

OBAMA AND THE GLOBAL PEACE PROJECT: LESSONS FOR PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The euphoria that followed the election of President Barack Hussein Obama as the first black American president reverberated in most parts of the world. The joy and anxiety that followed his election as the 44th president of America all over the world especially in Africa, the erstwhile home land of his ancestors knows no bounds. Obama is qualified variously as the first world president, a citizen of the world, the peace president etc. Thus, his election seems to be different from all other elections in America. In response to this world acclaim for his election, the President Obama has made a promise to change the country (America) and change the world. In this promise, he dangles a new approach in American foreign policy towards global peace project. This paper examines what the election of Obama symbolizes for the world in terms of inter group relations and what lessons his declared foreign policy stance holds for resolution of international and national conflicts. More restrictively, the paper reviews Nigeria's approach in handling some of her fundamental national conflictual issues and proffers that the Obama approach to global peace project could equally be very useful in resolving some persistent conflicts that threaten peace and unity in the country.

Key words: diplomatic; peaceful; Unassertive; Compromise

1 INTRODUCTION

The capability and readiness of the United States of America (USA) to interfere and intervene in conflict situations of other countries especially where American interests are threatened is no more a secret in international relations. The number of these interferences in most instances does not give any regard to the right to sovereignty, political or economic rights of the countries. Thus, in many third world countries, it is believed that the USA has had a hand in implanting or supplanting reactionary regimes, destabilizing progressive regimes or openly invading countries that are considered enemies or threat to American interests and global peace. Playing the role of the policeman of the world has been a core programme of American foreign policy.

However, while the role being played by America is perceived by her and her allies as ensuring and maintaining global peace, it is also clear that the manner has tended to be more of repressive and belligerent than diplomatic and peaceful. Therefore, rather than engender world or global peace, the world has continued to face conflicts and wars that are capable of large scale destruction of humanity and his world. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by America for instance has not brought peace to those countries and regions. Terrorism also has continued to be a useful instrument for the enemies of America and her allies to show their displeasure of the ways and manner of American leadership of the world and her policies towards engendering global peace.

Invariably, the election of President Hussein Obama as the first black American president promises to reinvent the American approach to the objectives of realizing global peace. The emergence of Obama which is seen by many to be a defeat to racism, ethnic chauvinism, inequality and all forms of marginalization and domination sends signal to the world that America may come to

lead a new way to the pursuit of human rights and sustainable peace in the world. True to this expectation, the new president has taken steps and adopted new conflict management approach to issues of threat to peace at the global level.

In Nigeria, the manner of pursuit of national peace and unity has not been very different from the hegemonic and belligerent approach of the pre-Obama era in America. It is therefore necessary that this research draws a lesson for Nigeria from this Obama approach to global peace in designing and implementing programmes for peace and unity of the country especially the nagging Niger Delta phenomenon. It is a known maxim that violence begets violence and can never be the right way to secure authentic and sustainable peace and unity of the country.

This paper explores the foreign policy stance of president Obama towards resolving some persistent sour relationships between America and some countries especially the Arabic countries and relates this leadership style as what should be explored in resolving some political and economic conflicts that are swept under the carpet or attempted to be resolved through the use of force in Nigeria. The paper is organized in four sections. Section one is the introduction. The next section discusses the key concepts of the paper. Section three will be on the Obama foreign policy and approach as it relates to global peace. The fourth section makes a brief review of Nigeria's approach to peace building and unity of the country. It also concludes the paper.

2.0 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

2.1 The Concept of Global Peace

In a popular parlance, peace is generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence. That is, it is fundamentally concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means.¹ Conceptualizing peace as the absence of war may be attractive, but is inadequate for understanding the nature of peace. Ibeanu explains that:

It is tautological and circular in logic- there is peace because there is no war and there is war because there is no peace. Second, it really tells us nothing about the meaning of peace, which, going by this definition, we have to arrive at by first defining war. However, even common sense would suggest that peace does exist independent of war. Thus there can be peace even when there is war, as in situations where there are peaceful interactions between countries that are engaged in active war. For instance, the Palestinians and Israelis have been able to establish peaceful use of water resources even as the war between them has raged.²

Furthermore, this definition is inapplicable in situations of structural violence according to Galtung.³ War is only one form of violence, which is physical, open and direct. But there is another form of violence that is not immediately perceived as such. This has to do with social conditions such as poverty, exclusion, intimidation, oppression, want, fear and many types of psychological pressure. It would be ironical to classify a country experiencing pervasive structural violence such listed above as peaceful. Consequently, it is quite possible not to have peace even where there is no war.

Based on the above thesis, Ibeanu⁴ repackaged the common interpretation of peace as converse of war thesis into two distinct views. These are the instrumentalist and the functionalist views. According to the former, peace is a means to an end. In other words, the absence of war

serves the end of social progress and development. It is instrumentalist. According to the latter view, peace is seen as playing a social function. It plays the social function of integration and development.

Ibeanu also gives other interpretations of peace. These are the philosophical, the social and the political interpretations. The philosophical view sees peace as a natural, original, god-given state of human existence that is free of corruption and sin as God established it. Consequently, peace is a state of perfection, and earthly expression of God's kingdom that is yet uncorrupted. This trend of thought is contained in the philosophy of Saint Augustine and other church fathers. Thus Saint Augustine of Hippo distinguished between two "cities" namely, the city of God, which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation, and the earthly city of man, which is founded on appetite and possessive impulses, is corrupt and divided by strife⁵

Another version of the philosophical explanation of the concept of peace is credited to the social contract theorists. They differ from the above philosophical view by their emphasis on human nature. Jean Jacques Rousseau for instance conceives of a peaceful original state of existence of man in which there are no desires. That is the state of nature for him. In that state, man existed as a free, gentle savage, and was naturally good. He was born free and had few desires. Put differently, Rousseau regarded man as naturally good and posited that the type of calculating and selfish individuals did not exist in the state of nature, that they were not therefore natural. Such people did exist because they were the product of a perverted society. In Rousseau's "state of nature" man/woman was neither moral nor vicious, neither happy nor unhappy, nor did he/she own property.⁶ Hence the tranquil state of nature subsequently became corrupted by human desire and greed, thus undermining the peaceful, pristine 'state of nature'. He made a scathing attack on private property, which he saw as a major reason for depravity of man⁷

While these philosophical traditions relate peace to the original inclinations and desires of human beings, they do not address the social context of peace beyond the state of nature.⁸ Plato's Republic captures this social context on the basis of justice (that is giving each his/her due). He argues that every society requires three functions to attain peace and harmony, namely; production, security and political rule. Injustice occurs where this functional state is distorted, for instance, where the knowledgeable allow persons of appetite to rule. In such a context, there cannot be peace and social harmony.

Sociologically, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms. In the words of Ibeanu, peace is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations. A sociological response to peace consists of two broad theses; namely structural functionalism which perceives society as function and structures of government that performs these functions. For example, in order to survive, a society needs to govern its affairs, provide security and job and social services. These functions are performed by the legislature, the judiciary and the executive-when these three arms of government work in harmony, peace, order and stability is attained. Consequently, from this structural functionalism perspective, peace is achieved where existing social structures perform their responsibility adequately, supported by the requisite norms, culture and values.⁹

On the other hand, peace has also been explained in the tradition of dialectical materialism. This is a thesis of social analysis associated with Marxist sociology. This thesis posits that to

understand society what we should look at are the processes through which society produces and distributes the means of material existence and the struggles, usually among social classes. In this kind of social relations the dominant classes do less work, but appropriate most of the reward. This exploitative relation gives rise to the class struggle, which sometimes entails open violence, such as state sponsored terrorism against the underprivileged groups or structural violence expressed in the form of inequity, oppression and social exclusion. To maintain dominance, the dominant class initially use naked force to enforce compliance and latter reduce it by the application of justice (legitimacy). The dominated class may equally apply revolutionary violence to dethrone their oppressors and seize state power.

The Marxian sociological thesis of peace concludes by positing that peace is not feasible in so far as society is divided into opposing classes and there is persistence of objective, structural and revolutionary violence. Peace is only feasible in societies in which classes are non-existent because society produces enough to give to each according to his/her needs. In reality, however, such a society remains an aspiration in modern era and we have to go back many centuries to find very simple societies that came close to this aspiration.

Finally, the political view of peace is explained as a political condition that makes justice possible. This is the view of Miller cited by Ibeanu¹⁰. Also Huntington¹¹ aptly reflected it when he posited that peace entails political order championed by the process of institutionalization of political structures in a modernized polity. In the absence of institutionalization, there is a primacy of politics, and as Huntington, observes, any society dominated by primacy of politics, predisposes every group on the polity (mobs, students, workers and soldiers) to use its unique endowments such as riots, demonstrations, strike and military coups to pursue and enforce its interests. To create peace, politics must be mediated by stable political structures and secular or participant political culture that promote negotiation, tolerance and bargaining. From this perspective, peace requires that government minimally employs the coercive apparatuses of the state, such as the armed forces and police in dealing with citizens usually because there is no threat to the interests of the ruling class by the under privileged classes. Politically also, peace could be seen as a contractual agreement denoting that the actors in international relations should respect the past and recognize each other as actors in international affairs as contained in the treaty or peace of Westphalia.

Peace is therefore not the absence of war or simply as order. This conception of peace could be a way of perpetrating and perpetuating oppression of the under privileged by the privileged classes. This is because behind the appearance of a seemingly neutral order, which ostensibly is desired by everyone, is the domination of the weak by the powerful. Consequently, privileged groups perceive their privileges, comfort and dominance as order, and any challenge to the statusquo is deemed to undermine peace. Yet, sometimes it may be vital for an existing order to be dethroned so that lasting peace can be established.

From the various theses reviewed, peace can be explained as follows:

- i. The absence of war (absence of direct violence)
- ii. Justice and development (absence of structural violence)
- iii. Respect and tolerance between people

- iv. Gaia (Harmony or balance in, and with, the eco-system – ecosphere)
- v. Tranquility or inner peace (spiritual peace) and
- vi. Wholeness and making while (being complete)¹²

It is obvious that in the real life situations, a pristine condition of peace is not possible. Even St Augustine did admit that his heavenly city is not of this world. Plato also admitted that the ideal state where condition of peace may be obtainable is a mirage. We are therefore agreeing with Ibeanu's definition of peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict both within specific societies and in the wider international community.¹³ This notion of peace emphasizes the way of handling or managing issues that threaten peace rather than explaining peace as a condition.

2.2 Conflict Management and Resolution

Imhanlahimi¹⁴ defines conflict 'as a disagreement over values in which parties in contention with each other maintain a position unacceptable to the other'. Ochonogor and Njoku¹⁵ believe that conflict arises from misunderstandings or disagreement that occurs among members of the society in the courses of their interactions. Conflict can therefore be conceptualised as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the parties could be to gain the desired value, injure or eliminate the rival party.

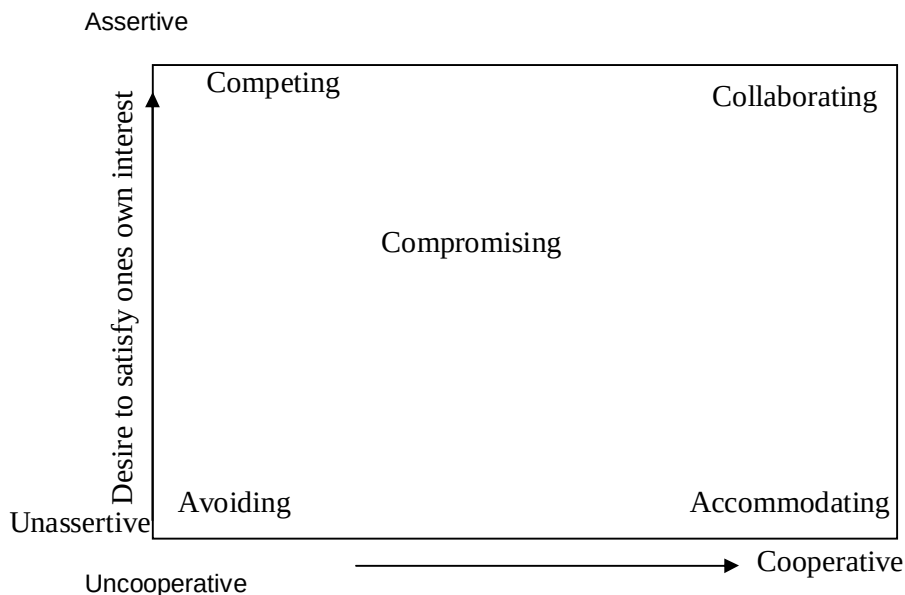
Disagreements can be based on ideas, actions or beliefs. Karl Marx sees economic factors and relations as the fundamental sources that determine, all relations in the society including conflicts.¹⁶ But as Imhalanhimi rightly argues, other forces such as ideas, political structure and processes might be the determinants of other relations in the society.¹⁷ It is therefore to be seen that various variables namely, economic, political, social, ideological, can generate conflicts. Hence, conflict is a pervasive occurrence in human society. The manifestations of this pervasive phenomenon cut across the psychological, political, economic, social, and anthropological dimensions and spheres of human existence.¹⁸

Though some scholars perceive conflict as a positive value¹⁹, it is a general consensus that adequate efforts should be made to manage and resolve all conflicts. Nelson and Quick²⁰ assert that not all conflict is bad. In fact, some types of conflict encourage new solutions to problems and enhance creativity. Kreitner²¹ also observes that conflict does not have to be discouraged always. For him, as long as a conflict trigger appears to stimulate constructive conflict, it can be allowed to continue. Nonetheless, it is theoretically better to say that we do not have a positive side of conflict but rather a positive outcome of conflict. Conflict is fundamentally a disagreement and misunderstanding. These does not in any way convey positivism. What makes a conflict situation positive is the emerging outcome. And this to a greater extent depends on the conflict management styles.

There are many conflict management theories. Thomas²² discusses five conflict management styles which are avoidance, competing, compromising, collaborating and accommodating. These are basically classified into two. These broad classifications are the assertive and the cooperative styles. The former has to do with the extent to which a party in the conflict wants his goals met. Competition is a management style that is very assertive and uncooperative. Parties to conflict want to satisfy their

interest at the expense of the other party. Avoidance is described as a conflict management style that is low on both assertiveness and cooperativeness. According to Adidu and Dedekuma, it is a deliberate decision to take no action on a conflict²². These two styles could be classified as assertive. Compromising style stands middle way between the assertive and cooperative styles. As a conflict management style, compromising requires that each party must give up something to reach a solution. The second broad classification concerns the extent to which a party to a conflict wants the other party's goals met. Accommodation is a cooperative style. It is concerned with meeting the other party's interests at the expense of one's own. Collaboration is described as a win-win style that is high in cooperativeness. It involves 'an open and thorough discussion of conflict and arriving at a solution that is satisfactory to both parties'²³.

The diagram below illustrates these styles of conflict management



Source: (Adapted from Thomas K.W. (1976), by Adidu and Dededuma (2006:235)

The conflict management styles of avoidance and competition are destructive methods as they tend to assert and desire a party's self interest. Destructive conflict

undermines morals of self-concept, polarize people and groups, reducing cooperation, increase or sharpens difference, leads to irresponsible and harmful behaviour such as fighting, name calling and so on (Adidu and Dedekuma),²⁴.

They seek to assert power and hardly seek cooperation, collaboration and compromise. Also, it is to be noted that accommodation, compromise and collaboration leads to constructive management of conflicts. According to Adidu and Dedekuma

conflict is constructive when it results in clarification of important problems and issues, involves people in resolving issues important to them, causes authentic communication, helps release emotion, anxiety and stress; builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other; helps individuals develop understanding skills²⁵.

It is therefore possible that questions of peace and unity at both the global national local and even family levels can greatly be improved through approaches that lead to constructive rather than

destructive conflicts. Constructive conflict resolution styles seek mutual benefit in all human interaction. It encourages win-win attitude or outcome. In the words of Covey²⁶ win-win is based on the paradigm that there is plenty for everybody, that one person's success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others. "Win/win is a belief in a third alternative. 'It's not your way or my way; it is a better way, a higher way.'"²⁷ It seeks to build equality and respect the right of others.

3 OBAMA'S APPROACH TO GLOBAL PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Barack Hussein Obama's victory in the November 4th, 2008 United States of America Presidential election and his emergence as the 44th president of the United States has brought many across the globe - white, coloured and black alike so much joy and excitement. It is axiomatic to posit that Obama is perhaps the first truly international president to have emerged from an American electoral process in the last century and the candidate with most impressive win at the polls since Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964. His victory has remained a loud confirmation that the proverbial American dream is real and possible and that the motto "change we believe in" is achievable. Just like Martin Luther King Jnr. said in 1963 at the height of the fight against racism in America:

And when this happens, we allow freedom reign. We will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sway in the words of the old Negro Spiritual; Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!²⁸

The election of Obama was seen by many as a new beginning for America and her leadership of the world. His campaign messages of hope, change, possibility of dreams and the reality of achievement of a world of peaceful coexistence of all peoples resonated across the globe.

Obama's presidency is symbolic for two grand reasons. The first is the spiritual emancipation of the black man from the yoke of racism. Every black man can walk tall today as a race capable of holding the highest political position in the world. This by implication signifies the need to liberate all enslaved persons whether by racial, ethnic, religious, economic, social, class or any other forms of discriminations. As he professed during his inauguration, "the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve, as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal closely, and America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace"²⁹. Thus, the American ethos that made it possible for a minority element to be elected president sends a message across the globe of the need to respect excellence irrespective of the place, race, and section from which it comes. America has lived her motto of a land of opportunity for all. This is a veritable lesson for Nigeria and other polities that are still enmeshed in politics of identity supremacy.

But beyond the fanfare and significance of a black president, there is the second reason of Obama trying to meet the challenges of his calling. He is inheriting a world frightened by terrorism and sectarian violence in almost every part. He is also inheriting American wars on two fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq. He is presiding over the worst economic meltdown in the world and in the United States and is expected to lead a new world of economic cooperation based on the expectations of various nations from him for as he rightly noted in one of his post election speeches,

in Chicago in 2008, “the threats we face at the dawn of the 21st century can no longer be contained by borders and boundaries”³⁰.

Obama therefore has inherited the position of dictating the tune for most world problems- a position which America has dominated since the end of the Second World War but more increasingly with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. The task of managing this America's global leadership in a world that is growing with many anti-American interests and hegemony requires a radical break with the traditional American foreign policy and international relational approach. The litany of America's actual and potential enemies is long. First and foremost is Iran, whose nuclear ambition is the subject of deep suspicion in Washington and many other world capitals. Obama has held out the prospect of negotiating directly with Tehran about its programme, reversing years of open hostility from Bush's White house. Other countries where diplomatic relations had improved include Cuba (which has battled with American trade embargo for five decades running), Syria, Venezuela, and North Korea. The last may include non-state actors such as Hamas and other Islamic militants. Early this year, some foreign media reported that Obama officials were open to establishing lines of contact with the Islamic militant group, Hamas, as necessary step in trying to push toward the Middle East Peace Process. Just recently, Vice President Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton visited Lebanon just as Obama disagreed with Israel over her expansion on the West Bank as ways of fast-tracking the Middle East peace process.

These moves are definitely antithetical to the traditional American style especially that of the immediate past administration of Bush. It is clear from the choice of his key cabinet members that Obama wants to chart a new course. Hillary Clinton, Obama's Secretary of State has vowed to renew U.S. leadership through “smart power mix of diplomacy and defence” during her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January 2009. Clinton is heading a group of advisers who have a past record of peaceful approach to issues. These include: former United Nations ambassador Richard Holbrooke who brokered a peace deal in the Balkans. He holds the post of a special adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Obama Administration; former Middle East negotiator, Dennis Ross is the special adviser on Iran and the surrounding regions; Dennis Ross has a history of personal involvement in Middle East Peace Tasks, including numerous negotiations between Palestinians/Arabs states and Israel; Susan Rice is the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. She was a member of the National Security Council staff under president Bill Clinton, first as director for international organizations and peacekeeping, and then as a special assistant to the president and senior director for African affairs; Other picks are Kurt Campbell, another former Bill Clinton official, who will be an Assistant Secretary of State of East Asia and the Pacific, and Philip Gordon, who would be Assistant Secretary of State for Europe.³¹ Virtually, these men have temperaments opposite to that of appointees made by Obama's predecessor. According to Michael Fullilove, a fellow at Two Think Tanks- the Brookings Institution in Washington and the Howy Institute in Australia,

These are people who reflect Obama's world view that sees the world less from a power-projecting perspective and more from looking at problems and seeing how to solve them³²

While Bush favoured aggressive neoconservative ideologues, it is clear that Obama's choices are people whose dovish credentials say much as to the approach and direction of Obama's governmental policies. Plans and programmes of the young administration are already showing commitment towards reversing the political unilateralism of the Bush administration and opening direct negotiations and dialogue with hostile and enemy states, ranging from Syria, North Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cuba and Venezuela, Iran, and Hamas militant group among other terrorist groups. There has also been a lesser interference in the internal affairs of countries as evidenced from the Iraqi elections.

What lessons does this stance therefore hold for Nigeria in handling the Niger Delta crisis that is always qualified by the Nigerian government as criminal activities, various intra and inter community crisis, sectional/ethnic cries of marginalization, ethno-religious intolerance and the recurrent demand for national sovereign conference to determine issues of national question?

4 A REVIEW OF NIGERIA'S APPROACH TO PEACE BUILDING AND NATIONAL UNITY

Nigeria is a country that was built on the precipice of force by the British colonialists. The unity of the motley ethnic groups that make up the country was never negotiated and agreed upon. Idahosa states the factual, when he writes that:

Prior to the colonization of hitherto independent ethnic groups, empires and kingdoms by Britain, there was no country known as Nigeria as a political entity. Some people refer to Nigeria as a historical accident. Others see it as a British creation. Both views are correct. Nigeria is a historical accident because the different ethnic and linguistic groups did not voluntarily take a decision to form them-selves into a political entity to be known as Nigeria. The creation of the nation was not by design in the sense that it was not the product of an indigenous nationalistic agenda³³

It is not that every country that exist must have had her people come together to agree to become one. At least the view is against some acceptable theories of origin of states. What is significant however is the fact that:

The tactics used by Britain in the acquisition of the territory which metamorphosed into the Nigerian political system, include outright conquest persuasion and signing of treaties of cession with local chiefs who invariably lacked understanding of the implication and/or consequences of the contents of the document to which they appended their signatures³⁴.

These tactics have left many groups feeling deceived and forced into being part of the country. More so, while Britain is blamed for bringing these many groups into one country and making no genuine effort towards building a unity among them through her divide and rule colonial policies, the indigenous political elites that succeeded the colonialists have been worse in their approaches. There is no doubt that since they inherited political power in 1960, many fundamental conflictual issues have bedeviled various administrations or regimes. Scholars and politicians alike continue to harp on resolving what has become known as national question. Issues of national question surround the central question of how to organize the Nigerian polity to give each group – minority and majority alike – an equal say in the running of the country and an adequate share of her resources. Aisien (2008:153) conceptualizes this thesis thus:

The one most fundamental and significant factor in the politics of the nation is

the number of ethnic/ sub-ethnic groups that make up the country along with those/ and areas of the country which each ethnic or sub-ethnic group regards as her home and therefore her own. Every ethnic group wants to have a voice in the running of this country which she calls her own. More importantly each group would want to control to a large extent her own local political arrangement, her wealth and her natural and human endowments³⁵

Invariably, these have constituted basis for both minor and major conflicts in the country. What are worrisome are not the conflict situations, but the manner of attempts made at resolving them by various Nigerian governments. Ikeanyibe and Njoku:

Despite these submerged discontents, the obvious trend in managing these agitations and conflicts neglects the basic tenets of successful conflict management strategies. Various Nigerian governments especially the military have voided the substantive grounds upon which the colonial government believed Nigeria could stand as a country. While they have created many states to douse the impact of ethnicity, the federalist character of the country has been seriously eroded³⁶

While federalism adopted by the British in 1954 continues to be the basic political structure of Nigeria, there is no doubt that this has been skewed in favour of unitarism and centralization, notwithstanding the phenomenal multiplication of the federating units over the years.

Our indigenous leaders and the political elites prefer a unitary system while, still professing federalism. This informs the obvious distaste of subsequent leaders to face the reality of allowing the Nigerian people to address what has constantly been referred to as the national question which should form the basis for nationhood and subsequent unity that will derive from it. It also informs their attitude in crushing opposition and conflicts in the usual military approach to protect the 'unity' of the country.

From all indications and from the experience of events at the global and national levels, violence does not engender peace. The invasion of Iraq since the presidency of John Bush Senior and a second invasion by the George Bush have not guaranteed peace in the gulf. The invasion of Afghanistan to crush terrorism has not also eradicated acts of terror. At the Nigerian scene, the killing of Saro Wiwa and eight others since the Abacha era, the police and military action of Obasanjo regime in various parts of the country have not brought peace to the Niger Delta. It is also likely that the present raids by the Umaru Yar'adua government in the Niger Delta to flush out militants cannot guarantee peace and unity in Nigeria.

While the entire world including Nigeria rejoiced for the election of Barrack Obama as U.S president, it is to be noted that the election of Obama does not mean that he will abandon American interests for those of other nations. It is therefore obvious that the greatest benefit of the Obama election to the world, Africa and Nigeria is for nations to imbibe the two grand lessons of this historic act. First is to emulate the United States in abandoning the old ways of discrimination and marginalization for the new way of respecting humanity and excellence. As we analyzed above, this implies liberating all enslaved persons whether by racial, ethnic, religious, class, economic or any other form of discriminations and marginalization. The American example in electing a minority element as president should send a message across the globe of dismantling all dominations. Nigeria should dismantle the tradition of class and ethnic domination.

More importantly, the Obama strategy of direct negotiation, dialogue and exploitation of a win-win approach to resolving conflicts should be emulated rather than the assertive, power-projecting and uncooperative approach. This approach requires accommodation, compromise and collaboration in resolving conflicts. It is a constructive approach to management of conflicts which according to Adidu and Dedekuma, 'results in clarification of important problems and issues, involves people in resolving issues important to them, causes authentic communication, helps release emotion, anxiety and stress; builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other; helps individuals develop understanding skills'³⁷. Most conflicts in Nigeria arise as result of perceived injustice, real or imagined. It is therefore important that issues including the persistent agitation for national question be discussed and clarified rather than suppressed or swept under the carpet. It is not by so doing that the desired peace and unity can be secured. The breakup of the Soviet Union after being put together in artificial unity for over seventy years should be a living prophecy that peace and unity cannot be secured through avoidance of issues, forceful subjection of parties to conflicts and uncooperative disposition to address people's wishes. Obama has set the pace for new approach towards resolving conflictual issues among peoples with non power-projecting diplomacy and collaborative international relations. Nigeria can immensely benefit from this style of leadership in resolving her major conflictual issues like the Niger Delta crisis and other ethnic and inter group rivalries.

5. CONCLUSION

We have argued in this paper that the election of Barrack Hussein Obama as the first American black president is symbolic for the world. His election broke the long discrimination and marginalization of the American black race as an enslaved population. His election to the highest and most powerful political position in the world today has put an end to years of politics of identity and colour of the skin in America and also brought to the fore the need to respect excellence and not the accidental features of race, ethnicity and other forms of identity politics. On a more symbolic ground, Obama has programmed a foreign policy stance that recognizes the value of cooperative and collaborative approach to resolving conflicts and crisis. No matter the strength and power which a party can wield, violent and hegemonic means do not ensure peaceful management of conflicts. Dialogue, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration and compromise are always better than assertiveness, avoidance, competition and uncooperativeness. It is therefore suggestive that Nigerian government can make progress towards resolving some of her endemic conflictual issues like the Niger Delta crisis, intra and inter ethnic rivalries, cries of marginalization, class domination, etc by finding a 'third way' in conflicts management. Avoidance of facing conflictual problems or finding a one way-designed solution can only swept conflict under the carpet only to re-emerge at some other day or in some different mode.

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