

Nigerian Foreign Policy and Its Role in Africa's Peacekeeping Landscape

Nigerian Foreign Policy and Its Role in Africa's Peacekeeping Landscape:

The Giant's Footprint

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FOREWORD

Peace and security constitute indispensable foundations for sustainable development in Africa. Yet, despite sustained regional and international efforts, the continent continues to confront persistent conflicts, political instability, and transnational security threats that undermine state capacity and regional cohesion. Within this complex security environment, Nigeria has emerged as a pivotal actor in peacekeeping, diplomacy, and conflict resolution, playing a central role in shaping Africa's evolving peace and security architecture. Nigeria's long-standing engagement in multilateral peace operations has not only reinforced regional stability but has also positioned the country as a leading contributor to African and global security governance. In *The Giant's Footprint: Nigerian Foreign Policy and Its Role in Africa's Peacekeeping Landscape*, Professor Jibrin Ubale Yahaya offers a timely, rigorous, and analytically rich examination of Nigeria's peacekeeping trajectory and foreign policy engagement across the continent. The book provides a comprehensive assessment of Nigeria's involvement in peace operations, interrogating the strategic motivations, institutional dynamics, and operational challenges that have shaped its interventions over several decades. Drawing on historical analysis, policy evaluation, and carefully selected case studies, the author presents a nuanced account of Nigeria's diplomatic and military roles within the frameworks of the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

A notable strength of this volume lies in its ability to move beyond descriptive narratives to engage critically with the structural and political realities underpinning Nigeria's peacekeeping commitments. Professor Yahaya does not merely chronicle Nigeria's contributions; rather, he situates them within broader debates on regional leadership, collective security, and burden-sharing in Africa. The book offers candid reflections on the financial, logistical, and political costs associated with sustained peacekeeping engagement, while also examining the tensions Nigeria faces in balancing its continental leadership aspirations with domestic security challenges, economic constraints, and shifting geopolitical dynamics.

The scholarly merit of this work is further enhanced by the author's deep grounding in international relations, African security studies, and foreign policy analysis. Professor Yahaya's extensive academic experience and engagement with policy-relevant debates enable him to bridge theory and practice effectively, making the book accessible to both academic and practitioner audiences. His analysis provides valuable insights into the evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy, the institutionalization of peacekeeping norms in Africa, and the broader implications of Nigeria's role for regional and global stability.

This book is therefore a significant contribution to the literature on African peace and security, Nigerian foreign policy, and international peacekeeping. It will be of considerable value to scholars, students, policymakers, diplomats, military professionals, and all those interested in understanding the dynamics of Africa's security landscape. *The Giant's Footprint* stands not only as an important academic work but also as a critical reflection on Nigeria's enduring influence in peacekeeping and the future of collective security in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

The Giant's Footprint: Nigerian Foreign Policy and Its Role in Africa's Peacekeeping Landscape offers a comprehensive and critical examination of Nigeria's foreign policy orientation and its far-reaching implications for peacekeeping and security governance across Africa. Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has consistently positioned itself as a central actor in the promotion of peace, stability, and collective security on the continent. Anchored in the long-standing foreign policy doctrine that identifies Africa as the cornerstone of Nigeria's external relations, the country has undertaken extensive peacekeeping commitments that underscore its ambition to function as both a regional leader and a stabilizing force in some of Africa's most protracted and complex conflict environments.

Nigeria's sustained engagement in peacekeeping reflects broader aspirations for continental leadership, shaped by its demographic weight, economic capacity, and strategic influence within Africa. From its leadership of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone to its participation in African Union and United Nations peace operations, Nigeria has remained at the forefront of conflict management and post-conflict stabilization initiatives. These interventions have reinforced Nigeria's reputation as a proactive security provider while simultaneously expanding its diplomatic reach and institutional experience in multilateral peace operations.

Despite this extensive legacy, Nigeria's peacekeeping role has not been without significant challenges and contestations. Domestic political instability, economic volatility, and competing internal security demands have at times constrained the sustainability of Nigeria's external commitments. Moreover, perceptions of hegemonic ambition among regional partners, coupled with shifting global power dynamics and the persistence of intra-African conflicts, have tested the adaptability, legitimacy, and effectiveness of Nigeria's peacekeeping strategies. These pressures raise critical questions about the balance between national interests, regional leadership responsibilities, and the evolving norms of collective security in Africa.

This book engages directly with these complexities by interrogating the relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and its peacekeeping practices. It systematically evaluates the motivations, achievements, and limitations of Nigeria's interventions, situating them within broader debates on African diplomacy, regional security architectures, and global peacekeeping governance. Through historical analysis and policy-oriented inquiry, the study provides a nuanced understanding of Nigeria's dual identity as both a regional power and a peacebuilder operating within an increasingly dynamic and contested international system.

By offering an integrated assessment of Nigeria's peacekeeping footprint, this volume contributes to scholarly discussions on African security, foreign policy analysis, and international peace operations. It is intended to serve as a resource for scholars, students, policymakers, and practitioners seeking deeper insight into Nigeria's evolving role in shaping Africa's peace and security landscape.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by its historical, cultural, and geopolitical context as the most populous nation in Africa and one of its largest economies. Upon gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's leaders articulated a vision of international engagement centered on Pan-Africanism, decolonization, and regional stability. This legacy has endured, making Nigeria a key actor in Africa's political, economic, and security landscape. The guiding principle of "Africa as the centerpiece" of Nigerian foreign policy reflects its commitment to promoting peace, development, and unity across the continent.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been a defining feature of its post-independence identity, rooted in its geographic, demographic, and economic significance. As Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies, Nigeria has embraced a leadership role in shaping the continent's political, economic, and security frameworks. The country's foreign policy, guided by the principle that "Africa is the centerpiece," reflects a commitment to Pan-Africanism, regional stability, and the decolonization of African states (Gambari, 1989).

Historically, Nigeria's foreign policy has prioritized participation in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These platforms have allowed Nigeria to project its influence and champion African solidarity. Notable examples include Nigeria's pivotal role in the liberation of Southern Africa from apartheid, as well as its leadership in peacekeeping missions during the civil conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone under the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Ogwu, 1986).

The nation's foreign policy legacy is intertwined with its domestic political landscape, which has oscillated between military rule and

democracy. These internal dynamics have shaped its international engagements, particularly in prioritizing stability and development. However, Nigeria's leadership role has not been without challenges. Economic fluctuations, corruption, and domestic insecurity have at times undermined its capacity to fulfill its foreign policy objectives (Aluko, 1981). Additionally, criticisms of hegemonic tendencies and inadequate coordination in peacekeeping missions have tempered its reputation as a benevolent leader in Africa (Adebajo, 2014).

Despite these challenges, Nigeria's foreign policy has contributed significantly to Africa's peace and security architecture. Its active involvement in peacekeeping operations, mediation efforts, and conflict prevention underscores its leadership aspirations. As global and regional dynamics evolve, Nigeria faces the task of adapting its foreign policy to address emerging challenges such as terrorism, climate change, and economic inequality.

This chapter explores the historical evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy, analyzing its foundational principles, key achievements, and enduring challenges. By examining the interplay between Nigeria's domestic and international agendas, it provides a comprehensive understanding of its role as a regional power and a partner in Africa's quest for unity and development.

1.2 Overview of Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy

Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960 has been shaped by its identity as a sovereign African state and its aspirations to lead on the global stage. As Africa's most populous country and a major economic hub, Nigeria's foreign policy is framed by the principle of "Africa as the centerpiece," reflecting its commitment to the continent's political, economic, and social advancement (Gambari, 1989). Over the decades, this foreign policy has evolved to address the dynamics of global geopolitics, regional integration, and domestic challenges.

Nigeria's foreign policy since independence has demonstrated a consistent commitment to Africa's development while grappling with the complexities of regional leadership and global engagement. Rooted in Pan-Africanism and the philosophy of "Africa as the centerpiece," the policy reflects Nigeria's aspiration to be a stabilizing force in Africa's socio-political and economic spheres (Gambari, 1989). This commitment is evident in its leadership roles within multilateral organizations like the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

However, the evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy has not been without challenges. Domestically, political instability, economic volatility, and insecurity—especially during periods of military rule—have often undermined its ability to fully achieve its regional and global ambitions. Externally, Nigeria's aspirations for continental leadership have sometimes been perceived as hegemonic by its neighbors, complicating regional integration efforts.

Furthermore, Nigeria's commitment to peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa, while commendable, has occasionally stretched its resources thin. Economic constraints, operational inefficiencies, and inadequate focus on conflict prevention have limited the long-term effectiveness of some of its interventions.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria's foreign policy legacy underscores its potential as a driver of Pan-African solidarity and a pivotal player in addressing global issues such as climate change, counterterrorism, and sustainable development. Its ability to adapt to shifting geopolitical and domestic realities will determine its future effectiveness as a leader in Africa and beyond.

Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960 has been shaped by its geopolitical position, economic aspirations, and leadership ambitions in Africa. Over time, several key themes and issues have emerged in its approach to international relations. Below is a breakdown of the major issues:

1.2.1 Africa as the Cornerstone of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's foreign policy has been fundamentally anchored on Africa as its primary strategic focus. This Africa-centered orientation is deeply rooted in the ideology of Pan-Africanism and reflects Nigeria's enduring self-conception as a regional power with a historical and moral responsibility to advance African unity, sovereignty, and socio-economic development. Successive Nigerian governments have consistently articulated the principle of "Africa as the centerpiece" of foreign policy, positioning the continent as both the primary beneficiary and arena of Nigeria's diplomatic engagement.

As Africa's most populous country and one of its largest economies, endowed with significant human and natural resources, Nigeria has sought to leverage its influence to address major continental challenges. During the Cold War era and the period of decolonization, Nigeria played an active role in supporting liberation movements, opposing apartheid, and promoting self-determination across Africa. Through diplomatic initiatives, economic assistance, peacekeeping operations, and leadership within regional and

continental institutions, Nigeria projected itself as a key actor in shaping Africa's political and security landscape.

This strategic orientation has also been driven by the belief that Nigeria's national interests are inextricably linked to Africa's stability and progress. Consequently, Nigeria's foreign policy has emphasized collective security, regional cooperation, and multilateral engagement as essential pathways to safeguarding both continental and national interests.

This policy was strongly influenced by the ideals of Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who emphasized the need for African solidarity and the eradication of colonialism. Nigeria's actions demonstrated its commitment to these ideals, aligning its foreign policy with broader African interests rather than narrow national objectives (Aluko, 1981).

Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has consistently anchored its foreign policy on the principle that Africa remains the centerpiece of its international relations. This Afrocentric policy orientation stems from Nigeria's geographic size, demographic strength, economic potential, and a deep-seated historical and moral obligation to champion the political and economic liberation of the African continent. The foundational philosophy, first articulated by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, emphasized Nigeria's responsibility in leading the African cause, particularly during the era of anti-colonial struggles and the dismantling of apartheid regimes.

Over the decades, Nigeria has demonstrated this commitment through active participation in liberation movements, substantial contributions to peacekeeping operations, and leadership roles in regional and continental organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). Notably, Nigeria's role in facilitating the independence of Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa reinforced its identity as the "Giant of Africa" and earned it considerable diplomatic capital.

However, academic discourse reveals that while the policy has elevated Nigeria's regional influence, it has also exposed the country to significant economic and political costs. Scholars like Akinyemi (1979) and Nwokedi (1992) argue that Nigeria's Afrocentric policy has often been driven by idealism, sometimes at the expense of pragmatic national interests. The pursuit of continental leadership has strained Nigeria's resources, especially during periods of domestic instability, economic downturns, and internal security challenges.

Realist scholars contend that Nigeria must reassess its foreign policy priorities to ensure that its engagement with Africa yields reciprocal

benefits. The increasing influence of external actors like China, the United States, and the European Union in African affairs has further complicated Nigeria's leadership aspirations. Moreover, internal political and economic challenges have weakened Nigeria's capacity to sustain its continental ambitions, creating a mismatch between its foreign policy objectives and domestic realities.

Nevertheless, the centrality of Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy remains relevant. In the era of globalization and regional integration, platforms such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offer Nigeria opportunities to leverage its economic power for mutual gains. To remain effective, Nigeria must adopt a strategic approach that balances its traditional Pan-African commitments with pragmatic considerations of economic interests, national security, and global competitiveness.

However, while the ideal of Africa as the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy is a historic and noble pursuit, contemporary realities demand a recalibration of this approach. Nigeria must strengthen its domestic capacity, pursue economic diplomacy, and build sustainable partnerships that not only reinforce its leadership role in Africa but also serve its national development interests in the 21st century.

1.2.2 Contributions of Nigerian Support for Liberation Movement in Africa

Nigeria's support for liberation movements, its role in the formation of the OAU and AU, and its contributions to mediation and peacekeeping underscore its Pan-African commitment and influence in shaping Africa's political and economic landscape. Nigeria's foreign policy trajectory since independence has been deeply rooted in Pan-Africanism, reflecting both its ideological commitment to African unity and its strategic interest in continental stability. This Pan-African vision has consistently guided Nigeria's support for liberation movements, its instrumental role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the African Union (AU), as well as its active participation in conflict mediation and peacekeeping missions across the continent.

Nigeria's support for liberation movements in Southern Africa—particularly in Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and apartheid-era South Africa—remains a critical testament to its dedication to Africa's political emancipation. As scholars like Aluko (1981) and Ogunsanwo (1986) note, Nigeria committed significant financial, military, and diplomatic resources to these liberation efforts, positioning itself as a frontline state despite its geographical distance from the Southern African region. Nigeria's

contributions were not merely symbolic but instrumental in hastening the collapse of colonial and minority rule, thus consolidating its status as a continental power and moral authority.

Furthermore, Nigeria's role in the formation of the OAU in 1963 was pivotal. Alongside other African leaders, Nigeria advocated for the creation of an institutional framework that would promote African solidarity, defend sovereignty, and eradicate colonialism. The OAU's transformation into the AU in 2002, with an expanded mandate to include socio-economic integration and conflict resolution, saw Nigeria maintain its leadership role. Nigeria continues to be one of the largest financial contributors to the AU and a vocal proponent of African solutions to African problems.

In the realm of peacekeeping and mediation, Nigeria has demonstrated both capacity and commitment. Through ECOWAS and its military arm, ECOMOG, Nigeria led interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, restoring order and preventing state collapse. These interventions were costly but underscored Nigeria's strategic interest in regional stability and its willingness to bear the burden of leadership. Scholars such as Adebajo (2002) argue that Nigeria's peacekeeping record remains one of the most robust on the continent, earning it international recognition and reinforcing its influence in West Africa and beyond.

Economically, Nigeria has championed regional integration projects such as the ECOWAS Free Trade Area and played an active role in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). These initiatives reflect Nigeria's enduring belief in the economic potential of African unity as a counterbalance to external dependencies and a pathway to sustainable development.

However, while Nigeria's Pan-African credentials are well established, recent scholarship highlights the need for a more strategic recalibration. Analysts argue that Nigeria must translate its political influence into tangible economic gains, invest in domestic capacity, and manage rising competition from other African powers like South Africa, Egypt, and Kenya. Additionally, the proliferation of external actors—China, the U.S., the EU—within Africa's economic and political spheres further complicates Nigeria's leadership aspirations.

Furthermore, Nigeria's support for liberation movements, its foundational role in the OAU/AU, and its contributions to peacekeeping and mediation have solidified its Pan-African identity. Yet, sustaining this influence requires Nigeria to align its foreign policy commitments with domestic strength, economic diplomacy, and evolving geopolitical realities. Only then can Nigeria continue to shape Africa's political and economic landscape in the 21st century.

Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960 was significantly shaped by a pan-Africanist ideology, focusing on the decolonization and liberation of African states still under colonial or minority rule. Nigeria's size, population, oil wealth, and self-identification as the "giant of Africa" placed it in a strategic position to champion African liberation movements. Its contributions were financial, diplomatic, military, and moral, aligning with its Afrocentric foreign policy principle.

1. Diplomatic Support:

Nigeria was a vocal advocate of African liberation in international platforms, particularly within:

- The United Nations (UN)
- The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee (now African Union)
- The Non-Aligned Movement

Nigeria leveraged its membership in these organizations to support resolutions condemning colonialism, apartheid, and minority rule in Southern Africa. For instance, Nigeria consistently demanded sanctions against apartheid South Africa and pressed Western countries to cease support for oppressive regimes.

2. Financial and Material Assistance:

Nigeria provided substantial financial contributions to several liberation movements and the OAU Liberation Fund:

- By 1980, Nigeria was estimated to have contributed **over \$20 million** to the OAU Liberation Fund.
- Major beneficiaries included:
 - African National Congress (ANC) - South Africa
 - South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) - Namibia
 - Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO)
 - Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)
 - Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)
- Nigeria also supplied military equipment, training, and logistical support to these movements.

3. Military and Training Support:

Nigeria provided military training and arms to various liberation movements. Notable examples include:

- Training SWAPO and ANC guerrillas in Nigerian military facilities.
- Sending troops to support peacekeeping operations in Southern Africa under the auspices of the UN and ECOWAS.
- Contributing to military operations in the Congo (1960s) and later in Liberia and Sierra Leone, though the latter were post-liberation conflicts.

4. Political and Moral Support:

Nigeria broke diplomatic relations with Britain in 1965 over the **Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI)**, led by Ian Smith's white minority government.

- It nationalized British Petroleum's assets in Nigeria in 1979 to protest British support for apartheid South Africa.
- Nigeria declared a "Africa-centered foreign policy" and committed itself as the "frontline state behind the frontline states" (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, South Africa).

5. Hosting Exiles and Refugees:

Nigeria provided asylum, education, and employment opportunities for refugees and political exiles from Southern Africa. Universities in Nigeria trained many exiled Southern Africans, contributing to their human capital development.

6. The Nigerian Technical Aid Corps (TAC):

- Although TAC emerged post-liberation, it further symbolizes Nigeria's continued commitment to African solidarity.
- Nigeria deployed professionals such as doctors, teachers, and engineers to support post-liberation nation-building in countries like Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, and Angola.

Critical Contributions to African Liberation:

Nigeria's role remains significant in the following historic victories:

Liberation Movement	Country	Nigeria's Role
ANC	South Africa	Funding, training, political lobbying
SWAPO	Namibia	Financial aid, training, education for Namibians
ZANU / ZAPU	Zimbabwe	Diplomatic pressure on Britain, financial support
MPLA	Angola	Military, financial, and diplomatic support
FRELIMO	Mozambique	Advocacy, funding, hosting Mozambican exiles

Scholarly Reflections and Gaps:

While Nigeria's contributions are well-documented, scholarly reflections raise some critical perspectives:

- The **effectiveness of Nigeria's support** vis-à-vis its domestic challenges such as corruption and military coups during the same periods.
- **Post-liberation relations** have not always been cordial, raising questions about the sustainability of liberation diplomacy.
- Nigeria's **moral authority** on African liberation has sometimes been undermined by domestic human rights records, inviting comparative research on internal vs. external democratic credentials.

Nigeria's contributions to African liberation movements remain a cornerstone of its foreign policy legacy. Its multifaceted support—spanning finance, diplomacy, military training, and moral solidarity—cemented its leadership role in Africa. However, contemporary scholars call for deeper examination of how these liberation-era solidarities have translated into long-term political and economic cooperation in post-apartheid and post-colonial Africa.

Nigeria's leadership in supporting liberation movements, particularly in Southern Africa, highlighted its staunch opposition to colonialism and apartheid. Its imposition of sanctions on apartheid-era South Africa and its material and diplomatic support for liberation groups such as the ANC underscored its commitment to racial equality and self-determination. By leveraging platforms like the Commonwealth and the United Nations to lobby for global sanctions against apartheid, Nigeria demonstrated its ability to influence international consensus on African issues.

However, this proactive stance often strained Nigeria's domestic resources, with critics questioning whether the country's economic challenges justified such extensive commitments abroad. Nonetheless, Nigeria's efforts earned it considerable respect and positioned it as a moral leader in the fight for African liberation and justice.

Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy was profoundly shaped by its Pan-African ideals, particularly its unwavering support for liberation movements in Southern Africa. As a key proponent of decolonization and anti-apartheid struggles, Nigeria leveraged its political, economic, and diplomatic influence to champion racial equality, justice, and self-determination across the African continent.

Between the 1960s and the 1990s, Nigeria emerged as a frontline state against apartheid, despite its West African location. Nigeria provided substantial material, financial, and diplomatic support to key liberation movements, including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) of Namibia, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). According to Akinyemi (1980), Nigeria established the Southern African Relief Fund (SARF) in 1976, through which it donated millions of dollars to support victims of apartheid and fund liberation movements.

Nigeria's economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa were particularly significant. It was the first African country to implement economic sanctions, including severing diplomatic ties, nationalizing British Petroleum's assets for its alleged support of apartheid, and imposing an oil embargo (Aluko, 1981). These actions demonstrated Nigeria's resolve to confront systemic racial oppression, regardless of the economic costs.

On the international stage, Nigeria actively used platforms such as the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the United Nations (UN) to pressure Western powers into adopting sanctions against South Africa. Notably, Nigeria championed the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement within the Commonwealth, which discouraged sporting contact with South Africa, and advocated for comprehensive mandatory UN sanctions (Ogunsanwo, 1986).

However, scholars like Adedeji (1993) and Nwolise (2004) argue that Nigeria's extensive external commitments often came at the expense of its domestic socio-economic development. The financial burden of supporting liberation movements, coupled with Nigeria's internal economic challenges, led some critics to question the sustainability of its liberation diplomacy. The oil wealth of the 1970s, which fueled much of Nigeria's