British government also announced that it had returned €70 million kept in the country by a Nigerian convicted of a crime in an Italian court, and another \$85 million from one of the greatest oil scams involving \$1.3 billion (*Channels TV*, 2018). The Buhari-led government has also received \$322 million of Abacha's loot (with interests) from the Swiss government in April 2018 (*Vanguard*, 2018). In a similar vein, the government has received tremendous support from the Commonwealth in its anti-corruption campaign. Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth in May 2018, announced that the organization had assisted Nigeria to recover about \$3 billion within a year (*Premium Times*, 2018).

Despite the seeming successes recorded so far, there are many domestic and external challenges obstructing the government's anti-corruption foreign policy. A major domestic challenge is founded in the overwhelming criticisms of Buhari's anti-corruption war over increased perceptions of selectivity and politicization of the policy. The critics argue that most of those apprehended by the government for corruption charges are members of the opposition, while the president deliberately fails to pay attention to allegations of corruption around his cabinet, cronies, and party members.

Indeed, there are substantial reasons for concern in the ostensible anti-corruption drive given that the government has either chosen to be silent on corruption allegations against individuals in the government or relaxed prosecution of certain individuals who cross-carpeted from the opposition parties to the ruling party. Useful examples include a former Minister of Defense, Musiliu Obanikoro, who was alleged to have defected to evade prosecution over a corruption case linked to the misappropriation of funds meant to fight terrorism. Once Obanikoro joined the APC, there has been a surprising relaxation of his case with the EFCC. There were news reports that his seized properties were quietly returned to him (Folarin & Aworinde, 2018). Obanikoro is also being used as a major witness against one of the members undergoing trial in the same corruption case. This case is strikingly similar to those of other individuals who left the opposition to join the ruling party. Without a doubt, these actions substantiate arguments suggesting a political motive in the supposed war on corruption. Ultimately, they question the sincerity of the government in its agenda of eliminating corruption in the state.

Furthermore, the government is severely criticized for flagrantly circumventing the rule of law in its war on corruption. In the name of fighting corruption, the government has consistently disobeyed court rulings and constitutional procedures. A typical example is the continued detention of former National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki, for the misappropriation of \$2 billion arms funds meant to fight terrorism under the Goodluck Jonathan-led government. Despite many court rulings granting him bail and the accused fulfilling the bail conditions, the government has refused to release him on the claim that he poses a security threat to the country.

Although the government has struggled to repudiate them, the claims of selectivity, the politicization of the anti-corruption war, and abuse of the rule of law has a negative impact on the anti-corruption campaign in the international arena. Other countries and international organizations must be convinced that there is a substantial and non-political effort to combat corruption before committing themselves towards supporting the government in its agenda of fighting corruption.

Besides the domestic factors, there are international challenges the government has confronted in achieving its objectives. The most obvious, which the president has continued to trumpet at international forums, is the complexity around the laws and procedures for the

recovery of stolen assets. In most cases, countries establish stringent conditions that often frustrate the government's efforts to recover stolen funds. For example, Nigeria was placed on the following conditions before the Swiss government could release stolen money kept in the country: (i) prosecution of those accused at home (ii) confirmation of the criminal origin of the funds and (iii) signing of an undertaking to guarantee transparent use of any repatriated funds (Ekweremadu, 2013).

There are also rising skepticisms by foreign countries over a proper use of the recovered money. This comes against the backdrop of a lack of transparency in the management of the recovered loot and increasing claims of re-looting of funds by government officials. For example, Vaclav Prusa, an official at the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Transparency International's chapter in Nigeria, stated that "currently, Nigeria has no framework for monitoring, managing and utilizing recovered assets and other proceeds of crime" (Transparency International, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper articulates how the Buhari administration internationalized its anti-corruption agenda as a measure not only to recover Nigeria's stolen assets but also to redeem the state's lost international image. There are noticeable achievements in the government's incorporation of its anti-corruption war in its foreign policy, which comes in the form of asset recoveries and international collaborations to tighten the noose around the stashing of looted funds in other countries. However, the government is still overwhelmed by numerous challenges within the local and international spaces. A major challenge concerns increasing suspicions about the seriousness of the government in pursuing the anti-corruption war given increasing claims and perceptions over the politicization of the policy. Despite these growing concerns, the government is not making sufficient effort to build the needed public trust in its fight against corruption. For the government to properly actualize its anti-corruption objectives, it is, therefore, imperative for the existence of a stronger political will to pursue the agenda irrespective of ethnic, political, or religious affiliation.

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