

PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY: A PANACEA FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Preventive diplomacy has over the years secured conspicuous usage and essential role as a key element in peace and security on the international arena. The concept has seen States and non-States actors committed to the establishment of sustainable peaceful co-existence in the international community making various efforts to prevent violent situations, especially those associated with electoral processes. Using qualitative analytical method, this paper seeks to ascertain the efficacy of the concept of preventive diplomacy as the basis of a peace and security structure for national and global peaceful co-existence. It aims to discuss the origin and meaning of preventive diplomacy and to elaborate on its operational requirements. The paper further demonstrates the effectiveness of preventive diplomacy in preventing violence situations, especially as it affects Nigeria's pre and post electoral processes; and conclusively offers a policy-relevant discourse on the potential of existing and emerging global institutions to develop a capacity for preventive diplomacy as part of their contribution to international peace and security.

Keywords: Preventive Diplomacy, Electoral Violence Prevention, Peace, Security, Democracy.

Introduction

A key element that has aided the efforts and commitment of actors in international peace and security in achieving and maintaining their role as "peace-makers" is Preventive diplomacy. Since Dag Hammarskjöld's first utterance of the phrase 'preventive diplomacy' in 1960, norms, rules, systems and institutions related to preventive action have proliferated (Lund, 2008). According to Zyck and Muggah (2012) the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established, in 2001, the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, and three years later the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) stood up its Mediation Support Unit.

Regional bodies have also increasingly taken up the language of conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. In Africa, the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) has been highly active, as have numerous other associated bodies such as the Panel of the Wise, the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS).

Sub-regional bodies such as the South African Development Community (SADC) and, in particular, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have been particularly active in attempting to settle disputes before and after they have turned violent. ECOWAS, for instance, played a key role in mediation efforts in Guinea in 2009 and 2010 along with the African Union and United Nations (Zyck and Muggah, 2012).

Other actors in international peace and security have substantially support the development of conflict prevention through preventive diplomacy. Austin (2015) explains that in May 1994, the Carnegie Corporation launched a Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. The Commission's final report published in 1997 became an essential reference for good policy for all governments and private organizations committed to preventing large-scale violence (the prevention mandate).

In the same manner, electoral violence has become an emerging problem of democratizing societies in the past two decades. Political actors and their supporters have started to perceive the competition during the elections as a zero-sum game with direct consequences for defeated entity and its followers. Violence is usually seen by them as an ultimate tool applied in a broader political strategy or an alternative way of campaigning. However, democratizing and transforming societies are not the only environments with a higher risk of violent outburst. Hence, a paper that seeks to establish the efficacy of the concept and practice of preventive diplomacy as the basis of a peace and security structure for national and global peaceful co-existence.

Preventive Diplomacy Defined

For a clear understanding of Preventive Diplomacy, it is pertinent to, at the onset, define the concept of "diplomacy". Diplomacy is the tact and means of conducting international relations in a peaceful manner, with the sole aim of avoiding conflicts and wars. It is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states. It can be further referred to as the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, culture, environment and human rights (Palmer & Perkins, 1969; Deutsch, 1978; Berridge, 2010). Aiyede (2006) sees Diplomacy as an art with a long-storied history. It is the practice of verbal discussion with the intent to influence, transmit a position or negotiate on a given issue or situation for a mutually acceptable outcome. It is referred to as an art because each situation requires a unique mixture of empathy, persuasion, bluster, and cajoling amongst other things. Preventive diplomacy then, refers to actions or institutions that are used to keep the political disputes that arise between or within nations from escalating into armed force. These efforts are needed when and where existing international relations or national politics appear unable to manage tensions without violence erupting. They come into play before a point of confrontation, sustained violence, or military action is reached (Lund, 1995). Ban Ki Moon (2011) emphasize that preventive diplomacy refers specifically to diplomatic action taken, at the earliest possible stage, "to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur". Earlier, in his UN press release in 2007, Ban Ki-moon precisely expressed that:

Preventive Diplomacy is not an option—it is a necessity. As we know too well, dealing with the aftermath of violent conflicts is costly. Lives are needlessly lost. Economics are destroyed. Hopes for development are dashed. Resolving conflicts, before violence occurs, is one of the smartest investments we can make.

To this, Lund (1996), specifically looks into preventive diplomacy a requirement, and calls for “explicitly multilateral and multilevel” norms and procedures to provide for “more regularized [and] widely established arrangements” so as to “preempt crises rather than wait for them to erupt.” Zyck and Muggah (2012) opine that some stakeholders view preventive diplomacy as ‘soft’ mediation while others refer to it as ‘muscular’ diplomacy which includes credible threats of pre-emptive military action. According to Steiner (2004), preventive diplomacy is implemented by great powers individually and/or collectively, either by states in the same region, by international organizations, or by international civil servants, for instance the UN secretary general. These state and non-state actors see preventive diplomacy as essential because of the widespread and boundless effect of intrastate conflict situations “such as violent civilian power struggles, military coups, militarized ideological campaigns, insurgencies, civil wars, and revolutions” and thereby “affecting and involving neighboring states through refugee flows, outside military assistance and bases, hot-pursuit operations, and outside instigation of internal conflict; engaging the interests of major states and international organizations; and are always major agenda items for the international community.”

To some experts in Sub-Saharan Africa, preventive diplomacy constitutes the consensual resolution of tensions and disputes while to others in North Africa it indicates a more regressive form of appeasement that allows underlying drivers of conflict to persist under a veneer of stability (Zyck and Muggah, 2012). Preventive diplomacy, thus, remains highly relevant along the entire conflict spectrum.

Violence and Electoral Violence Prevention

Nelson Mandela (2002) notes that

“the twentieth century will be remembered as a century marked by violence. It burdens us with its legacy of mass destruction, of violence inflicted on a scale never seen and never possible before in human history”.

To many people, staying out of harm’s way is a matter of locking doors and windows and avoiding dangerous places. To others, escape is not possible. The threat of violence is behind those doors – well hidden from public view. And for those living in the midst of war and conflict, violence permeates every aspect of life. As an act of aggression or a turbulent state resulting in injuries and destruction, violence is, according to *World report on violence and health*, “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation”(WHO, 2010). Understandably, human experience has always been characterized by violence (physical or not). Every year, according to a WHO report, more than 1.5 million persons are killed during violence, with a higher number of casualties from non-lethal injuries and

chronic, and non-injury health issues resulting from suicide attempts, interpersonal violence such as intimate partner violence and sexual violence, as well as collective violence such as war and other forms of armed conflict. Thus, violence is adjudged one of the leading reasons for death among people aged 15–44 years around the world (Krug EG et al., 2002).

On these lists are violence caused by and are witnessed during electoral processes. Violence, experienced in such outrageous situations like during elections, subverts the democratic attractiveness of elections by allowing coercion to subjugate free will and thereby discouraging political participation. Arguably, where force influences electoral processes, democratic systems and institutions are at the devastating level of their peril (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020). First, electoral violence is a subset of political violence and abstractly comparable to communal violence, rebellion, and civil war. On the other hand, electoral violence can be thought of as a type of election wrongdoings, and therefore more likened to election rigging, vote-buying, and other forms of electoral fraud (Taylor, 2018), occurring on the framework of electoral rivalry before, during or after elections using force as coercive instruments and targeting a variety of electoral actors – candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters (Birch and Muchlinski, 2018).

Citing Höglund (2009), Taylor (2018) affirms that electoral violence is underscored by the motive of the violence, the timing of the violence, the actors perpetrating the violence, as well as the targets of the violence. Unlike other forms of violence, electoral violence differs in terms of the institutional contexts or frameworks shaping the ways or manners of violence involved in the electoral process. These formal electoral frameworks further create specific actors, practices, and institutions that direct the cause of electoral violence and control both its timing and targets. Hence, electoral violence only occurs in the course of an electoral contest, or rather would have taken a different shape in the absence of an electoral process (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020). In fact, previous experience or fear of exclusion from political decision-making, by major political actors or groups standing for elections are likely causes of electoral violence. The perceived risk of exclusion, which may arise from ethnic discrimination, electoral fraud or other deviations from democratic norms, increases the interests in elections making actors and groups resorting more violence (Birch and Muchlinski, 2018).

Specific indicators of electoral violence as they affect Nigeria's electoral sphere, as noted by Campbell (2010), include the division of the electorate into mutually hostile blocks defined by regional, ethnic, and religious identities. This is given credence by the open idea of power-sharing formality allowing political actors to appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments while employing defamatory and inflammatory messages through local radio stations, text messages, websites and social networking apparatus. Other identified indicator is the inadequate preparation by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. This is occasioned by the failure of INEC to "institute a credible registration system, a credible ballot and ballot box distribution process, or a transparent ballot-counting procedure." Also, is the executive arm reluctance to implement the National Assembly's legislation to secure the autonomy of INEC with its own necessary funding – an avenue for the incumbent president to manipulate INEC in his favour since INEC is fiscally dependent on the presidency.

It should be, however, noted that electoral violence may not necessarily be the physical combat violence but a perceived threat of violence such that was used, to force voters into compliance, by former warlord, Charles Taylor in the 1997 presidential election in Liberia when he clearly warned that if he did not win, he would restart Liberia's civil war (Taylor, 2018). On the overall, electoral violence is used not only to influence the outcome of elections but also to spoil the electoral process itself, especially forestalling elections from taking place.

However, Krug EG et al., (2002) warns against accepting violence, of any type, as unavoidable since there are "systems – religious, philosophical, legal and communal– that have grown up to prevent or limit it." Kalevi J. Holsti in his *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648–1989*, as quoted by Ramcharan (2008), also held that "I am reasonably convinced that man can build diplomatic institutions, norms and procedures that will at least reduce the incidence of war. I do not share those pessimistic views that see war as a necessary concomitant of man's genetic make-up, a perpetual "struggle for power" among nations, or an inevitable consequence of international anarchy." Thus, violence can be averted, and as such electoral violence can definitely be prevented using the right systems, institutions and procedures.

Explicitly, prevention of electoral violence is any kind of electoral support or assistance aimed at preventing or mitigating some form of electoral violence undertaken by a variety of actors, both local and international (including transnational) (Birch and Muchlinski, 2018). These electoral violence preventive assistance are seen from technical and political strategies to electoral violence prevention (USAID, 2013), and the difference between the two strategies offers an important analytic framework for understanding electoral violence interventions or supports. Electoral violence assistance is technically approached to grow the capacity of electoral actors and institutions in delivering a credible election acceptable to all, including victors and losers, as fair and commendable (Birch and Muchlinski, 2018; Taylor, 2018).

In the real sense, reducing or preventing electoral violence implies improving the conduct of elections by encouraging equal participation and removing the fear of possible exclusion from the electoral process through adequate consultations, dialogue and sensitization for actors and stakeholders. Going forward, astute capacity building of electoral institutions and positive transformation of popular electoral attitudes or context are also workable and worthy ways of addressing and preventing electoral violence.

Preventive Diplomacy and Electoral Violence Prevention in Nigeria

Having understood the meanings and workings of preventive diplomacy, violence, and electoral prevention, the next step is to make an incursion into the importance of preventive diplomacy in the prevention of electoral violence and disaster in Nigeria. With the introduction of elective principle in 1922, the people of Nigeria, like other countries of the world, excluding countries such as Brunei, China, Eritrea, South Sudan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, are enjoying the opportunity to choose their leaders in local, state and national elections. Although nearly six decades of its independence have been smeared by military coups, pervasive corruption and secessionist movements. However, elections in Nigeria, as experienced also by some nascent democracies, are burdened with substantial amount of violence during the preparation period (like campaigns), on the voting days or in the post-

election times. All resulting in records of casualties that undermine democratic foundation and functions as well as jeopardizing peaceful human relationships (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020).

Records show that election violence in Nigeria resulted to the death of more than 100 people during and after the 2015 election, a casualty below the experience of four years earlier in 2011 where 800 people died, with 700 killed alone in the religiously diverse Northern city of Kaduna (REUTERS, 2015; Campbell and Gavin, 2019). In 2015, according to the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), 106 election-related deaths were recorded, among which 62 were killed in the nearly seven months before the general elections, and 44 killed in the first two weeks after the elections. Hitherto in 2003 and 2007, in the records of the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 100 people and 300 people respectively were killed in election-related violence (Campbell and Gavin, 2019). Similarly, there was a geographical prejudice of electoral violence in the country. For instance, in 2015, the south-west and south-south, particularly in Lagos, Delta and Rivers, experienced more violence resulting to deaths with a handful in the Middle Belt and Kano. Also, in 2018, such deadly violence was recorded mostly in the Southwest and the Delta, as well as Kano. On the overall, in 2015, at least one deadly violent occurrence was recorded in about eighty percent of all Nigerian states. However, in 2018, southern Nigeria and the Middle Belt were most affected with only under fifty percent of the country's states having at least one incident of election-related violence (Gavin, 2019).

These electioneering upheavals are occasioned by the diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious affiliations of both the voters and those seeking their votes, unhealthy rivalry among politicians, intra and inter party competition, pride, corruption, bias and intimidation by security agencies, and the inefficiency and bias nature of the electoral body, the Independent National Elections Commission (INEC). So excruciating and severe is the unending aftermath of electoral violence in Nigeria, especially among the youths who readily served as foot soldiers or political thugs for the politicians. Proliferation of small arms is an experience during and after elections. It was speculated that during the 2003 electioneering period in Kwara State the gladiators namely, Alhaji Muhammed Lawal, the incumbent Governor, and his political godfather, Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki, employed the service of thugs who are mostly students in the state higher institutions and equipped them with various category of arms to settle political scores. After the elections, most of these arms were not retrieved, though the succeeding government of Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki reportedly tried to recover them, thus creating opportunity for thuggery and cultism to thrive.

Worthy of note is the predisposition and high-handedness by the security agencies, especially the Nigeria Police and the Nigerian Army. Although, the security outfits have, on several occasions, assured that they are doing their best in providing level playing field to all political parties, candidates and the electorates to consciously involve and participate positively in elections in Nigeria, and since their sole responsibility is to control the process to its conclusion, they have no interest in the outcome of the elections or the person who wins eventually. Yet, the Police and the Army have been accused of serving as instruments for politicians, especially the 'government of the day', to aid stealing of electoral materials,

disruption of polling booths, arresting and torturing of political opponents, and assist in transporting and serving as guards for political thugs.

Without doubt, elections in Nigeria involve great interests and the winners take all in the contest. With a lot covetously at stake, and as so far noted, such elections are often, if not always, associated with violence. Stakeholders, mostly politicians, are ever ready to exploit seething ethnic, religious, and regional divisions to score political points. These politicians and their supporters stir up tensions within identified communities targeting at every opportunity their political oppositions. However, the brunt of such electoral violence is bore by the average Nigerians as well as on the credibility of Nigeria's political processes (Campbell, 2019)

Conflict Prevention and Preventive Diplomacy by the US, UK, and the UN and other Interlocutors

Electoral violence in Nigeria, as expected, attracted concerns from international countries and actors, especially from those who share diplomatic relations with the country. For this reason, state actors like the US and UK, as well as international organizations such as the UN, and other interlocutors involved in and carried out various preventive measures and activities that helped in solving disagreements, preventing violence, encouraging free and fair elections, and promoting post elections transformation. In the wake of the events leading to both the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom declare their intolerance for electoral violence and unhealthy election interference with strict repercussions and consequences to include visa and travel restrictions.

On both election periods, the United States government affirmed its support for a genuinely free, fair, transparent, and peaceful electoral process without supporting any particular candidate or party in Nigeria's elections. The US government specifically warned that "We, and other democratic nations, will be paying close attention to actions of individuals who interfere in the democratic process or instigate violence against the civilian population before, during, or after the elections. We will not hesitate to consider consequences – including visa restrictions – for those found to be responsible for election-related violence or undermining the democratic process. Under U.S. immigration law, certain violations may also lead to restrictions on family members" (U.S. Mission Nigeria, 2019).

In addition to warning and threats, the US government input some advocacy. According to 2019 Premium Times Agency Report, the United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Stuart Symington, admonished that Nigeria should not disappoint the international community by getting right the 2019 elections "so that its credit will be invested in democracy and freedom throughout West Africa and across the entire World." He advocated for the shunning of hate speeches and dissemination of fake news because such acts can bring about division among the citizens and called for a peaceful participation in the elections "to guarantee free, fair, and peaceful and a credible honest reflection of their choice. "On the overall, people must take responsibility for their actions, "First before God, second under the laws of the country, in the eyes of countrymen and lastly in the eyes of the world" (Premium Times, 2019).

In the same manner, the United Kingdom government and its international partners, on same occasions, provided significant support to the electoral body – Independent National Electoral Commission, and to Nigerian civil society in delivering credible elections. The UK government provided regular engagement with actors across the political strata to admonish them to respect electoral rules and sustain a peaceful and calm atmosphere. Ultimately, it expressly warned that “We would like to remind all Nigerians that where the UK is aware of such attempts, this may have consequences for individuals. These could include their eligibility to travel to the UK, their ability to access UK based funds or lead to prosecution under international law” (U.S. Mission Nigeria, 2019).

Attaching a high level of importance to the Nigerian elections due to the risk of large-scale violence as well as the potentially catastrophic consequences of such violence, the United Nations Organization (UNO) in 2015 played two major conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy roles by supporting the Nigerian institutions that engaged in conflict prevention and management; and directly, through the efforts of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative (SRSG), Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas. To support the Nigerian institutions that engaged in conflict prevention and management, the United Nations Organization, through its Abuja based UN Country Team (UNCT), enabled “good offices and engagement with the PDP and APC; generated positive messaging through public information and media statements; enhanced the capacity of national institutions to prevent and manage conflict by supporting the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), as well as local NGOs, media and other partners; and assisted with the design of an elections dispute resolution mechanism” (Nathan, 2018).

As preventive measures to conflict management and prevention, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative (SRSG), Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, assisted in fashioning the way forward at the critical stages when tensions were high, and disaster was looming. He, therefore, “defused tension in relation to both the presidential contest and a number of gubernatorial elections at the state level; played an instrumental role, together with the UN Resident Coordinator, in establishing the NPC; reinforced the peacemaking efforts of national and local actors; marshalled the regional and international actors on the ground in Nigeria to adopt a common approach; alleviated the crisis caused by the postponement of the elections; and contributed to Jonathan’s decision to concede defeat” (Nathan, 2018).

Other interlocutors such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized, in accordance with Nigerian law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, a joint international election observation mission for the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Consequently, in the spirit of international cooperation the joint mission offers recommendations to various stakeholders to improve the electoral process. The IRI/NDI mission craves for a legal framework and election dispute resolution; election administration; political party conduct; civic engagement; and election security.

These recommend a comprehensive, inclusive and expeditious electoral reform process, and establish time limits for the adjudication of pre-election petitions. They also suggest a complete constituency delimitation exercise, adoption of more transparent procedures for the

tabulation, transmission and announcement of results, commitment to and implementation of measures to strengthen mechanisms for political party internal democracy, and continued efforts to enhance the participation of marginalized groups, including women, youth, people with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the electoral process. Efforts that promote an improved coordination between security agencies and INEC on the provision of electoral security as well as to enforce electoral laws by investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of election-related criminal acts were recommended.

Efforts towards preventive diplomacy were also made at both the regional and sub-regional levels by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Understanding its role in guaranteeing that member states comply with the democratic values of free and fair elections, the AU instituted the African Union Election Observer Missions (AUEOM), which at different elections times sent electoral observer missions to member states. For instance, in 2019 and in line with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, an AUEOM team led by Hailemariam Desalegn, former prime minister of Ethiopia, and assisted by Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs was deployed to Nigeria between February 9 and 28. The mission was charged with the transparency and fairness of Nigeria's electoral processes, thereby ensuring that election results are reliable and credible. The mission also facilitated reports that suggest various areas of electoral improvement and positivism. In the same manner, there were the ECOWAS's Election Observation Teams in Nigeria that met with stakeholders to support a successful election.

All these preventive diplomacy initiatives are important as they help enhance credibility and ensure a nonviolent and peaceful electoral process in Nigeria, especially given the mounting suspicions and allegations of influencing the process and outcome of the elections by actors and stakeholders, notably from the two major political parties—the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The paper has so far expatiated on the workings of preventive diplomacy as taking importance and relevant position in the general conflict atmosphere. From the onset, the paper traced the growth and development of preventive diplomacy being the idea influencing the changing norms, rules, systems and institutions that are associated with preventive action at all levels of international interactions. Thus, the study reflects on the various efforts of actors using preventive diplomacy to prevent violent situations before, during and after elections in Nigeria, and qualified preventive diplomacy as the basis of a peace and security structure for national and global peaceful co-existence.

The study statistically looks at violence especially those caused by and are witnessed during electoral processes, revealing a great number of casualties experienced in electoral violence in Nigeria. It affirms the underlying motives, electoral frameworks and indicators of electoral violence as well as an understanding of the preventive activities to prevent or curb such electoral wrongdoings.

The paper conclusively recommends that all actors, both state and non-state, should established more unilateral and bilateral relationships with Nigeria to guide against negative outcomes at election periods especially those leading to violent situations. Existing and emerging global institutions need to develop tools for preventive diplomacy as part of their contribution to international peace and security. These include but not limited to strong congressional/parliamentary statements, weighty or reflective actions by government agencies such as embassies and diplomatic missions, technical and financial aid for the nation's electoral body, and diplomatic planning and outreach, especially to emerging political groups, international partners as well as those Nigerian nongovernmental organizations canvassing and operating for credible elections.

More diplomatic and strategic initiatives on policy coordination and contingency planning specially focusing on information sharing and appropriate coordination should be taken by influential countries like United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and China towards regular consultations and coordination on Nigeria's elections. In the same manner, corresponding consultations and coordination should be made with the European Union, the African Union, the ECOWAS, and other regional and sub-regional organizations, and invariably with nongovernmental organizations and civil societies.

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People Interviewed for This Paper

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2. Mr. Olatayo Adeshina, a staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Kwara State.
3. Mr. Abdulgafar Muse, Former Youth Leader, All Progressive Congress (APC), Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State.