

The Domestic Environment and Nigeria's Foreign Policy (1960-2025)

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[0210] Abstract

The nexus between a nation's internal health and its external behaviour is rarely as visible or as volatile as it is in Nigeria. Since Independence, Nigeria's posture on the world stage has been fundamentally tethered to the shifting sands of its domestic landscape. While the nation has often been described as a Giant of Africa, the stride of that giant has historically been dictated by the stability of its home soil and the evolving definition of its national interest. The study sought to appraised thematically the extent to which political stability and pursuit of domestic national interest have been reflected in Nigeria's external engagement of the various administration in Nigeria from 1960 to 2025. The theoretical framework adopted for the study was the linkage theory. The utility of the theory to the discourse, is that, it highlights or reveal how domestic pressures have consistently dictated the country's external posture. The findings from the study reveal among other things that when domestic politics are stable, Nigeria acts as a "Big brother" in Africa, when internal stability falters, the nation's external engagement becomes a search for "life support", seeking loans, weapons and international validation. The study recommended that for Nigeria to regain its status as a pivotal global actor, its external engagements must be rooted in a recalibrated domestic foundation, since foreign policy is no longer a tool for prestige but an instrument for solving internal instabilities, economic and social that have historically hindered its global reach.

Keywords: Afrocentrism, Citizen Diplomacy, Debt Relief, Economic Diplomacy, Medium Power Concert, Non-Alignment and Shuttle Diplomacy.

Introduction

Foreign policy is that formal, legal and authoritative expression of national interest by the government at the international arena through the constitutional process of the state. It is that pursuit of the explicit objectives which state strives to achieve beyond its borders and the set of strategies designed to achieve them. It is that deliberate course of action embarked upon by a state to either preserve or alter a situation in the international system in a way that is consistent with its own goals and objectives (Piate, 2017). The two fundamental ingredients governing the conduct and administration of foreign policy are state objectives and capability. Objective here refers to the national goals that are pursued by the state, while capability refers to the where withal for pursuing and achieving these goals. In other words, there must be a correlation between the goals that state set out to achieve and its capability for attaining them (Uhomoihbi, 2011). Foreign policy is a country's response to the world outside or beyond its own frontier or boundaries, responses which are products of environmental factors (Northedge, 1968). The implication of this assertion, is that both the domestic and external environments impact significantly on the Foreign Policy of States. In this vein, while the domestic factors help in determining the national interests and the specific objectives which foreign policy was meant to achieve, the external environment has a great deal of influence over the shape and even the mechanism, methodology and instruments of a nation's international engagements and diplomacy (Piate, 2014). By Environment of foreign policy, we mean those domestic and external factors, dynamics, structures and processes within which an actor is supposed to function. Domestic environment refers to the socio-economic, political and cultural dynamics and institutional frame works which inform policy, while the external environment refers to the configuration of power, the political and economic dynamics and the institutional, frameworks and structures which define option and policy choices of actors (Alli, 2010, Piate, 2025). Several factors have conflated together to influence the domestic environment of Nigerian

foreign policy, and they include the ethnic composition of the state, the colonial heritage, the attitude and perception of the elite and the priorities which the government sets for itself. Cultural diversity also colours Nigerian's foreign policy because different cultural and religious values may indicate different orientation and interest thereby complicating foreign policy. Other associated factors include the state of inter-ethnic relations, the level of political stability, ethno-religious conflict, socio-economic factors, domestic events such as military coups, civil wars and other domestic political crises that have impacted on the direction of the nation's foreign policy (Adefuye, 1992; Mustapha, 2009; Piate, 2014; Piate, 2025). Domestic challenges shape the national interests which foreign policy is meant to pursue. Some of these challenges include the achievement of security and socio-economic welfare of the people and national development. Distortions in the economy can make a nation very weak and vulnerable to all manner of manipulations such that despite its famed natural endowments and potential, the Nigerian State has not been able to participate as effectively in global affairs as expected because Nigeria has not been able to develop a clear and effective national strategy for purposefully engaging the world (Piate, 2014). It appears that the domestic structure of Nigerian Foreign Policy and its architecture have also not improved over the years. This decline has been brought about by poor political leadership and lack of synergy between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant think tanks such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) cum the National Institute of Policy and Strategy Studies (NIPSS). The point here is that, the personnel for driving foreign policy is a critical component of what should be considered the domestic environment of foreign policy and in succeed to today's highly competitive international environment, a nation should deploy high quality diplomats and technocrats. The Nigerian situation vividly shows a situation where over sixty percent of ambassadorial appointments goes to political appointees rather than to career diplomats, and usually to the most important and demanding diplomatic posts which suggest a lack of adequate appreciation of the challenges of the era and displays a disturbing nonchalance towards the place for foreign policy in the national agenda (Akinterinwa, 2004).

Domestic environment refers to the internal factors, structures, actors and dynamics within Nigeria that profoundly influence, shape and often constrain its interactions and politics towards the outside world. It emphasizes the principle that Nigeria's foreign policy is not simply a reaction to external events but is significantly a reflection of its domestic needs, challenges and aspiration (Piate and Eminue, 2022, Piate, Sunday and Kia, 2024, Piate, 2025). It encompasses a wide range of internal elements that decision-makers must consider when formulating foreign policy. It includes the political structure and governance, that is the nature of the political system (which may be military rule versus civilian democracy, Federal structure) which dictates that concentration of power, the decision-making process and the level of domestic input and constraint on foreign policy. Other factors are the economic conditions, that is issues like economic challenges (such as debt, need for foreign investment, reliance on oil, high unemployment or recession), which often drive foreign policy goals leading to emphasis on Economic Diplomacy, Seeking Debt Relief or focusing on trade partnership. Security challenges are another domestic internal element, that is internal security issues such as the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, farmers-herders clash or other regional conflicts directly shape foreign policy by necessitating military co-operation with neighbouring countries or western powers (Piate, 2025). National interest and public opinion are also another domestic factor. The evolving definition of the national interest, which can be influenced by ethnic, religious or regional sentiments and the demands of vibrant Public Opinion in a democratic environment can pressure the government to adopt certain foreign policy stances, for example, Nigeria's historical commitment to Afrocentrism is partly rooted in domestic expectations and its resources. The domestic environment of foreign policy also includes the political actors, where the key actors include the president whose personality and priorities often define the foreign policy thrust, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Political Parties (especially in coalition governments) and powerful pressure groups (example religious, business or ethnic organizations). In essence, the domestic environment acts as the foundation upon which Nigeria's foreign policy is built ensuring that external actions are consistent with and ideally serve internal stability and development goals.

The nexus between domestic environment and Nigeria's foreign policy is one of mutual influence which internal challenges and governmental priorities significantly shape its international engagements and in turn, foreign relation affects domestic outcomes. This relationship manifest through several key areas which include economic imperative and domestic stability, governance and legitimacy, domestic security and regional role, Diaspora and national branding. In short, Nigeria's Foreign Policy is largely a projection of its domestic needs and realities. The success of its diplomacy is increasingly measured not just by its continental leadership but by its ability to translate foreign engagement into tangible domestic stability, economic development and improved well-being of its citizens. It is within this context that the study examines the extent to which internal political stability and the pursuit of domestic national interest have been reflected in Nigeria's external engagement of the various administration in Nigeria from 1960 to 2025.

Theoretical Explication of the Disclosure

The theoretical framework adopted for this study, is the linkage theory. The theory is a cornerstone of international relations that bridges the gap between domestic politics and foreign policy. It posits that a state's behaviour on the world stage is inextricably tied to its internal environment. The primary figure associated with the theory is James Rosenau. Rosenau, in his seminal work linkage politics in 1969, argued that the traditional "billiard ball" model (where states are seen as closed units) was obsolete. He suggested that "linkage" occurs when a sequence of behaviour in one system triggers a reaction in another. Other scholars who expanded on these themes include: Robert Keohance and Joseph Nye, through their concept of complex interdependence. Robert Putnam known for the "Two-level Game theory", view international negotiations as a simultaneous struggle to satisfy domestic interest groups and foreign counterparts. The theory operates on several key premises such as: (a) permeability of borders: that is national boundaries are not "walls" but "filters". Events flow from the domestic (internal) environment and vice versa. (b) output and input: A domestic event (like a civil war) can become an output that affect the international system, while international events (like a global-oil price crash) become inputs that force domestic policy changes. (c) the linkage unit: The primary unit of analysis is the linkage defined as any recurrent sequence of behaviour that originates in one system and is reacted to in another. (d) Domestic constraints: Foreign policy is not just a pursuit of national interest in a vacuum, it is shaped by domestic variables such as economy, ethnicity, leadership personality and political stability. The utility of the theory to the discourse is that it highlights or reveal how domestic pressures have consistently dictated the country's external posture.

Domestic Environment and Nigeria's Foreign Policy

The first phase of Nigeria's Foreign Policy was one of uncertainty and timidity, coincided with the period of First Republic, under Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (popularly known as the Balewa's administration), between 1960 to 1966. The major issues were the official foreign policy declaration itself: the Anglo-Nigerian defense pact, the Congo crisis and the political battle around the creation of the organization of African Unity (OAU), negotiation for associate status with the European Economic Community (EEC), the Rhodesian crisis, Common Wealth relation, the Arah-Israeli antagonism and the search for a cohesive policy toward the middle east. On all these issues, Nigeria did not speak with one voice, and when she spoke, she leaned toward the west. The uncertainties of Nigeria's foreign policy were due largely to the constraint of its domestic environment or politics. Given this disabilities in policy-making, Nigeria opted for a Non-aligned policy that was in reality pro-west, ratified then abrogated but later retained the basic elements of Defense Pact with Britain, sent troops to the Congo under the United Nation Umbrella without supporting Lumuba who requested for the troop, opted for a weak Organization of African Unity, negotiated and signed but did not ratify any agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) and professed a "neutral" Federal Policy toward the Arab-Israeli in the middle East (Bukarambe, 2010; Gambari, 2008).

At independence in 1960, there was the need to accelerate the economic development of the country but the choice of strategy for development became the major challenge. This informed why the

leaders settled for Dependent Import – Substitution Strategy as a means of attracting net inflow of external financial resources and technical assistance from a variety of international actors (Asobie, 2002). Nigeria's foreign policy during this period was geared toward attracting foreign investment. This period coincided with the Cold-War era. So, the first major challenge was the needs to mobilize external resources in a world that was split into two ideological camps. Balewa recognized that reliance on the great powers involved in ideological rivalry entailed some political risk for a weak and under developed state like Nigeria. This informed why Nigeria officially adopted non-alignment as a cardinal principle of her foreign policy. While non-alignment allowed Nigeria to diversify its economic relationships, it is also meant that the country did not fully benefit from the economic advantages offered by either the western or Eastern Blocs. The Non-aligned policy sometimes led to lack of strategic direction in Nigeria's foreign policy, as the country struggled to balance its interests with the demands of international diplomacy. The non-aligned stance makes it vulnerable to external pressures from both super powers particularly during times of crisis or conflict. In essence, the Balewa administration navigated a complex global landscape characterized by the cold war and a continent hungry for decolonization, and so his foreign policy was often described as moderate, pro-western and cautious. Balewa's approach was rooted in a desire for stability and a gradualist philosophy. His key objectives included non-alignment, Pan Africanism, legalism and sovereignty and decolonization.

The thrust of Balewa's policy wasn't born in a vacuum, it was a direct reflection of the fragile, multi-ethnic and ideologically split environment within Nigeria. Nigeria's three-region structure (North, West and East) meant that foreign policy often had to satisfy competing regional interests. While Balewa's party, the NPC was conservative and Northern-based, this led to a strong Pro-Arab stance in the Middle East conflict (to satisfy the Muslim North) and a general suspicion of radical Pan-Africanism that might destabilize traditional structure, the Action Group (AG) and NCNC often pushed for a more radical, anti-imperialist stance, forcing Balewa to occasionally toughen his rhetoric to maintain national legitimacy. Again, post-independence Nigeria, was economically tied to British capital. Balewa knew that a radical shift toward the Soviet Union or an aggressive anti-western stance could result in the withdrawal of the aid and investment necessary for the First National Development Plan. This domestic need for growth cemented his pro-west tilt. Balewa was also wary of internal subversion. He viewed radical African Leaders (like Nkrumah) as potential sponsors of domestic dissidents. This fear made his foreign policy more conservative, that is, he sought to isolate radical influences to prevent them from emboldening opposition movements within Nigeria. Nigeria's military rule which began on January 15, 1966 was a child born in crisis and for the next six months. General Ironsi battled with the internal squabbles such that he had little time left to think of any concrete foreign policy for the country, which unfortunately also consumed him in a counter coup of July 29, 1966. Unlike his predecessor Balewa, Ironsi neither had domestic nor foreign policy because of the relative shortness of his tenure as Head of State. General Gowon succeeded him as the Head of State. Gowon upon assumption of Office, was confronted with the challenge of overcoming the Biafran irredentism, which eventually resulted in a 30 months civil war (1967-1970). The focus of government policy under Gowon, was the defence and protection of the country's territorial integrity, cessation of hostilities and peaceful resolution of the conflict. So, the Gowon regime foreign policy could be classified into two eras, the period of war and the period of reconciliation at home with the secessionist and the period of rapprochement with countries such as Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon who had recognized Biafra. This was the basis of his Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction after the war (Osita, 2011; Kunle, 2021; Olagunju, 2021).

A number of factors caused Nigeria's movement away from the moderate and timid foreign policy approach and orientation to a relatively more activist, positive and influential role during Gowon's era. First, the military government succeeded in dramatically and effectively redressing the balance of power in favour of the central government in relation to the region and state. The centralized and hierarchical nature of military command structure and the military government decision to divide Nigeria into twelve and later nineteen states and the swelling of the Federal Financial purse helped to end regional challenges to a federally controlled foreign policy. Second, the civil war was fought and

won by the Federal authorities, but the bitter taste left in the government's mouth by recognition of secessionist "Biafra" by some African States required a post-civil war reassessment of Nigeria's African Policy. Third, and perhaps most prominent, was the increasing wealth from oil revenue and OPEC membership, which strengthened Nigeria's capability to pursue a new active and effective policy toward Africa and the world (Bukarambe, 2010; Gambari, 2008; Adeniyi, 2005; Agbu, 2011; Osuntokun, 2005; Okoro 2002). Gowon tenure was a transformative period for Nigerian foreign policy as he moves the country from the cautious "pro-west" stance of the Balewa administration toward a more assertive, Non-aligned and Africa-centric position. The interplay between his domestic challenges – most notably the Nigerian civil war and his international strategy created a unique "concentric circles" approach to diplomacy. His core thrust which was Africa as the centerpiece, make his primary focus to be the stabilization of the African continent and the promotion of regional integration. His policy was built on several pillars such as non-alignment, regional integration and Anti-colonialism. The domestic environment didn't just influence his policy, it dictated it. Gowon had to manage a fragile coalition of ethnic groups and military officers. By pursuing a Nationalist Foreign Policy (standing up to colonial powers), he was able to build a sense of national pride that helped bridge the internal divisions caused by the war. Though he successfully turned Nigeria's internal crisis into a catalyst for international leadership, his focus on external prestige draw criticism at home for neglecting domestic infrastructure. The foreign policy thrust of General Murtala Mohammed could be inferred from his speech during the African Heads of State and Government Conference at Addis Ababa where he lampooned some African countries that he described as Lackeys of erstwhile Colonialists, accused them of supporting apartheid policy and advocated for the establishment of liberation movements.

Unfortunately, he was brutally assassinated in a counter-coup led by Lt Col Buka Dimka on February 13, 1976 and was succeeded by General Obasanjo, who pursued and continued the dynamic and radical foreign policy as conceived by his predecessor. This era is often described as the Gold Age of Nigeria Diplomacy, characterized by an "Africa-Centered or Afrocentric approach. The fundamental thrust was that Africa's interests dictated Nigeria's international relations. Nigeria stopped being a "fence-sitter" and began using its oil wealth (the 1970s oil boom) to exert influence. It was under these regimes that the anti-colonial and racist posturing of the nation's foreign policy assumed a forceful, radical and uncompromising dimensions. The regimes went to a great length in giving Africa and African Affairs pride of place in foreign policy and foreign relations. Though Nigeria had always asserted that Africa is the cornerstone of its foreign policy, it was only during the duo regime that the country maintained a militant oriented foreign policy which sought to dictate the pace and direction of progress on the continent. This commitment was informed by the glaring behaviour of the remaining colonial regimes in countries like Angola, Mozambique and Apartheid South Africa that never wanted to grant them independence in a hurry (Osita, 2011, Piate and Eminue, 2022). This era proved that Nigeria's foreign policy was most effective when backed by strong internal economy and clear ideological focus on African Liberation. The transition from General Gowon to the duo of General Murtala and General Gowon marked a radical shift in Nigeria's global stance. While Gowon was seen as cautious and pro-western, the Murtala Obasanjo regime introduced a "Nigeria First" and "Africa-Centered" Policy. This shift wasn't just a choice, it was a direct reaction to the domestic atmosphere of the mid – 1970s. The domestic economy was flush with "Petro Naira" following the 1973 oil crisis. The domestic wealth gave the regime the financial confidence to stop begging for western aid and instead use oil as a political weapon. This explain why Nigeria could afford to be confrontational, for example the nationalization of British Petroleum (BP) assets in 1979 to pressure the UK over Zimbabwean Independence. Without the domestic oil boom, such a bold foreign move would have been economic suicide. It was a time when the internal confidence of the nation was so high that its voice became the loudest on the continent.

The foreign policy thrust of the Shagari's administration remained Africa as the Centerpiece, "Frontier extension" That is, Nigeria still professed its commitment to Africa such as strengthening of African solidarity, promotion of peace and stability in Africa, support of the rights of peoples to self-determination and unwavering support for the eradication of apartheid in South Africa. The effect of

the domestic environment was that, the country had just transitioned from thirteen (13) years of military rule to a fragile second Republic Democracy. Unlike the military era; Shagari had to contend with a Bicameral National Assembly and five (Later six) competing political parties. Foreign policy was no longer the exclusive preserve of the Head of State. The Senate Scrutinized appointments and treaties, leading to a more cautious, deliberative, and sometimes slower diplomatic pace. The domestic economy was perhaps the biggest factor that bit the administration's foreign ambitions. Initially, high oil prices allowed Nigeria to be the "Big Brother" of Africa, funding the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and supporting the frontline states. When the global oil glut hit, Nigeria's revenue plummeted. This forced the Shagari administration to pivot from "Liberation Diplomacy" to "Survival Diplomacy". The administration had to seek IMF loans and austerity measures, making it more susceptible to western (especially United State and Britain) influence (Osita, 2011; Olagunju, 2021; Obaze, 1988; Gambari, 2008; Fawole, 2010; Osuntokun, 2010; Bukarambe, 2010; Oparadeke, 1982).

The Buhari/Idiagbon administration like the others, still professed Africa as the center-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy and clearly articulated that in the concentric circles theory. The regime recognized the MPLA in the power struggle in Angola and reiterated its commitment to the anti-apartheid cause in South Africa, recognized the polisario government in Western Sahara against the background of opposition by some African States and the Saharawi Arab Republic and backed its admission into OAU now AU (Kunle, 2021). Most of the action of Buhari's administration was contradictory to Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. The reduction in the number of the Nigerian Diplomatic Mission abroad, the closure of Nigerian borders and the expulsion from the country citizen from Nigeria neighbour who were pejoratively labeled "illegal aliens", thereby destroying Nigeria's relation with her neighbours, including the policy of good neighbourliness (Okoro, 2002; Osita, 2011 and Adeniyi, 2005). Nigeria's foreign policy under this era, was essentially an extension of its domestic "house cleaning". The administration operated under the linkage theory, where the internal drive for discipline economic survival and anti-corruption dictated how Nigeria interacted with the world. Domestically, the regime was obsessed with order. This translated into a radical and often abrasive foreign policy. The administration believed that for Nigeria to be respected abroad, it had to be disciple at home. The regime projected an image of a nation that was no longer pushover for western interest.

Again, driven by the domestic priority to arrest and try former politicians that was accused of looting the treasury, when Britain refused to extradite Umaro Dikka (a former Minister), the regime attempted to kidnap him in London, drug him, and crate him back to Nigeria as "diplomatic baggage". The fallout, was that, the domestic obsession with bringing looters to book, led to a massive diplomatic standoff relation with Britain were nearly severed, and the High Commissioners of both countries were withdrawn. This showed that the regime valued its domestic justice over long-standing diplomatic protocols. The Buhari/Idiagbon regime proved that a state external behaviour is often a "mirror image" of its internal struggles. A regime that was stern, nationalistic and willing to sacrifice international goodwill for domestic discipline.

The Babangida administration on assumption of office was confronted with two major problems. The first was an economy that was in shambles, second was an uninspiring foreign policy which was based on the theory of concentric circle. His administration marked a shift from the traditional, somewhat reactive stance of previous military governments toward a more assertive, pragmatic and economically driven foreign policy. His regime, popularized the concept of Economic Diplomacy which sought to align Nigeria's International relations with its domestic economic needs, specifically the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Key pillars of the administration foreign policy include: Economic Diplomacy, Afrocentric Leadership and Regional Hegemony, the concert of medium powers and normalization of key Ties (i.e., restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel and sought to maintain a delicate balance with both the west and the Islamic world. The Babangida's administration foreign policy was a blend of Great power ambition and Economic Survivalism. He successfully positioned Nigeria as the undisputed "Policeman of West Africa" even as his domestic policies eventually strained relations with the west. The annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993 and the subsequent

domestic crises tended to erode whatever achievements that stood in the administration credit and further marred Nigeria's aspirations as an influential country within the sub-region and Africa.

Chief Ernest Shonekan became Head of Interim National Government due to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election and given the circumstance of the period and short duration of three months in office, he could not initiate any foreign policy that could be pointed to his credit. The same fate befell Sani Abacha, who sacked the Shonekan administration in a Palace Coup and assumed the reign of power. His administration was largely pre-occupied with maintaining power or regime survival, and therefore did little on the foreign scene. The administration by its actions and inactions turned Nigeria into a Pariah nation amongst the comity of nations as a result of its poor human rights records. As an act of survival, it made a policy shift away from the West to Asia, courting countries like China, North Korea and Libya (Osita, 2011). The sudden demise of Abacha led to the emergence of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Abubakar unlike his predecessor, focused more on domestic than foreign issues. He avoided taking any step that could destabilize the programme of his return to civil rule. Under Obasanjo's regime, Nigeria's foreign policy underwent a dramatic shift from isolation to active global engagement. After years of being treated as a "Pariah State" due to the military dictatorship of Abacha, Obasanjo's primary goal was to restore Nigeria's international image and leverage diplomacy for domestic economic growth.

The key pillars that drive his foreign policy thrust include Shuttle Diplomacy (i.e. image restoration and re-integration), Economic Diplomacy (the pursuit of debt Relief or cancellation which the crowning achievement was securing an \$18billion debt write-off from the Paris club in 2005, Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) particularly in the telecommunications (GSM) and energy sectors, recovery of looted funds by negotiating with foreign governments (especially Switzerland, to repatriate billions of dollars slashed abroad by the Abacha regime) and Afrocentrism (transforming the OAU into AU and Co-founded NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development, Conflict Resolution especially in Sudan (Darfur) and Sao Tome and Principe and Regional Security through ECOWAS and use ECOMOG Forces to maintain regional stability). The domestic climate didn't just influence his foreign policy, it dictated it. As observed above, when Obasanjo took office, Nigeria was a Pariah State due to the human rights abuses of the Abacha era. Domestically, there was a desperate need to prove that the new Nigeria was stable and democratic. This domestic push for legitimacy led to Nigeria's re-admission into the Common Wealth and a seat at the table in major global forums like the G8. Again, Nigeria was suffocating under a massive external debt of \$30 billion that make the economy stagnant and infrastructure was decaying. Obsanjo campaigned tirelessly for debt-relief, arguing that the democratic dividend could not be felt if all of Nigeria revenue went toward servicing debts. His efforts culminated in the 2005 Paris club debt forgiveness, where Nigeria secured an \$18billion write-off. Alongside leaders like Thabo Mbeki, he helps transition the OAU into AU and co-founded NEPAD. He equally introduced the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), essentially trying to export the "good governance" he was attempting implement at home.

Under the administration of Yar'Adua and Jonathan, Nigeria's Foreign policy shifted from the Shuttle Diplomacy of the Obasanjo era toward more people-centric and investment-driven Models. While both maintained Nigeria's traditional Africa-centered stance, they introduced distinct frameworks: Citizenship Diplomacy and Economic Diplomacy. The hallmark of Yar'Adua's foreign policy as was articulated by his then Foreign Affairs Minister Chief Ojo Maduekwe was citizen diplomacy. This was a shift from state-centric interests to the welfare of the individual Nigerian (Piate, Kia and Obisung, 2025). The policy dictated that the primary responsibility of Nigerian missions abroad was the protection and welfare of Nigerian citizens. It introduced a consequence element of diplomacy. If a country mistreated Nigerians, Nigeria would respond in kind. A good example was the "Yellow Fever" diplomatic row with South Africa, where Nigeria retaliated against the deportation of its citizens by sending South Africans back. The foreign policy threat, also sought to repair Nigeria's international image which had been battered by scams and drug trafficking, by emphasizing the "good" Nigeria citizen. Unlike his predecessor, Yar'Adua ill health and untimely, death robbed the nation of his impact. When Jonathan, his deputy, took over, the focus pivoted toward using foreign policy as a tool for his

transformation Agenda. This era was defined by Economic Diplomacy. The primary goal here, was to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Foreign policy was treated as an extension of domestic economic policy, aimed at job creation and infrastructure development, diplomatic engagements were strictly aligned with the goal of making Nigeria one of the world's top 20 economies by the year 2020. Later in his term, the thrust was forced to shift toward Security Diplomacy to gain international support in the fight against Boko Haram, leading to increase military co-operation with neighbours (like Chad, Niger and Cameroon and Western Powers (Piate, 2025)). The duo regime foreign policy thrust were direct reactions to the internal crises and political pressures they faced at home. For Yar'Adua, he inherited a country with deep-seated internal legitimacy issues and a restive oil-rich region. His foreign policy was shaped by three major domestic factors: Election legitimacy (his election that brought him to office, was widely condemned as flawed), Niger Delta crisis (militancy was crippling oil production which was Nigeria's main revenue source, which make Yar'Adua to prioritize internal stabilization – the Amnesty Programme – over aggressive foreign ventures. His foreign policy became more “inward-looking” as he sought to reassure foreign oil investors that Nigeria was safe). For Jonathan, domestically, Nigeria was struggling with high unemployment and a mono-product economy, this is why, his foreign policy shifted toward investment – centric diplomacy. This he did, by repositioning Nigerian embassies as “trade centers” to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), notably through Bi-National Commissions with countries like Germany, China and Canada. The rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East fundamentally altered his foreign policy. He was forced to move from purely economic interest to security diplomacy, forming the multi-National Joint Task Force MNJTF) and seeking military aid from the US, UK and France. So, while Yar'Adua use foreign policy to try and heal a bruised national image after a bad election, Jonathan tried to use it as a tool for economic development. In both cases, the internal security environment acted as a leash, preventing Nigeria from exercising its full power on the global stage.

Foreign policy under Buhari, was primarily a tool for achieving his “three-point agenda”. Security, economic diversification and Anti-corruption. Unlike previous administrations, Buhari regime adopted a concentric circle approach and heavy shuttle diplomacy to address internal crises through external collaboration. Since security was the most critical pillar of his administration, Buhari sought to repair international relations that had soured under his predecessor to gain support against Boko Haram insurgency. He prioritized relations with neighbours to revitalize the Multinational Joint Task Force and successfully lobbied the US and European allies to lift bans on weapon sales. To address the domestic economic recession, the administration focused on attracting foreign direct investment and securing long-term loans for infrastructure like railway projects (Lagos-Ibadan, Abuja-Kaduna) from China and airport terminal upgrades, the administration also made the repatriation of looted assets a central theme of its international engagements. The Boko Haram insurgency and later banditry, forced a shift from global peace keeping to regional survival Nigeria suffered two recessions during this period, and so the domestic economic comatose state dictated a foreign policy of Economic Diplomacy. The need for domestic infrastructure, led to a deepened relationship with China. Foreign policy was effectively used as a tool for credit seeking. Nigeria closure of its land borders this era to curb domestic rice smuggling and stimulate local production, shows how domestic protectionism can override regional integration goals. Finally, because fighting corruption was a core domestic promise, foreign policy under Buhari was weaponized to track and repatriate stolen funds. Foreign policy in this era, was no longer about Africa being the centerpiece in a romantic sense, it was about African and the world being a resource to solve Nigeria's internal bleeding.

Conclusion

The study appraised thematically the extent to which internal political stability and the pursuit of domestic national interest have been reflected in Nigeria's external engagement of the various administration in Nigeria from 1960 to 2025. Ultimately, the trajectory of Nigeria's foreign policy from 1960 to 2025 reveals a persistent mirror effect. The nation's external engagements have consistently reflected the strength or fragility of its internal political stability. While the rhetoric of Africa as the

center piece remained a constraint throughout various administrations, the capacity to project power abroad was inextricably tied to the health of the national interest at home. This historical evidence suggest that Nigeria's foreign policy is not an independent variable but a function of domestic resilience. The way forward is that for Nigeria to regain its status as a pivotal global actor, its external engagements must be rooted in a recalibrated domestic foundation. This is because foreign policy is no longer tool for prestige but an essential instrument for solving internal instabilities – economic and social that have historically hindered its global reach.

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