National Border Closure as Paradigm Shift in Sustainable Foreign Policy Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: As the government of Nigeria ordered the closure of its national land borders in August 2019 to curtail illegal cross-border import and export of goods and smuggling of arms, many of the neighboring countries whose economies depend heavily on trade with Nigeria have criticized this action due to the hardship it has brought on trans-border commercial activities. This paper examines the impact of border closure on regional trade between Nigeria and its neighbors. It also examines the potential impact of the border closure on Nigeria's relations with other African nations and overall implications on Nigeria's foreign policy. Coming from the Economic Nationalism theoretical perspective, the paper understands the Nigerian government action as a reflection of the government's drive to take total control of the nation's resources and maximize these for the overall benefit of the citizens. The government policy places the interest of Nigeria first, above the competing interests of other African nations. Although the Nigerian border closure has the potential of adversely impacting regional trade arrangements, including the recent African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the paper contends that the Nigerian government action upholds the country's concentric circle foreign policy idea which advocates prioritization of the interest and welfare of citizens over the nation's interests in West Africa, Africa, and the wider world.

Keywords: West Africa, National border, national interest, regional trade, foreign policy.

Introduction

Nigeria's land borders link the country with four different countries namely, the Republic of Benin in the southwest, Cameroon in the southeast, Chad in North-East, and Niger in the North. These borders, like others dividing many African counties, have been referred to as artificial boundaries because they were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial powers in Africa often separating people of the same tradition and culture into different countries. Nigeria's economystands perhaps as the largest in Africa, even surpassing South Africa. In West Africa, Nigeria's economy, sustained by its over 200 million national population, clearly stands as the strongest, prompting very robust business activities both at the land borders and between Nigeria and her different neighbours. Two of the Nigerian immediate neighbouring counties, Benin Republic and Niger, are co-members of the sub-regional economic cooperation body, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The Nigerian government said it took the unilateral action on August 20, 2019, shutting its land borders to curtail the flooding of rice and other smuggled goods into the country. Forestalling illegal export of petroleum products out of the country was another reason given to support the government decision. Although not openly stated, government was also said to have shut the national land borders to curtail the booming illegal cross-border arms trade.

The Nigerian government's decision has generated much economic and political ripples across the country and the West African sub region, spreading into other parts of Africa. There were widespread fears that protracted closure of the Nigerian boundaries could lead to recession or other adverse economic consequences for the fragile West African economies largely dependent on trade with Nigeria.There were also concerns that the Nigerian border closure could derail the smooth takeoff of the plan by the African Union (AU), through the AfCFTA), to create a single, Africa-wide regional market for goods and services thereby promoting movement of persons and capital across the continent. To underscore their worries, African leaders initiated active bilateral and multilateral diplomatic moves to try to convince Nigeria to end the border closure. ECOWAS set up a special committee in

February 2020 to study and make a full report on the **closure***of* **Nigerian** *land***borders. Members of the committee and other African diplomats made repeated visits to Abuja with passionate appeals for a reversal of the border closure (Alake, 2020).**

The Nigerian government explained that the nation's landborderswere shut in the nation's overall best interest. Justifying his government's action, President Muhammad Buhari was recently quoted as saying: "We have saved millions of dollars; we have realised that we don't have to import rice. We have achieved food security-we have curtailed the importation of drugs and proliferation of small arms which threaten our country." (African Review, 15 February 2020). Still, there have been questions whether the Nigerian government action, which negatively impacts the economy of her West African neighbours, contradicts the country's popular political mantra that Africa is the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. There have also been suggestions that the and protracted border closure signified a radical departure from Nigeria's traditional care for all African nations.

It is obvious that the unilateral border closure is a paradigm shift from Nigeria's past experiences where successive governments pursued the self-assigned role of *Big Brother Africa* without first weighing their actions against the domestic interest of Nigerians. This paper examines the closure of the Nigerian land borders from the economic nationalism theoretical perspective, which justifies government's intervention to protect the overall interest of its citizens in the current world order defined by stiff competitions. From this perspective, the Nigerian government action, which is akin to the America First philosophy promoted by United State of America President Donald Trump,appears properly aligned with the country's concentric circle foreign policy idea as espoused by Nigeria's External Affairs Minister 1984-1985 Professor Ibrahim Gambari and upheld through the years by successive Nigerian foreign affairs ministers. With concentric circles defined as circles that form around each other, all sharing a common hub,Gambari asserts that a country's foreign policy consists of many circles, all revolving around national interests at the centre of the circles. "The innermost of the circles of national interests involves Nigeria's security - territorial integrity and political independence – and that of the neighbours of Nigeria (Gambari, 1989).

It has been argued that Africa as centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy presupposes that Nigeria's national interest must come first, followed by West Africa, the rest of Africa, and finally the other parts of the world. Africa being the centerpiece of Nigeria's doesn't mean, as has often been presented by some scholars, that Nigeria's domestic interests must be placed behind, or sacrificed in pursuit of the interests of other African nations. Benjamin Ashaverstates that "concentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy "means that our national interest must take precedent over other interests such that the welfare of the citizens should take priority over Nigeria's interests in the West Africa subregion, Africa and the wider world (Ashaver, 2014).

The political and economic reverberations from the Nigerian border closure, which have been felt in many places the present, may linger even after the borders may have been opened. We shall explore the potential socio-political and economic impact of the border closure on Nigeria's relations with her West African neighbours and other African nations, as well as the future implications for Nigeria's foreign policy. While considering possible options for Nigeria to fully harness the positive fallouts from the border closure, we shall also outline steps to mitigate some of the potential backlash from the Nigerian government action.

Theoretical Framework:

Theories are the abstract foundations on which research studies are built. A theoretical framework, therefore, is like the skeleton which holds the entire frame of an inquiry. Theoretical framework not only supports the principal focus of a research, it provides a high-level explanation or justification for embarking on the study. It, therefore, leads the researcher, providing the compass on what factors to evaluate and the nature of the relationship between the different research variables.

Our goal in this study is to understand the rationale behind the Nigerian government's unilateral closure of the nation's land borders in August 2019. This study seeks to examine the impact of the Nigerian government's action on the country's foreign policy, relationship with her immediate neighbours, as well as implication on regional and continental trade and cooperation. To facilitate full understanding of these, we shall rely on the theory of Economic Nationalism in international politics, which explains why states sometimes directly intervene over economic matters, including imposition of restrictions on the movement of goods and capital. Ever so suspicious of globalisation and free trade in the current international system in a flux, economic nationalists rather favour protectionism aimed at boosting local capacity and growth of national industries. The most important concern for the economic nationalist in power is to achieve total control of the nation's resources and direct these resources for the overall interest of the citizens. Self-sufficiency, political and economic autonomy of the country are considered paramount and therefore placed over and above the need to link the national economy with the economies of other nations.

Nature of Nigeria's Borders

Nigeria's 923,768 square kilometer land space stretches from the Gulf of Guinea coastline in the south, up to the lake Chad region to the northeast. The West African nation shares boundaries withfour different countries namely, the Republic of Benin in the southwest, Cameroon in the southeast, Chad in North-East, and Niger in the North).The Nigeria-Benin borders are straddled by four of Nigeria's 36 states, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Kwara States. The Nigeria-Cameroon borders in the eastern flank stretches all the way from the south to the north of Nigeria, touching six states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa and Borno States.Nigeria's third border area, the boundary with Chad, touches several Borno State towns, including Monguno, Ngala, Bama and Gwoza, and stretchesup to the Lake Chad region.The fourth borderland, whichseparates Nigeria and Niger Republic, runs along Nigeria's entire northern brink, touching seven different Nigerian States:Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe and Borno States (Worldatlas.com)

Like the borders dividing many other African countries, the Nigeria boundaries with Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have been referred to as artificial because they were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial powers in Africa. Scholars have found that Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa countries have, perhaps, the most artificial and arbitral borders than any other part of the world. Up to 44 percent of the African national boundaries were simply drawn as straight linesby the colonial occupiers, thus often separating people of the same tradition and culture into different countries (Green, 2012).It has been established that many Nigerians across the Nigeria-Benin Republic, Nigeria-Cameroon and Nigeria-Niger borderlands have relations and traditional ties with people across the borders, despite the rules of inter-state relations and boundary crossing (Babatola,2015). This point was graphically illustrated during the 2014 National Conference when Alhaji Muhammadu Mustapha, the foremost traditional ruler (Lamido) of Adamawacautioned that he and his people in Adamawa Statecould easily cross over to Cameroon to join their kith and kin shouldNigeria disintegrate. His words: "I am the Lamido Adamawa and my kingdom extends to Cameroon. The larger part of my kingdom is in Cameroon. Part of that kingdom is today called Adamawa State in Cameroon. You see, if I run to that place, I will easily assimilate (Umoru, Erunke & Nwabughiogu, 2014).

Though exposed to different political and cultural experiences through the years, the different peoples separated by the artificial boundaries still maintain vibrant socio-economic relations. The demarcating line between Nigeria and Benin Republic (formerly Dahomey) drawn by Britain and France, effectively altered the socio-economic and cultural future of the Yoruba and other peoples on both sides of the artificial divide. But the affinity among the population at the borderlands continued to promote lots of trans-border movement, trading and overall socio-economic activities across the artificial boundaries between Benin Republic's 12 million people and their more populous and richer Nigerian neighbours to the south.(Afolayan, 2000).The thriving trade along the Nigeria-Beninborderlandhas generally involved transactions in imported finished goods. Benin hasserved as a well-known trade route for channeling finished goods, farm products and especially refined petroleum from Nigeria not just to its local population, but toother African countries, reaching as far as Cote d'Ivoire and into landlocked Burkina Faso and Mali.

But the direction of the trade between Nigeria and her immediate neighbours has not just been one-directional, flowing from the richer Nigeria to the poorer Benin Republic, Niger and other neighbours. Nigeria has also been a choice destination for rice, wheat, frozen foods, second-hand cars and clothing imported from Europe and funneled through the neighbouring states, especially Benin Republic. The foundation for these tripartite trade relations involving Europe, Benin Republic and Nigeria was laid by the drastic fall in the value of Nigeria's currency in the late 1980s and changing political policiesby successive Nigerian governments. The depreciation of the Naira against the CFA and ban on the importation of certain grades of used cars and poultry products by successive Nigerian governments turned Cotonou into a huge warehouse for receiving, storing, and re-exporting to Nigeria second-hand cars, rice and wheat. The used cars came from Europe, while rice and wheat came mainly from Thailand. The total ban on importation of rice by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari further complicated the nature of the trans-border trade between Nigeria and her immediate neighbours, boosting smuggling of cars, rice and frozen chicken into Nigeria through the Benin, Niger and Cameroon borders. Black market transportation of refined petroleum products from Nigeria through the borders to Benin, and onward transfer to other West African countries also became rampant.

The borders between Nigeria and all her Neighbor Care alsoknown to be very porous. Former Nigerian Minister of Interior Abba Moro said that Nigeria had 84 officially recognised entry points into Nigeria, but there were 1,499illegal land routes into the country many of which are either mountainous or in the jungle. In Adamawa State alone, over 25 illegal routes into Nigeria have been identified. Due to this ineffective border control, only a limited volume of people, goods and services pass through the authourised border checkpoints. The porous nature of the Nigerian borders promotes heavy smuggling of people, currency andgoods, including rice, second-hand cars, used clothing and fake pharmaceuticals. There have also been reports of booming illegal trading in drugs, small arms and light weapons as well as almost unfettered movement of terrorists,e.g., Boko Haram, across the borders(Eselebor, 2014).

Implications of Nigeria's Border Closure

Nigeria is a well-known destination for all manner of finished goods and services, including assorted food items which are imported from Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. The country in 2019 exported mainly mineral fuels which accounted for 87% of the total US$54 billion worth of goods shipped from Nigeria. Other principal Nigerian exports are miscellaneous base metals and agricultural products such as cocoa, oil seeds, tobacco, fruits and nuts, as well as raw hides, skins and leather. On the hand, Nigeria was reported to have imported US$47 billion worth of goods from across the globe in 2019. This was 30% higher than the previous year's imports, and a 40% increase in the volume of imports since 2015. Besides machinery, computers and mineral fuels including refined oil, food items including rice and wheat have featured prominently in Nigeria's top imports in recent years. A steady rise in the amount Nigeria spent on food and drink imports, from about US$3 billion in 2015 to about US$4 billion by 2017, was reported (National Bureau of Statistics).

Different Nigerian governments over the years adopted various economic policies and strategies to try to discourage the importation of different types of goods and services that could be provided from local sources. Such import substitution policies have ranged from outright ban on importation of certain classes of goods, imposition of higher tariffs on such goods, to the offer of incentives such as subsidies and loans, to local industries and farmers. From 2013, the government of Nigeria started restricting importation of rice, and imposed 70% tax on the commodity. This made it cheaper to import rice through Nigeria's neighbours. Benin Republic and Cameroon quickly took advantage of this and in 2014, while Benin lowered its tariffs on rice from 35% to a mere 7%, Cameroon completely removed its previous 10% tariff. In an apparent bid to placate Nigeria, however, landlocked Niger announced prohibition of export of rice through its borders to Nigeria, a move considered a mere feel-good diplomatic pronouncement. (Orjinmo, 2019).

The combination of these government interventions led to drastic fall in the importation of rice directly from Thailand to Nigeria. It, however, resonated in astronomical escalation of rice import to Benin and Cameroon. It was obvious that much of the rice arriving Benin and Cameroon were eventually channeled into Nigeria through the southern and eastern borders.

After coming into office in 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari, in the bid to boost local agriculture, imposed outright ban on the importation of rice, which is Nigeria's favourite food. As Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) stopped issuance of foreign exchange for rice and other imports, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports showed that the Nigerian government action crashed the country's food and drinks annual import bill from US$4 billion in 2017 to about $3.6 billion in 2018 and down to just about $1 billion in 2019. Nigerian government officials have, however, presented different, conflicting food import statistics. CBN Governor Godwin Emefiele in December 2019 said Nigeria's annual food import was $1.9bn, having fallen from $7.9bn in 2015. But earlier, in September 2018, former Agriculture minister Audu Ogbe said Nigeria spend $22bn importing food annually

(Falayi, 2019).

Overall, as a result of the Nigerian government policy, local production of rice was reported to have risen,even as food prices also increased. But there were also worrying reports that rice smuggling, especially from Benin Republic, had become big business. Nigerian markets continued to be flooded with imported rice that persistently passed through the well-known contraband route between Cotonou, Benin's biggest city, and Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos. Cotonou and Lagos are only a few hours'drive away. Nigeria Customs continued to regularly seize and display to the media large quantities of rice, wheat and frozen chicken and turkey parts.

Just like rice, different secondhand or "tokunbo" goods, including cars, electronics and clothes are also smuggled into Nigeria especially through the Cotonou-Lagos contraband route. Nigeria's ban on the importation of vehicles older than 15 years made Cotonou a favourite destination for all manner of vehicles, estimated at an average of 10,000 per month, especially from Europe. Many of such vehicles were, in the end, illegally "flown" into Nigeria through the porous Benin-Nigeria borderlands at Seme and elsewhere. On the reverse side, petrol which is cheaper in Nigeria because it is subsidized by government was also heavily smuggled from Nigeria through the porous borders into Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) estimated in 2019 that up to 10 million litres of petrol was smuggled daily out of Nigeria through the land borders, translating to loss of about two billion Naira daily. Following the border closure, the Nigerian government ordered suspension of supply and sale of petrol to communities within 20 kilometers radius of the country's land borders (Adekoya, Jeremiah & Abuh, 2019).

It is established, therefore, that smuggling of rice, frozen foods, petrol and secondhand vehicles are parallel business activities that have gone on, for many years, through the Nigerian land borders. Successive Nigerian governments introduced different policies and adopted many approaches in trying to curtail the booming illegal business, balancing these against official regional trade that happen across the borders. Until 2019, these policies and approaches, which achieved different levels of success, had come short of outright closure of the nation's land borders. It is being suggested that the Nigerian government may have finally been pushed into taking the drastic and unprecedented decision of shutting the country's land border because of reports of growing smuggling of sophisticated arms and weapons into the country through the borders. Many of such weapons used by Boko Haram and other terrorists were increasingly being seized by government security forces in northern Nigeria.

A study published in Aljazeera detailed how Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria has been exacerbated by Nigeria's porous borders with Cameroon, Niger, Benin, and Chad. Noting that over 70% of the about 80 million illegal weapons in West Africa reported to be in Nigeria, the report outlined how Boko Haram fighters and other terrorists as well as smugglers take advantage of the porous nature of Nigeria's borders to smuggle small arms and light weapons. Some of such weapons are also trafficked through the normal inter-state borders stuffed inside heavy trucks and lorries laden with goods, taking advantage of the laxity and corruption of some Customs officers at the borders and hiding under the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement of persons, goods and services (Onuoha: 2013).

Impact of Nigeria's Border Closure

Different officials of the Nigerian government, from President Buhari himself, to the Customs and Excise and NNPC chiefs, insist that the closure of the nation's land borders has achieved its primary goals – drop in rampant smuggling from neighbouring countries, rise in local production of rice, and sharp spike in customs earnings at the ports. Nigeria Customs said in late 2019 its revenue from the ports had dramatically increased to an unprecedented level of about N6 billion per day, while trafficking in illegal arms and ammunition reduced. NNPC said there has been drastic reduction in the volume of petrol consumed in the country following the border closure. (Agboluade, 2019; Nnodim, 2019)

However, the economic shock caused by the border closure is believed to have worsened unemployment in the informal sector as the government action adversely impacted the means of livelihood of many Nigerians and others involved in small-scale trading in textile, footwear's, alcohol and other goods along the borders. The border closure has also been identified as a contributory factor in the rise in food prices. Following the border closure, the nation's annual inflation rate continued to climb steadily every month. Four months into the border closure, in December 2019, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that Nigeria's inflation rate rose year-on-year to 11.85%, the highest rise since 2018. The inflation figures continued to rise steadily, jumping to 12.26%by March 2020, seven months into the border closure, with experts speculating of impending economic recession in Nigeria (Nairametrics, December 17, 2019).

The reverberations from the border closure have generated intense socio-political and economic ripples across West Africa and beyond. It exposed the fragile economies of Nigeria's immediate neighbours as it effectively shut them out from Nigeria's very lucrative market powered by the over 200 million Nigerian population. It was natural, therefore, that the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the larger continental body, the African Union (AU) showed much determination to find solution to the closure. They engaged in several multilateral and bilateral diplomatic channels to try to convince the Nigerian government to reverse its action. Many African leaders perceived the border closure as a major threat to the operation of free trade across West African and the rest of Africa. Chairman of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, who is Ivorian, said the Nigerian land border closure posed much danger to ECOWAS and threatens to undermine all the gains so far recorded by the community. Other leadersagreed that "the unilateral closure of borders goes against all the trade and free movement treaties signed by Nigeria within the framework of ECOWAS." They described the Nigerian action as "very worrying" and capable of affecting the very foundations of ECOWAS, namely the free movement of people and goods (Africanews, 15 February 2020).

At the continental level, the border closure was quickly identified as a major, potential obstacle to successful implementation of the landmark free trade arrangement, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which aims at creating a "continental market" by boosting the combined consumer and business spending and increase intra-African trade by at least 53.2%. The AfCFTA, already signed by all of Africa's 55 countries except Eritrea, seeks to achieve phased removal of tariffs for up to 90% of goods and allow free access to countries' goods and services across the continent. Nigeria signed the regional trade pactin July 2019, two months after it had come into force in May 2019. Nigeria's border closure in August 2019 was, therefore, described by some commentators as going against the spirit and letter of the regional trade agreement which the country signed just one month earlier (Signe, L., & Van de Ven, C, 2019). Trading under the AfCFTA framework was scheduled to start in July 2020, but this has apparently been impacted by the forced closure of borders by other countries in Africa and elsewhere due to the global health crisis arising from the Coronavirus pandemic. The already closed Nigeria's land borders may remain shut till after the global health crisis.

Besides its impact on regional trade and the economics of neighbouring African economies, concerns have been further raisedon the potential political implications of the Nigerian border closure. Statements by some African leaders have implied that the border closure threatens Africa's regional peace. The unilateral nature of the Nigerian government action has been questioned, since the border closure was implemented suddenly without prior consultations with neighbouring countries. By so doing, has Nigeria failed in its duties as a signatory to ECOWAS and the AfCFTA? Did the Nigerian action negative its long-avowed principle which holds up Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy? Was the Nigerian government action a poor imitation of United States President Donald Trump's extreme nationalistic America First Policy?

Judged strictly from the commercial standpoint, the Nigerian border closure may pass as an economic aberration as most countries don't usually close their borders for trade-related reasons. They do so when their security is jeopardized or during periods of disease epidemic out of fear of possible cross-border spread of the disease. Sudan, Rwanda and Kenya are examples of African countries that have walked similar paths in the past, closing their borders during the Ebola disease outbreak. Nearly all countries of the world shut their national borders between March and May 2020 at the height of the Corona virus pandemic.

It appears, therefore, that instead of adducing only economic reasons, it would have appeared weightier if the Nigerian government pushed the more fundamental reason of national securityas a principal underlying factor behind its sudden border closure. Before the border closure, there reports that Boko Haram and other terrorist groups were engaged in flagrant cross-border trading in arms. Such national security considerations would have subsumed economic reasons. Nigeria has continued to demonstrate its continued support for ECOWAS. It showed support of the African regional economic cooperation by signing the AfCFTA on July 7, 2019. The country has continued to faithfully fulfil all its obligations to the African Union (AU), and other regional and sub-regional organisations, which is a clear departure from USA President Trump's policies. So, by its demonstrable actions, Nigeria has continued to uphold its concentric circle foreign policy philosophy which places Africa at the centre. However, through the unilateral border closure to protect the economic interests of Nigeria, the administration of President Buhari seems to have interpreted the Nigerian concentric circle foreign policy principle to mean that Nigeria's national interests stand at the core of the concentric circle, even as Africa remains a principal focus of the foreign policy. We hold this as the correct and better interpretation of the cencentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy (Ashaver,2014)

The very harsh criticismsthat have trailed the border closure from Nigeria's neighbours are poignant suggestions ofhow seriously and dimly they view the Nigerian action. The reasons for the negative reactions are not far-fetched. Reports attest that Benin Republic's economy in the south is heavily dependent on the informal re-export and transit trade with Nigeria, which accounts for about 20% of the nation's GDP. As high as 80% of imports into Benin are destined for Nigeria. Similar linkage and dependence have also been established in the north between the economy of landlocked Niger Republic and that of Nigeria. From Nigeria, food, petrol and other items that pass through the land borders flow into the rest of West Africa, reaching as far as Cote d'Ivoire, Burkin Faso and Mali. It would,therefore, come as no surprise if the leaders of Benin, Niger, and other negatively impacted African nations perceive Nigeria's action as a declaration of some sort of economic war on their countries (Orjinmo: 2019).

Chances, therefore, are high that with time and given opportunities, these nations may want to retaliate against Nigeria. Such opportunities may arise at bilateral or multilateral levels. Nigeria will always need the support and cooperation of her neighbours to effectively contain the activities of Boko Haram and other cross-border terrorist and sundry transnational criminal operations. The situation seems even more precarious when it is considered that all the four Nigeria's immediate neighbours are relatively poorer, which sets the stage for natural rivalry and resentment. Also, all of Nigeria's immediate neighbours are Francophone countries which have been politically groomed to consider the Anglophone Nigeria as a regional political and economic contender.

Conclusion

Nigeria will need to develop strategic economic and political policies to manage the future possible fallouts from its border closure. Deliberate policies to woo the neighbouring countries through visible investments to support economic developments in these countries in West Africa and Africa in generalis highly recommended. Nigeria may consider initiating an African version of the ChineseBelt and Road Initiative, a programme aimed at boosting Chinese influence in Asia, Europe and Africa through critical infrastructural investment, enhanced trade and economic ties with key countries in these regions. For sure, the border closure marks a positive shift in Nigeria's foreign policy. It demonstrates the country's determination to push through its national interest over and above other considerations. But the gains of the policy need to be managed very carefully to avoid future adverse backlash from the immediate neighbours. Ahead of the eventual re-opening of the borders, government must also initiate and enforce sustainable policies and actions to lock its porous borders and stem flagrant corruption often reported among the Customs and Immigration officials at the borders which promote unhindered cross-border smuggling. Failure to take these and other necessary steps may erode all the gains from the border closure.

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