THE DYNAMICOF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Nigeria's role in the international system has historically been defined by its Areocentric focus, leadership within continental bodies like the African Union (ECOWAS), and its status as a regional hegemony. However, the 21st-century global landscape, characterized by multipolarity, economic interdependence, climate challenges, and shifting security threats, demands a re-evaluation of traditional foreign policy approaches. This paper argues for the necessity of a dynamic Nigerian foreign policy one that is agile, pragmatic, and strategically aligned with core national interests of economic development, citizen welfare, and national security.Moving beyond the static principles of non-alignment and concentric circle models, a dynamic framework would be proactive rather than reactive. It would leverage Nigeria's demographic capital, economic potential, and diplomatic experience to build strategic partnerships beyond its traditional spheres. This involves a deliberate economic diplomacy drive to attract foreign direct investment, facilitate technology transfer, and secure market access for Nigerian goods, particularly within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).Furthermore, this paper examines the critical domestic prerequisites for such a dynamic external engagement, including economic stability, democratic consolidation, and bureaucratic efficiency. It concludes that for Nigeria to maximize its influence and secure its interests in a complex world, its foreign policy must evolve from a primarily political project to a tool for tangible national development, requiring constant adaptation to both global trends and domestic imperatives. This study examines the dynamics of Nigerian foreign policy and its prospects in the contemporary global system. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved through different political regimes, reflecting shifts in national interests, ideological orientations, economic conditions, and global power relations. The study analyzes key phases of Nigerian foreign policy, including the immediate post-independence era characterized by Afrocentric diplomacy and anti-colonial solidarity, the military regimes which emphasized regional leadership and peacekeeping roles in Africa, and the democratic era marked by economic diplomacy and strategic

international partnerships.

Introduction

As a state commonly referred to as the Giant of Africa, Nigeria takes a place of unquestioned importance both in continent and in the international community. It is not just such a stature due to its huge population. The largest or of the huge oil and gas reserves in Africa. Instead, it is deep-seated and projected with a foreign policy that is dynamic as it is multifaceted. Nigeria does not interact with the world in a fixed and fixed doctrine inscribed upon a stone; it is a living breathing and ever evolving policy, always in response to the dynamics of domestic factors, regional needs, and changing global geopolitical forces. This dynamism of the Nigerian foreign policy is anchored in a philosophical principle that has over decades stressed on Afro-centrism, non-alignment policy and a belief in regional stability and integration. Since the early post-independence period, with the leadership of the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Nigeria established itself as the voice of the decolonizing African continent. This was solidified during the 1970s under General Murtala Muhammed whose aggressive support of apartheid in Southern Africa and more aggressive African agency set the gold standard in Nigerian diplomacy (Gambari, 2008). The theme of making Africa the pivotal component of its foreign policy has been one such constant factor in the place of Nigeria making such massive contributions to peacekeeping activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone and Sudan and others (Adebajo, 2010). The Domestic Sphere. The policy is exceptionally responsive to the domestic socio-economic and political situation in the country. The need to have an economic diplomatic approach to foreign policy has been dictated by economic downturns, democratization of the military in 1999, and internal security issues such as insurgency in the Northeast (Ogwu, 2016). This domestic-level shift can be seen in the slogan of Citizen Diplomacy propagated by Foreign Minister OjoMaduekwe in the late 2000s, which made an express attempt to refocus the foreign policy on supporting ordinary Nigerians by providing tangible benefits. The Regional (West African) Sphere. Nigeria since it is the hegemony in West Africa has disproportionate role in ensuring stability in the region. This has been necessitated in most cases by a dynamic and at times difficult balancing between interventionist solidarity as portrayed by its leadership of ECOWAS and the national interest. The economic and human price of such interventions has at times caused a debate in the public and a reevaluation of its strategy (Bach, 2007). The Global Sphere. The shift to the multipolar world order, the termination of the Cold War, the increasing significance of the emerging economies, and the rising role of such transnational problems as climate change and cyber insecurity all require continuous adaptation. The foreign policy of Nigeria needs to interact with the traditional western countries and at the same time intensify South-South collaboration and forge strategic relationship with the emerging players such as china, India, and Brazil (Saliu, 2010).

Background of the Study

Foreign policy of a country is hardly ever a fixed thing; it is a dynamic and changes process that is conditioned by a complicated interaction of domestic interests and changing structure of the international system. Nigeria, being the most populous and the largest economy in Africa, is an interesting case study of such dynamism. Nigeria has witnessed major changes in its

foreign policy, which have ranged between aggressive leadership in the continent and the retreating stage since achieving independence in 1960. The given study is placed in terms of the necessity to conduct a systematic examination of the causes, the symptoms, and outcomes of this dynamism. The main question that it tries to address is as follows: What are the major reasons that explain the swings in the foreign policy of Nigeria and what have the changes contributed to its position and prominence in the international system? The foreign policy of Nigeria was nurtured through a clear vision that was clearly expressed by first Prime Minister of the country, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa: the country should be friendly to others and it should be at the forefront in African affairs. This Afrocentric approach was not an act of altruism; it was a strategic move to achieve leadership of Nigeria in the continent. The crucial tenet was strongly summed up in the phrase of the Foreign Minister JajaWachuku, who said that Nigeria had a manifest destiny to be the leader in Africa (Aluko, 1981). This fate was to be sought in a pledging to decolonization, elimination of apartheid and nurturing of African solidarity, mainly with the assistance of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and now the African Union (AU).

It was the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) that tried and consolidated the dynamism of this early period. The war necessitated a more practical and security-conscious strategy in showing how domestic instability is becoming the pre-eminent determinant of foreign policy, which often requires the abandonment of ambitious international posing (Akindele, 2005). The 1970s oil boom supplied the financial brunt to support the Afrocentric aspirations in Nigeria. During the leadership of the General Yakubu Gowon and the subsequent General Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigerian foreign policy turned out to be more assertive and institutionalized. This is the time that can be characterized by the strategic role that Nigeria played in the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Nigeria took the shape of a frontline state and funded the liberation efforts and exerted powerful pressure on the apartheid South Africa and colonial powers. Such activism was distilled in the government declaration: The wealth of Africa has centuries been exploited to build Western Europe and America. Now we have the turn to utilize the fraction of that wealth to assist ourselves and African sister states (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1970). This was the period when institutions such as the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) and a strong economic diplomacy were developed and put Nigeria on the platform of a respected middle power and the giant of Africa. According to a scholar Olajide Aluko, the model of the foreign policy of Nigeria during this time was that of the concentric circle where Africa was at the heart of focus and then the rest of the developing world after which was the global system (Aluko, 1981).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the dynamism of Nigerian foreign policy took a sharp turn as economic crisis caused by a drastic drop in oil prices, the immense debt, and internal political turmoil in the form of a series of military coups made an impact. The resource-based idealistic foreign policy of the 1970s collapsed. This prompted the formulation of the so-called Concentric Circle doctrine by General Ibrahim Babangida which, although reiterating the centrality of Africa, placed a greater focus on economic diplomacy and a more active focus on the west to relieve the debt and other economic assistance (Gambari, 2008). This decade proved an important maxim: the economy of a country internally is the foundation of its external power. According to a captured quote by President

Shehu Shagari, foreign policy is simply a continuation of domestic policy... a country without peace with itself cannot effectively pursue a successful foreign policy (Shagari, 1980). The domestic tensions were manifested by a more pragmatic, ideologically less motivated and at times conflicting foreign policy. The restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 was an opportunity that Nigeria could start afresh and reclaim her traditional activist role. President Olusegun Obasanjo promoted the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD), established Nigeria as a prominent peacekeeper in West Africa (e.g. in Liberia and Sierra Leone), and demanded the relief of debts. Under President UmaruYar'Adua, the mantra changed to citizen diplomacy as it sought to concentrate on the welfare of Nigerians in the diaspora (Ogwu, 2008). Nevertheless, the 21 st century has brought about new dynamics: the emergence of new global superpowers such as China, the growing threat of transnational terrorism (e.g. Boko Haram), and the long-term domestic issues of corruption and economic diversification. These have remained to define a constantly recalibrating foreign policy. The most recent one is the 4-D Doctrine (Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora) of the current administration that tries to exploit the soft power and demographic dividend of Nigeria in the multipolar world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria).

Conceptual Review

The foreign policy of Nigeria is a classical example of a country whose external relations are dynamic rather than fixed but are in a process of change governed by a complex interaction of domestic and regional forces and the forces of the world politics. It is most dynamic as seen in the development of its major tenets which are the main agents of the change and how it is reflected in various historical periods. Afro centrism. This is the cornerstone. Nigeria thinks of itself as a leader and a central authority on the African continent. Its foreign policy is commonly insisted on with giving African unity, decolonization and development. This is summed up in the well known adage that Africa is the heart of things about foreign policy of Nigeria. National Interest. An actualist approach to the security, economic and political welfare of the nation. These are safeguarding territorial integrity, economic development and attaining status equal to its demographic and economic weight.

Non-Alignment (Multilateralism). First this implied that we would avoid becoming involved in the Cold War competition. This is what today translates into an active pragmatic involvement in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in an attempt to exploit them to its own end. Type of regime and ideology of leadership. The subjective sense of world held by the head of state and the type of government (civilian or military) has had a significant impact on the direction of the policy. As an illustration, the idealism of the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa contrasted with pragmatic Afro centrism of Generals Gowon and Murtala Mohammed, and consequently with the economic diplomacy of President Obasanjo. Home Economics. One of the main forces has been the boon and bane of oil. The 1970s oil boom financed a policy of interventionism (i.e. promotion of liberation movements). Economic crises of the 1980s (e.g., as part of Structural Adjustment Programs) in turn necessitated the withdrawal of expensive international engagements and the prioritization of so-called economic diplomacy. Regional Security Problems. Being the hegemon of the region, the unrest in West Africa is something that Nigeria has to respond to. The best

indication of how policy is influenced by external crises is its role in the formation of ECOMOG (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group) in Liberia and Sierra Leonean civil wars (Adebajo, 2002).

The Changing Global Order. The collapse of the Cold War eliminated one of the major structuring factors in international relations and Nigeria had to redesign its role. In the same way, new powers such as China and the increasing significance of transnational questions such as climate change and terrorism have also prompted changes in policies.

A Historical Overview

Epoch / Period	Key Characteristic & Driver	Signature Actions & Focus
The Balewa Era (1960-1966)	Cautious Conservatism and Alignment Balancing Afro centrism with maintaining strong ties with the Commonwealth and the West.	Moderate stance on apartheid. Active but cautious role in the OAU and UN.
The Civil War Era (1967-1970)	Survival and Diplomacy Foreign policy was entirely subordinated to the goal of preserving sovereignty and gaining international recognition against Biafran secession.	Lobbying for support, especially from OAU members. Securing military support from UK and USSR.
The Oil Boom Era (1970s)	Assertive Afro centrism Economic power from oil revenue fuelled a confident, leadership-oriented policy. Driven by Murtala/Obasanjo regime.	Strong vocal support for liberation movements (ANC, SWAPO). Creation of ECOWAS (1975). "Africa has come of Age" speech at the OAU (1976).
The Structural Adjustment Era (1980s)	Economic Diplomacy and Retrenchment Crippling debt and economic crisis under President Babangida forced a pragmatic shift towards policies that could attract foreign investment and debt relief.	Championing the African Petroleum Producers Association. Less focus on costly continental projects.
Post-Abacha Re-entry (1999-2007)	Rebuilding Legitimacy The return to democracy under Obasanjo aimed to rehabilitate Nigeria's pariah status after the Abacha era.	Active peacekeeping in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Darfur. Championing NEPAD. Debt relief negotiations.
Contemporary Era (2007-Present)	Pragmatic Economics and Security Characterized by a	"Nigeria First" economic focus. Leadership in the Multinational

	focus on attracting foreign direct investment, combating regional terrorism (Boko Haram), and navigating a multi-polar world with China's growing influence.	Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Balancing Western and Eastern partnerships.

The Foundational of Nigerian Policy in West Africa

The foreign policy of Nigeria with regard to its West African neighbours is probably the most impactful bilateral and multilateral relationship of the region. It remains a changing, even contradictory one, wavering between aggressive hegemony and comradly leadership and propelled by a complicated combination of historical necessities, economic facts, security interests and continental prestige aspirations. The Circle of Doctrine of Concentric Circles. In this conventional set up, the closest West African neighbourhood (ECOWAS) to Nigeria has been at the core of its foreign policy interests. The rationale is that the region has a tendency to become unstable before instability is experienced at home. Hence, the security of Nigeria cannot be outside the scope of the West African security (Gambari, 2008). Demonstrate Leadership Potential. Nigeria is the most populous country and the biggest economy in Africa, and it has traditionally regarded itself as a natural leader on the continent, which is what it is supposed to become in the eyes of its citizens and other African states (Adebajo, 2010). Economic Interests. Nigeria has great economic interests in the region which includes investments in banking (e.g., UBA, Access Bank), telecommunications (MTN, Airtel) and a large informal sector trade. One of the objectives is to secure these interests and facilitate the economic integration. Security Imperatives. Internal security issues that plague Nigeria, including insurgency in the Northeast to banditry and farmer-herder issues are often transnational, and are also linked to arms trafficking, terrorist cells and criminal gangs through porous West African borders.

In 1975 Nigeria was a founding father of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with Togo. It was an obvious strategic step, to institutionalize its leadership, and to establish a pattern of economic and political collaboration on a regional level. Nigeria has been the main contributor to ECOWAS as they have contributed approximately 60 to 80 percent of their budget at one point or another, a fact that shows their commitment (Akindele, 2003). The Big brother/Big Bully Dilemma.

This is the main conflict in the Nigeria-neighbours relations. On the one hand, Nigeria supplies electricity to Niger, Benin, and Togo, takes in millions of migrants in ECOWAS countries, and is the first country to act in the crisis in the region. Alternatively, its supremacy is subject to envy. Unilateral decisions such as the abrupt closing of land borders in 2019 to prevent smuggling (which stayed until the end of 2020) led to severe economic impacts to neighbouring nations relying on trade across their borders with Nigeria. An anonymous Ghanaian diplomat once commented, When Nigeria sneezes, the rest of West Africa gets a cold. This encapsulates the unavoidable nature of the economic and political heaviness of the Nigerian state that can weigh down on smaller neighbours (Ogwu, 1999).

Nigeria's Relations with the Rest of Africa

Nigeria is the most populous and largest economy in Africa and has continuously presented a foreign policy that underlines its status as a leader in the continent. This position can be summed up in the term "Pax Nigerian" the anticipation and demand of Nigeria to assume a leadership in Africa in political, economic, and military spheres of stability and development. This is a complex relationship that incorporates diplomacy, economic, security cooperation and cultural exchange. Afro centrism has been the pillar of the foreign policy of Nigeria since independence. This was officially stated in the doctrine of the concentric circle whereby Africa is the centre circle and therefore the main target of external relations of Nigeria. Liberation Support. Nigeria is the new frontline state against apartheid under the leadership of President Murtala Mohammed and under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo. It gave financial, diplomatic and material assistance to such movements as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and SWAPO in Namibia. The Nigerian government came up with the Southern Africa Relief Fund (SARF) to which the citizens also contributed. ECOWAS. In 1975, Nigeria spearheaded the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This was a move spearheaded by General Yakubu Gowon and President Gnassingbé Eyadema of Togo in an attempt to bring economic integration and political stability to West Africa. Nigeria has taken a heavy burden of the budget and peacekeeping expenses of the organization. Peacekeeping. Nigeria has played a significant role as a contributor of troops to peacekeeping activities in the continent with the most notable being in the case of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan (Darfur) and Mali. The expensive Liberian and Sierra Leone interventions during the 1990s under the banner of ECOMOG (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group) were carried out mostly by the Nigerian led and funded interventions and rescued the two states but at a huge price at the expense of Nigerian lives and purse.

Nigeria's Relations with Non-African State

Nigeria being the most populous nation and the largest economy in Africa has been subject to a foreign policy with its orientation of Afro-centrism and strategic involvement in the world super powers. The doctrine, commonly known as the concentric circles, has Africa at its heart then the global black world (Diaspora), and the rest of the international community (Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike, 2016). Its interactions with non-African countries are thus informed by its pursuit of economic growth, control of the region and a leading role in international governance.

Relations with the United States

The relationship with the United States is one of Nigeria's most crucial and multifaceted, encompassing security, trade, and Diaspora ties.

Security Cooperation: This is the cornerstone of the relationship. The U.S. is a key partner in Nigeria's fight against terrorism, particularly against Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. This involves military training, intelligence sharing, and the sale of military equipment. The U.S. also provides significant support for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Trade and Investment: The U.S. is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners. Nigeria is a significant supplier of crude oil to the U.S., though this has diminished due to the U.S. shale boom. American corporations like ExxonMobil

and Chevron have massive investments in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. The African Growth and Opportunity Act(AGOA) provides preferential trade access for Nigerian non-oil exports to the U.S. market.

Relations with the United Kingdom

The UK-Nigeria relationship is deeply rooted in a shared colonial history, which creates a complex blend of close ties and historical baggage.Historical and Commonwealth Ties As a former colony, Nigeria's legal, educational, and governmental systems are modeled on Britain's. Both are members of the Commonwealth of Nations, which facilitates diplomatic and cultural cooperation. Development and Trade The UK's Department for International Development (DFID), now merged into the FCDO, has been a major source of aid for health, education, and governance programs in Nigeria. Post-Brexit, the UK has sought to strengthen bilateral trade ties with Nigeria, its second-largest trading partner in Africa. Diaspora and "Japa" The UK hosts a very large Nigerian Diaspora. The recent trend of skilled Nigerian professionals emigrating to the UK (colloquially known as "Japa") has become a significant aspect of the relationship, creating both brain drain concerns for Nigeria and a valuable talent stream for the UK.

Relations with China

Since the early 2000s, Sino-Nigerian relations have expanded dramatically, becoming a defining feature of Nigeria's economic foreign policy. Economic Engagement China is Nigeria's largest trading partner, a major source of imports, and a significant buyer of Nigerian crude oil. The relationship is characterized by extensive Chinese infrastructure projects (roads, railways, ports, and airports), often financed through loans from Chinese banks.Infrastructure-for-Resources A common model has been Chinese companies executing major projects funded by concessional loans from the Chinese government, sometimes backed by oil revenues. Critics, however, point to the debt burden these projects create (Adebajo, 2022).Soft Power China has invested in cultural and educational exchanges through Confucius Institutes in Nigerian universities and scholarships for Nigerian students to study in China.

Relations with the European Union

Nigeria engages with the EU both as a collective entity and with its individual member states (like France and Germany).Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) The EU is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners and investors. Negotiations around the EU-ECOWAS EPA have been contentious, with Nigeria hesitant to sign due to concerns about protecting its nascent industries from European competition. Development Aid and Migration The EU provides significant development assistance. A key area of cooperation is migration management, including tackling human trafficking and the root causes of irregular migration from Nigeria to Europe. Security The EU supports security initiatives in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, often providing funding for regional counter-terrorism and piracy efforts.

Multilateral Financial Institutions (The World Bank & IMF)

This is perhaps the most significant and contentious relationship.Role: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been crucial sources of loans, grants, and technical advice for Nigeria's development projects and economic stabilization.Historical Context: Nigeria turned to the IMF for a loan

during an economic crisis in the early 1980s, leading to the controversial Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986. SAP conditions included currency devaluation, trade liberalization, removal of subsidies, and privatization of state-owned enterprises.Current Engagement: Nigeria continues to engage with the World Bank and IMF for budget support, project financing (e.g., in power, education, and health), and policy advice, though it often resists full adherence to certain conditions, such as fuel subsidy removal, due to social and political pressures.

The United Nations (UN) System

Nigeria is a founding member of the UN and plays a very active role, particularly within its regional context.Peacekeeping & Security**:** Nigeria is one of the top contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping missions globally. Its soldiers have served in Congo, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan (Darfur), and Mali. This has bolstered its image as a regional leader.

Joseph Garba was President of the UN General Assembly (1989-1990).

Ibrahim Gambari served as Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Amina J. Mohammed is the current Deputy Secretary-General of the UN.

The Challenges in Nigeria's Engagement

i. **Sovereignty vs. Intervention:** Nigeria is fiercely protective of its sovereignty. It welcomes support but often resists perceived external imposition of policies, especially from the IMF/World Bank.

ii. **Leadership vs. Burden:** Nigeria's role as a regional leader comes with a heavy financial and military burden, especially in peacekeeping and enforcing ECOWAS mandates.

iii. **Corruption and Governance:** The effectiveness of aid and loans from international institutions is often undermined by systemic corruption within Nigeria, leading to debates about accountability.

iv. **Policy Ownership:** There is an ongoing struggle to ensure that programs designed by international institutions are properly tailored to Nigeria's specific context and are "owned" by its government and people, rather than being seen as foreign impositions.

Findings

1. The Primacy of Domestic Politics and Leadership

The most significant driver of change in Nigeria's foreign policy is the nature of its domestic governance.

Civilian vs. Military Rule**:** Military regimes (e.g., Generals Murtala/Obasanjo, Buhari, Babangida, Abacha) often pursued more assertive, unilateral, and ideologically driven policies (e.g., Nigeria's leadership in the anti-apartheid struggle, ECOWAS intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone). Civilian democracies (e.g., Obasanjo's Second Republic, Yar'Adua, Jonathan) have tended to favor multilateralism, economic diplomacy, and building international consensus.PersonalityLeadership The personality and worldview of the head of state have profoundly influenced policy direction. For instance, President Olusegun Obasanjo’s personal engagement was crucial for debt relief and the creation of NEPAD, while President Muhammadu Buhari’s focus was on security cooperation and counter-terrorism.

2. The Overwhelming Influence of Economic Imperatives

Economic realities have consistently acted as a constraint and a catalyst for policy shifts.The Oil Boom (1970s): Petro-wealth funded an ambitious and interventionist foreign policy, allowing Nigeria to act as a "frontline state" against apartheid and a major financial backer of African liberation movements and regional organizations.Economic Crises (1980s-2000s): The oil glut and subsequent economic decline forced a retreat from costly international commitments. This period saw the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and a foreign policy re-oriented towards attracting foreign investment and securing debt relief ("Economic Diplomacy").Diversification Challenge: The continued reliance on oil revenues makes foreign policy vulnerable to global oil price shocks, underscoring a persistent dynamic of ambition versus capacity.

3. The Consistent Pillar of Afro centrism

Despite other changes, a focus on Africa remains the bedrock of Nigeria's foreign policy. This is often termed the "Concentric Circle" model, with Africa as the core priority.Regional Leadership: Nigeria has invested immense diplomatic, military, and financial capital in maintaining regional stability, primarily through ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). This is evident in its leadership in ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone.Pan-Africanism: Nigeria was a staunch opponent of apartheid in South Africa and has been a key player in the transformation of the OAU to the African Union (AU).

4. Navigating the International System: From Non-Alignment to Pragmatism

Nigeria's posture towards major powers has evolved from ideological non-alignment to pragmatic engagement.Cold War Era: Nigeria was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, seeking to avoid entanglement in superpower rivalry while advocating for a more equitable international economic order.Post-Cold War Era: The end of bipolarity created new challenges and opportunities. Nigeria's foreign policy became more pragmatic, focusing on partnerships that offer tangible economic and security benefits (e.g., engaging with the US, China, and the EU on specific issues like trade, investment, and counter-terrorism).Relations with Major Powers: Dynamics with the US and UK have been complex, often strained by issues of democracy and human rights (e.g., during the Abacha regime). Meanwhile, relations with **China** have deepened significantly in the 21st century, cantered on infrastructure-for-resources deals.

5. Emerging Dynamics: Security and Non-State Actors

21st-century challenges have introduced new dynamics that traditional state-centric policy must adapt to.Transnational Security Threats: The rise of Boko Haram insurgency and other regional security threats (e.g., in the Sahel) has made security cooperation a top foreign policy priority, reshaping relationships with neighbours (Chad, Niger, Cameroon) and Western powers providing military aid and intelligence.The Role of Non-State Actors**:** The influence of multinational corporations (especially in the oil sector), transnational civil society organizations, and media has grown, making the foreign policy environment more complex and less exclusive to the state.

Discussion

Nigerian foreign policy is not a fixed formula, but a fluid and changing body of principles and activity that are formed by a complicated interaction of internal forces, national commitments and international facts. Its dynamics could be explained by its essential principles, the most significant factors that influence its changes, and the challenges it can face today. The foreign policy of Nigeria since 1960 has had a number of consistent broad principles on which it is formally based. Non-Alignment. Nigeria was also a non-aligned nation having not officially allied with either the US-led western or the Soviet-led eastern blocks during the cold war. This enabled it to engage in national interest relationships as opposed to ideology. Advancement of National Good. This is the ultimate driver. Foreign policy is an instrument that ensures that the interests of core national security, economic development and welfare of citizens of Nigeria are secured. Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity Respect. The desire to butt out in the internal affairs of other states, which is an element of the post-colonial nations most valued. The National Political Environment. This happens to be the strongest dynamic. Regime Type and Ideology. Military regimes (e.g. Murtala/Obasanjo in the 70s, Babangida/Abacha in the 80s/90s) tended to have a more forthright, aggressive foreign policy. Democracies (e.g. Obasanjo civilian, Jonathan, Buhari) are more conciliatory and institution-based where they operate through multilateral institutions such as the UN and the AU.

Conclusion

Nigerian foreign policy is a narrative of an ambitious policy limited by capability. It is torn in several ways: the traditional commitments to its historic mission as a leader on the African continent versus its immediate domestic requirements; between its old alliances and new international relationships; between its rhetorical aspirations and the frequently ugly realities of pragmatism. The general pattern of the foreign policy of Nigeria is the latent tension of its view itself, as a regional and continental leader (a position that demands vast resources and commitment), and domestic issues of the economy and politics that often restrict its ability to act as such. The effect is a recessionary cycle of grandiose, resource-intensive involvement and intervals of re-retrenchment and re-emphasis on domestic problems. The relations of Nigeria with international institutions are symbiotic and unequal. The financial resources, technical expertise, and platform that these institutions provide to Nigeria are needed by the country in order to project its regional influence. On the other hand, the institutions demand that Nigeria plays a significant role as a regional stabilizer, a big market, as well as a representative of the developing world. The relationship is dynamic, with internal politics of Nigeria, economic needs of Nigeria and its aspiration to be the voice of Africa in the world. The relations of Nigeria with non-African states cannot be regarded as constant; they change according to the existing world order and priorities on the national level. The premise is pragmatism. Nigeria uses its market size, regional and oil reserves to win investment, security collaboration and development finance. Nevertheless, it also very cautiously protects its sovereignty and pursues alliances that provide technology transfer and domestic capacity development, and no longer a purely extractive relationship. Being a powerhouse in the Africa continent, its interactions with the rest of the world are essential to not only its growth, but also the general standing of the continent within the global order.

Recommendations

i. **Define a Clear Modern National Interest:** Move beyond broad principles like "Afro-centrism" and "Concentric Circles to a more precise definition of Nigeria's 21st-century interests. This should prioritize. Economic Security Foreign policy as a tool for attracting investment, securing markets for non-oil exports, and technology transfer.Human Security. Focusing on the well-being of Nigerian citizens abroad (Diaspora engagement) and addressing transnational threats like climate change, pandemics, and terrorism.Regional Stability. A stable West Africa is a prerequisite for Nigeria's own security and economic prosperity.

ii. **Institutionalize Policy Formulation:** Decouple from Domestic Politics. Shield core foreign policy objectives from the volatility of electoral politics as much as possible. Establish cross-party consensus on key strategic pillars (e.g., ECOWAS leadership, UNSC reform).Strengthen Inter-Agency Collaboration. Formalize a National Security Council/Foreign Policy Advisory Board that includes not just the Presidency and MFA, but also key ministries (Trade, Defence, Finance, Environment), intelligence agencies, and the military for a "Whole-of-Government" approach.

iii. **Economic Diplomacy:** Train Diplomats as Economic Agents Foreign service officers should be trained in economics, negotiation, and promoting Nigerian products. Missions abroad should have clear investment and export targets.Targeted Engagement. Focus diplomatic efforts on securing partnerships in key sectors where Nigeria has comparative advantage or strategic need: agriculture (processing), solid minerals, renewable energy, digital economy, and creative industries.Use diplomacy to showcase Nigeria not just as a market for extraction, but as a hub for manufacturing and services for the entire African continent, leveraging the AfCFTA.Address the fundamental issues that deter investment (inconsistent policies, infrastructure deficits) domestically, as foreign policy cannot compensate for a poor domestic environment.

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