


Historical Foundation of Nigeria's foreign policy Objectives in West Africa Sub- Region 1967 -2007

Dr. Bariledum Kia ¹ 

Dr. C.I. Chinda ² 

¹Department of History and International Diplomacy Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, PortHarcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria,
Bariledum.kia@ust.edu.ng

² Department of History and International Diplomacy Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Submitted: 15-February, 2025

Accepted: 26-February, 2025

Published: 3-March, 2025

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2025. Sociometrics.us

Journal of History, Modernity, and Society

***Corresponding author:**

Dr. Bariledum Kia ¹

Bariledum.kia@ust.edu.ng

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Abstract

Nigeria's foreign policy in West Africa from 1967-2007 was shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including regional security concerns, economic interests, and domestic politics. Throughout this period, Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in West Africa were driven by a desire to assert its leadership role in the region, promote regional stability and security, and protect its economic interests. Nevertheless, as the analysis illustrated, this position also imposed significant costs that have obscured the clarity of the country's foreign policy in the sub-region. Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region fostered amicable relations. Given its Afrocentric stance and significant economic advantages compared to other countries in the sub-region, Nigeria has maintained a non-dominant approach; however, its benign and progressive actions have often been misinterpreted by many neighbouring sub-regional states. Nigeria's particular focus on the West African sub-region must be reinforced, particularly in light of the need to harmonise military measures to mitigate the terrorism now afflicting the North East of the nation and the sub-region.

Key words: Nigeria, West Africa, Foreign Policy, Security, Economic Cooperation

Introduction

The framework of Nigerian foreign policy constitutes the fundamental perspective through which it views the world from intellectual, political, economic, and religious dimensions. These variables determine its foreign policy approach to regional and continental issues. Nigeria is a significant participant in the West African sub-region, Africa, and on the world stage, particularly in the operations of the regional intergovernmental organisation ECOWAS. Nigeria's foreign policy towards the West African regional agenda is grounded in an Afrocentric worldview, which has shaped its foreign policy trajectory since independence,

aimed at supporting African nations striving for independence in the 1960s. Ibrahim and Kabir [1] said that Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region has been shaped by its African orientation, which has established Nigeria as a sub-regional leader in all respects. Nigerian authorities see its West African neighbours as strategic assets. The Nigerian Afrocentric foreign policy concept was successful regionally, targeting its West African neighbours, since Nigeria saw the West African area as its inherent domain. Nigerian foreign policy in West Africa has a dual strategy, engaging in both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic interactions with state players in regional matters. In this regard, Akiba [2] argues that there was no particular attention to the strategic significance of the West African sub-region. He said this was demonstrated by the unwavering commitment of the nation's leaders to the continental organization—the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), of which Nigeria was a founding member. He noted that the civil war, together with the involvement of some bordering governments, necessitated a sub-regional foreign strategy for Nigeria. He asserts that the government was evidently dissatisfied with Côte d'Ivoire's recognition of Biafra and the use of Benin Republic as a "conduit pipe" for supplying weaponry and relief goods to the Biafran secessionists.

The understanding from the above is that Nigeria's foreign policy in the sub-region was given importance due to security considerations. Consequently, the country began to show more enthusiasm in sub-regional economic cooperation. Thus, to Akiba [2], this explains Nigeria's desire to champion the formation of ECOWAS in the West African sub-region, propelled by certain fundamental factors. Prominent among these, he said, was the country's security concern following the anti-Nigeria role played by France and some of her former colonial territories during Nigeria's Civil War. Moreover, France's de facto recognition of Biafra, he contends, motivated some of the Francophone West African states to recognize the Biafran secessionists. Specifically, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin Republic were used as staging posts for the supply of ammunition and relief materials to Biafra, a situation he concludes created anxieties for post-civil war Nigeria. Against this background, this study seeks to examine from a historical perspective the various threats that defined Nigeria's foreign policy in the sub-region of West Africa. The study further interrogates the achievements of its desired interests in the region.

Conceptual Clarifications

A. Foreign Policy: Scholars are not certain that the term "foreign policy" has a universally recognized meaning. As such, many interpretations of the term have been offered regarding its relevance. Aluko [3] therefore questioned if it would be possible to have a universally accepted meaning of the term. Northerge [4] regards foreign policy as solely the interaction between the outside and the inside. Sai'd and Lerche Jr. [5] assert that a state's foreign policy

often encompasses the overarching concepts guiding its engagement with the international arena. Frankel [6] remarked that foreign policy is a dynamic process influenced by evolving domestic needs and support, as well as related external conditions.

Furthermore, the term is seen as a sequence of actions executed by a state's power, aimed at influencing circumstances outside its domestic realm. Consequently, it may be interpreted as a nation's reaction to external stimuli. Sachdeva [7] aptly described this as a compilation of choices made by a government concerning its relations with other states, including its stances in international institutions and conferences. Foreign policy comprises the strategies, methods, and guidelines used by national governments to conduct their actions in the international arena. It defines the goals of national interest and seeks to achieve these through the exercise of national power. Foreign policy may also be conceived as the general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behavior of other states, and plans to advance specific geopolitical designs. Ogwu [8] defines foreign policy as the relations between sovereign actors in the international system. Foreign policy embraces the goals that the nation's officials seek to attain abroad, the values that give rise to those objectives, and the means or instruments used to pursue them. In the views of Modelski [9], foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment. From this viewpoint, it is evident that the notion of foreign policy encompasses an ongoing reciprocity of interactions among nations via many components such as diplomatic, military, commercial, economic, socio-cultural, and others. Consequently, Nigeria's foreign policy may be seen as a means to promote and attain certain national goals in its interactions with other nations, particularly its sub-regional neighbours.

Foreign policy is formulated as a systematic approach to address issues that may emerge with other nations. In the contemporary context of globalisation, no nation can sustain isolation given the inequitable distribution of finite natural resources and human labor in this age of interdependence. The importance of a nation's foreign policy trajectory is increasingly recognized. Foreign policy includes a range of actions and a set of principles that direct these actions in response to external conditions and influences, reflecting the collective ideas, actions, and principles of decision-makers to achieve both long-term goals and immediate objectives. This research acknowledges, based on our prior conceptualization, that obstacles consistently arise in interstate interactions. For example, while Nigeria's foreign policy towards its sub-regional neighbours has been appropriate and progressive, it is questionable if these neighbours have reciprocated this goodwill in equal measure. A reassessment of the approach, particularly by Nigeria, has become essential—though without abandoning the notion of good

neighbourliness. As Omojuwa [10] well said, Nigeria approached her neighbours with idealism, whilst they, in contrast, engaged with Nigeria through a pragmatic lens.

B. National Interest: A definitive agreement on the precise definition of the term "national interest" is lacking. The prevailing view is that national interest dictates the conduct of nations and politicians in their international engagements to safeguard the state's declared goals. The notion of national interest is often seen as a contentious issue in the examination of foreign policy. Given the plethora of personal, class, group, and sectional interests existing within a state, researchers have often inquired whether a coherent concept of national interest can be identified. The challenge is the absence of a precise metric or a unified platform to reconcile the various interests within the state. Consequently, some see the national interest of a state as synonymous with the interests of its leadership or ruling elite, who may possess constitutional or traditional authority to make decisions on behalf of the citizenry. The concept of national interest often serves as a front to legitimize the narrow interests of individuals, classes, or groups by governmental leadership.

Although a universally accepted definition of national interest and the measures statesmen should adopt for its realization or maximization do not exist, foreign policy experts generally concur that "national interest" is the primary motivating factor of foreign policy. National interest is regarded as the most straightforward method for comprehending or elucidating the motivations behind a nation's actions in international engagement. Henderson perceives national interest as the collective desire of a state in its interactions with other nations within the international system, but Hans Morgenthau [11] defines national interest in terms of power. He asserts that statesmen conceive and act based on interests defined as power. Morgenthau elaborated in his writings that a foreign policy driven by moral abstractions, devoid of regard for national interest, is destined to fail.

Rosenau [12] recognized national interest as "the fundamental element in elucidating goal-seeking behavior," and said that "its application in politics will persist as a datum necessitating analysis." According to Obiozor [13], "national interest assesses not only the value of foreign policies but also elucidates the rationale behind nations' actions in international relations." Obiozor asserts that national interest elucidates or justifies the conduct of nations in international affairs.

Sondermann [14] posits that the notion of "national interest" is based on two premises: (i) there exists a collectively identifiable interest that all members of a society share equally; and (ii) this collective interest supersedes any interests that specific subsets of individuals may share with individuals from other societies. The idea of national interest emphasizes that a state's foremost objective is to secure or maintain a favorable position in global affairs. Nations pursue this by

addressing problems in ways that enhance their political landscape, economic and social welfare, health, culture, and political sustainability. “They are encouraged to implement measures that will enhance the welfare of their populace instead of enacting policies that will render the people subservient to foreign powers.”

Asogwa [15] examined the concept from both political realist and Marxist viewpoints. He asserts that, from a political realist perspective, the notion of national interest pertains to the judicious use of power by a nation to advance its essential interests internationally. The presumption was that a nation's national interest was typically static and immutable, and that national decision-makers ascertain what this interest includes. Asogwa [15] indicates that Marxists dissent from the realists' interpretation of national interest. According to his analysis from a Marxist perspective, national interest can be delineated as class interest—specifically, the interests of the dominant class within society. It is the ruling class's perception of national interest that the state endeavors to realize in its interactions with other states. The interests of a select few are misleadingly represented as the interests of the whole country or state.

National interest refers to a state's objectives and aspirations in its interactions with other nations within the international system. These objectives may be political, economic, military, or cultural. Despite the diverse attempts by scholars and practitioners in international relations to delineate national interest—varying in their components and focus—they ultimately converge on a singular notion: the national interest of a state is defined by the foreign policy perspectives of its leaders. Consequently, under Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's administration in Nigeria, there was a focus on fostering positive and amicable connections with Africa. The administration advocated and facilitated decolonization initiatives throughout Africa, emphasizing non-alignment and respect for the dignity of all Africans, regardless of their location. The Gowon government, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, promoted moral considerations in the treatment of black people globally under the principle of "human dignity." During the Murtala/Obasanjo administration, Nigeria's national interest was predicated on safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as fostering equality and self-sufficiency in Africa and other developing regions. The focus shifted from the administration of Ibrahim Babangida to that of Muhammadu Buhari, emphasizing economic and citizen diplomacy.

The form of governance a state practices often significantly influences the definition of its national interests. Governments in Western-style democracies typically consider the preferences of various influential interest groups, whereas autocratic and dictatorial regimes define their national interest with minimal regard for domestic input. Nonetheless, within any state—democratic or dictatorial—various individuals and organizations articulate the national interest in divergent ways. Although national interest lacks a general definition, researchers

agree that it serves as a valuable concept, enabling them to comprehend the objectives of nation-states in their interactions within the international system. Eminue [16] reinforces this by asserting that "national interest is regarded as the most straightforward means of comprehending or elucidating the motivations behind nations' actions in international engagements." By articulating national goals that fulfill their best interests, analysts may use the notion of national interest as a means of explanation or analysis. Rosenau [12] also notes that any comprehensive list of issues related to the analysis of foreign policy objectives must include those that necessarily engage the idea of national interest.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, three theoretical frameworks were adopted, as discussed below.

A. Linkage Theory: The linkage school contends that both internal and external forces converge to influence foreign policy decisions. James Rosenau [17], the progenitor of the linkage school, posits that the increasing interdependence between domestic and foreign policy has prompted analysts to scrutinize foreign policy more closely while simultaneously fostering a greater focus on the connection between national and international political systems. This connection, he asserts, illustrates how a political system reacts to the actions of another that influence it. Comprehending the linkage thesis aids foreign policymakers in crafting foreign policy by considering the international system and environment in conjunction with the distinctiveness of their domestic politics. In research focusing on the internal and external aspects of Nigeria's foreign policy, linkage political theory functions as a valuable analytical tool and guide. It provides insight into the early period of Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region.

B. Realist Theory: Nevertheless, Akinboye [18] has stated that Nigeria's foreign policy aligns with the realist perspective. This is because Nigeria aims to pursue dominance in West Africa as a whole. He elucidates that Nigeria's role in Africa is founded on the Afrocentric model. As the quest for power is the fundamental tenet of realism, Nigeria seeks to preserve and strengthen its influence in Africa. Critics of the concentric school contend that Nigeria is poised to assume significant roles in African politics, making it impractical to focus only on its immediate populace. Idumange [19] asserts that citizen-centered diplomacy is neither feasible nor practical in Nigeria, given that the country is a prominent leader in several domains within Africa. Consequently, reciprocating the actions of other African nations towards Nigerian citizens would be challenging.

The premise of the power school is that Nigeria is a dominant force in Africa, and its actions and initiatives on the continent aim to reinforce that dominance. This aligns with the realist perspective on power, characterized by national interest. Power is an essential tool for a

decisive and impactful foreign policy. In international relations, power refers to a state's capacity to influence the actions of another state even against resistance. Frankel [6] defines power as the capacity to impose one's desires on another in the face of resistance. This encapsulates the stance of realists, who contend that the quest for power underpins international affairs. Nonetheless, the power capabilities of each state vary, resulting in an international system comprising three categories of power: Super or Great Powers, Middle Powers, and Small Powers. Wood [20] asserts that global history has concentrated on major powers. The international system is often seen as a stage where major powers engage in competition or collaboration, while other nation-states function as background elements, supporting actors, or significant participants. Moreover, he perceives Middle Powers as entities that, due to their material resources, willingness and capacity to assume responsibilities, and their influence and stability, are on the verge of becoming Great Powers. These nations require acknowledgment within the international framework. In 1979, Nigeria was ranked 17th among 36 nations possessing middle power influence, as determined by Gross National Product (GNP) metrics. The middle power theory of Nigeria's foreign policy posits that Nigeria has the characteristics of a regional and sub-regional power capable of influencing events in the international system. This is evident in her involvement in advancing her national interests on the world stage. Nigeria has played a crucial role in advancing the African agenda within the community of nations. Nigeria has significantly contributed to world peace and security through the provision of personnel and material resources.

C. Concentric Theory: Researchers of the concentric circle school argue that Nigeria's national interest and the welfare of its population should take precedence over all other interests, whether regional or international. Believing in concentric circles as the main framework for examining Nigeria's foreign policy, Gambari [21] and other academics contend that using the concentric model in foreign policy planning helps to better safeguard the national interest of the country. This strategy is important because Nigeria should build her interactions with other nations on a series of concentric circles with four tiers. Under this paradigm, the first tier is Nigeria's own interests—including her welfare and cordial interactions with her neighbors. West Africa, Africa, and the global community at large form the subsequent tiers. Soremekun [22] counters, however, that a nation's capacity shapes its involvement in world affairs. The way it integrates its various capabilities determines whether it can achieve its goals in foreign policy. When its obligations and vision adversely affect its domestic politics, its foreign policy goals have to be reviewed and adjusted.

The need for concentric circles arose as a reaction to the non-reciprocal responses by African governments to Nigeria's sacrifices over the years in fulfilling the “big brother” role in African affairs. Between 1960 and 1966, Nigeria's foreign policy was grounded on constructive Pan-

Africanism, according to Osuntokun [23]. Later it evolved to embrace concentricism. Indeed, the founder of the concentric circle theoretical model in Nigeria, Gambari [21], argues that the drop in oil income placed a new fiscal burden on Nigeria which seriously compromised its ambitious foreign policy aims. He advocated for a reassessment of Nigeria's role in African and global politics. Buhari [24] emphasized the significance of the economic circle, referencing Dauda, and said that while Africa remains central to our foreign policy, we must operate within a number of concentric circles that now influence our actions on both the African and global stages. The core of Nigeria's national interest includes political independence, territorial integrity, national security, and the conditions of neighboring countries. The second circle pertains to our engagements with the ECOWAS sub-region, where we often demonstrate a keen interest in political, social, and economic advancement. Nigeria is not a global power; thus, our responsibilities, priorities, and allocation of resources must align with our capabilities and interests. These considerations are the basis for our primary focus on the West African sub-region, since every development in this area directly impacts Nigeria's interests. The three spheres of national interest focus on facilitating self-determination and addressing broader African issues.

Review of Literature:

This section consolidates previous scholarly perspectives on Nigeria's foreign policy direction in West Africa, highlighting significant opportunities and challenges. A study by Ibrahim and Kabir [1] examined the consolidation of Nigeria's foreign policy direction in West Africa, identifying major challenges and prospects. They adopted a historical research approach. The results revealed that the challenges involved were common and made it difficult to successfully project the country's foreign policy in the sub-region. The study concluded that Nigeria's African origins have shaped its foreign policy even within the West African sub-region.

Another work, focusing on Nigeria's foreign policy under a regime referred to as Omo-Ogbebor (likely a period or administration), looked at ECOWAS and Nigeria's foreign policy after 1999. According to that research, evolving geopolitical dynamics have shown that foreign policy is an effective tool for projecting a nation's image and policy directives abroad in the contemporary international system.

Lawal and Aluko [25] explored Nigeria's foreign policy in the Fourth Republic, characterizing it as a "diplomatic escapade." Their study identified challenges facing Nigeria's foreign policy in this era, including: (i) redeeming Nigeria's international image after it was battered by the repressive military regime of Sani Abacha, (ii) issues arising from the conservative concentric circle approach (Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy) introduced during the

Balewa administration, and (iii) inadequate funding for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They offered suggestions to address these challenges.

Debates persist among scholars regarding what truly constitutes Nigeria's national interest. Some pivotal foreign policy objectives—such as decolonization and the elimination of racism, Pan-African unity, national economic development, and global peace—were prominent at independence under Balewa's leadership in 1960. Following the Nigerian Civil War, foreign policy gained importance in national programs aimed at social and economic development. Nigeria adopted a dynamic non-alignment strategy based on national interest, including political unity, economic development, national security, and the advancement of African interests. These elements were enshrined in the 1979 Constitution. Section 19 of the 1979 Constitution mandates that the state shall promote African unity and foster the comprehensive political, economic, social, and cultural liberation of Africa, alongside all forms of international cooperation that enhance global peace and mutual respect among all peoples and nations, while actively opposing racial discrimination in all its forms.

Nevertheless, the framework provided by Aluko [3], Olusanya and Akindele [28], and Nweke [29] gives a comprehensive perspective on aspects of Nigeria's national interest. Aluko [3] lists three aspects he considers essential components of Nigeria's national interest: national self-preservation; defense and maintenance of the country's independence; and the people's social and economic welfare. He also identified other aspects that are not fundamental, such as “preservation and promotion of the way of life of Nigerians (especially democratic values), enhancement of the country's standing in the comity of nations, and the promotion of world peace.”

According to Olusanya and Akindele [28], Nigeria's national interests include the defense of the nation's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity; the restoration of human dignity for Black people globally; the establishment of relevant political and economic conditions in Africa and beyond; the enhancement of the economic welfare of Nigerian citizens; and the promotion of global peace and justice. Ogunbambi [30] adds that Nigeria's national interest comprises political stability, security, export promotion, access to external resources and technology, foreign aid, protection of citizens abroad, cultural and moral expressions for Nigeria, and a fair, effective, and rigorous articulation of Nigeria's perspectives on regional and global issues.

The interests highlighted by these scholars are ingrained in the guiding principles and goals of Nigerian foreign policy, as this review reveals. While the examination of these interests shows many similarities, their prioritization varies from one government to another. Some of these interests were not fundamental in certain governments, while they were in others. The

main problem with articulating Nigeria's national interest lies in the absence of a coherent strategic plan for its realization. The national interest of Nigeria, as proposed by the above scholars and others, is underpinned by values that have guided Nigeria's foreign policy since independence and have been maintained by successive governments, whether military or civilian, albeit with differing degrees of commitment.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been predominantly Afrocentric since its independence in 1960. General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi's remark that "in the entire realm of external relations, the government places significant emphasis on our African policy" echoed Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa's formal declaration on August 20, 1960 (two months before independence). This policy thrust introduced Nigeria into the complex arena of Afrocentrism under those early foreign policy guidelines. Notably, subsequent Nigerian governments—both military and civilian—placed considerable emphasis on Afrocentric foreign policy. However, a broad review of the literature on the various efforts Nigeria has made toward an African agenda in areas such as decolonization, conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations, and other bilateral and multilateral aid on the continent reveals that the ambitious principle of Afrocentrism may not have served the national interest to a commensurate degree. As Ola [31] contends, the central values of a state's national interest inevitably shape the course of its foreign policy. These are the deeply held objectives for which states strive. The Nigerian state is evaluated through its Afrocentric foreign policy and its national interests, which encompass internal security, political stability, and economic development. Nigeria recognizes that these goals can be achieved within the context of regional peace, harmony, and the welfare of its citizens. The nature and extent of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy are influenced by its camaraderie with African nations, especially those in West Africa. Nigeria's status as a major African power and the leading nation in West Africa imposes substantial regional responsibilities and commitments.

Al-Hassan [32] posits that Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region seeks to achieve national objectives centered on security, welfare, and national pride. This perspective likely informs Adebo's [33] view that the architects of Nigeria's foreign policy emphasized the importance of world peace, under the idea that peace within Nigeria would be strengthened if there is peace in the international system. The Cold War and its dire implications for humanity, coupled with Nigeria's desire to base all foreign policy considerations on Nigeria's national interest, shape this viewpoint.

Ofoegbu and Chibuzor [34] reinforce this perspective by noting that Nigeria's foreign policy makers conceptualized national interest in terms of values that the Nigerian people find relevant and readily understandable. These values were largely tied to the political integration, socio-economic development, and general welfare of the Nigerian people.

Nigerian political leaders believe that committing the country to a foreign policy supporting peace, security, and prosperity in the West African sub-region would strengthen Nigeria's national interest. Nigeria's national interest in internal stability and regional obligations thus commanded great dedication. This supports the view of Wale and Prey [35] that "Nigeria's strategic location, national interest, assumed responsibilities and status in West Africa informed its commitment to regional politics."

Nigeria's "big brother" role in Africa has had very serious implications for its foreign policy on the continent. Scholars like Alade [36] and Shaw [37] have argued that Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy posture is actually beyond her capabilities. "Sheer size, population and resources do not make a leader; regional leadership is not only a function of geography and resource endowment, but more importantly, of the ability to convert and utilize them to advantage and command respect of regional peers," Alade [36] notes. Alade's point of view is echoed by Shaw, who feels that Nigerian politicians handed the nation a "grandiose regional policy" which has drained Nigeria's development resources and failed to maximize objectives tied to the realization of her national interest.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been heavily influenced by oil and gas as key factors. While Nigeria provided certain West African nations with consistent power supply and made oil and gas readily accessible to others, Soremekun [22] argues that "the primacy of oil in Nigeria's foreign policy engineering has given Nigerian foreign policy makers a false ego, leading them into messianic pretensions that frittered away precious resources meant for deliberate internal development." Soremekun's assertion aligns with Shaw's perspective on Nigeria's commitment to Africa. Shaw [37] asserts that "Nigeria has inflated its potential and overestimated its capabilities, thereby excessively pursuing commitments to Africa and striving for global significance." Aluko [3] warned against two specific errors stemming from economic and psychological misconceptions, asserting that: assigning Nigeria a role in global affairs that exceeds our capabilities, and the psychological fallacy held by many Nigerians—both in and out of government—that due to the country's size, population, and agricultural and mineral resources, we are fated to lead Africa.

Aluko may be correct in his thesis of misjudgment. Nevertheless, some Nigerians, both inside and outside government, persist in seeing Nigeria as the "Giant of Africa" due to its natural wealth; they are fundamentally supported by these factors as they articulate national interest. Yet a few scholars like Akinyemi, Meir, and Soyinka [38][39][40] share the sentiment that the "Giant of Africa" mentality is self-imposed, undeserved, and even laughable, because the glory has faded amidst a plethora of domestic problems and an economic downturn. A significant number of Nigerians, both at home and abroad, contend that such sentiments reflect a concern that Nigerian leaders' ambition to present Nigeria as the "Giant of Africa" at any cost may have

pushed the economy to its breaking point, ultimately causing more harm than good to Nigeria's national interest. It is not surprising that Onyearu [41] recommended that "Nigeria should prioritize domestic issues, rejuvenate the economy, engage in citizen-centric diplomacy in Africa, and consequently restore its esteemed position."

Adaramola [42] argues that Nigeria's excessive focus on African problems renders its foreign policy outside the continent "ambiguous and lacking a principled foundation that would provide Nigeria with substantial political and economic benefits." He asserts that Nigeria's capacity to attract investment from several industrialized countries has been undermined by its Afrocentric foreign policy orientation. Reuben Abati, the presidential spokesperson for President Goodluck Jonathan, notes that Nigeria has been very foolish in limiting its foreign policy to Africa as its foundation. He contends that Africa as the focal point of Nigeria's foreign strategy is no longer sufficient and promotes a more expansive viewpoint. Reuben Abati and other scholars and writers like Onyearu [41], Ajayi [43], and Adaramola [42] believe that Nigeria's domestic policies have not provided an enabling environment to support her Afrocentric foreign policy posture. These experts have condemned the implementation of an Afrocentric foreign policy, asserting that it undermines economic diplomacy, which relies on multilateral engagements beyond Africa.

Conversely, some scholars such as Moyosore [44], Hoffman [45], and Obiozor [13] hold that Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy objective of regional peace has largely been achieved despite its limited capabilities and the negative consequences on domestic development. They argue that domestic development (or lack thereof) should not be viewed in relation to Nigeria's foreign policy. The lack of development at home can be attributed to visionless Nigerian leaders who failed to clearly articulate and vigorously pursue development goals in line with domestic aspirations and national interests, rather than to Nigeria's foreign commitments. These scholars believe that Nigeria fulfilled the goals underpinning her financial, human, and material commitments in Africa. Hoffman [45] stated that Nigeria's aim to be perceived as a regional force reflects political realism—seen in her overwhelming financial, human, and material resource commitments to Africa. Hoffman's argument is consistent with the views of Moyosore and Obiozor, who believe that Nigeria's natural and historical endowments, together with the great contributions and sacrifices made for Africa's development since independence, have inevitably earned the nation honor and a leadership role in Africa..

Materials and Methods

The methodology employed in this research is crucial to its success, being determined largely by the kind of data required. After carefully examining the focus of the study, it was decided that qualitative and historical research methods would be adopted. The University of Utah

defines qualitative research as a “process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting.” Qualitative research is primarily concerned with the “why” rather than the “what” of social phenomena and interprets people’s experiences. According to Family Health International, qualitative research is “especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations.” Areas of focus for qualitative research include individuals, societies and cultures, as well as language and communication. This method is descriptive and narrative in nature; hence, a historical research approach was also used. Historical research in this context involves examining Nigeria’s past foreign policy activities to explain what occurred and interpreting those activities to contextualize the issues that prompted Nigeria’s foreign policy actions in the area during the period under study.

This method is appropriate because the historical research approach allows the researcher to observe past and present issues in context, helping to provide likely answers to current issues and challenges related to the subject under investigation. Another reason for using the historical method is that it relies on existing data from the past, making it difficult to manipulate – thereby lending inclusiveness and objectivity to the study. The qualitative method was chosen because the study relates to state behaviors and how states collaborate within and between organizations to address social issues, including political and economic affairs.

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data include documents, relics, and oral testimonies – records kept by actual participants or eyewitnesses of events. Primary sources can take the form of constitutions, charters, laws, court decisions, official minutes of meetings, newspapers, and magazines, among others. Primary sources also encompass personal interviews (recorded and transcribed) and physical remains (relics such as fossils, tools, pictures, utensils, etc.) that clearly originate from the past. Primary sources provide a firsthand account of events and are considered authoritative, representing original thinking or direct evidence. Often created at the time of the actual event, primary sources can sometimes be produced later (e.g., memoirs). They usually represent the first formal appearance of original ideas or findings. For this study, primary materials were obtained from Nigerian government gazettes on foreign policy in West Africa, ECOWAS documents, and other declassified documents from some West African countries.

Secondary data refer to information collected through primary sources and made available for researchers to conduct their own research. Secondary sources include books, journals, newspapers, articles, and websites. All secondary data used in this research were derived from books, academic journals, news outlets, and official documents; information from these

sources was carefully examined. The researcher visited libraries (including the Rivers State Central Library and the Rivers State University Library) to gather data for the study.

In moving from evidence to analysis, qualitative analytical methods were employed. Qualitative content analysis focuses on analyzing text content in various mediums – most commonly written words – to identify the intentions, focus, or communication trends of an individual, group, or institution and to determine their psychological or emotional state. It is a useful research tool for examining human thoughts and actions.

This study's qualitative analysis emphasized thematic dimensions. Thematic analysis is a method [46] for analyzing qualitative data that involves reading through a dataset and looking for patterns in meaning to identify themes. The qualitative analysis approach was used to identify the objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy and its achievements in the West African sub-region.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings, focusing on Nigeria's foreign policy goals and achievements in the West African sub-region.

First, political stability and security have been and remain key foreign policy goals for Nigeria in the West African sub-region. The linkage framework applied in the research is relevant here, illustrating how a political system reacts to another's actions that influence it. Understanding the linkage thesis enables foreign policy makers to craft policy with knowledge of both the international system and the unique characteristics of domestic politics in mind.

According to Sottilotta [47] (as quoted by the global consulting company Eurasia Group), political stability is the ability of a political system to withstand both internal and external shocks. Geographical proximity binds the security interests of neighboring nations in an inextricable relationship. Every sovereign territory offers a potential base for the destabilization of an adjacent state. As developing nations, Nigeria and all her neighbors lack nuclear capabilities. This reality makes their mere physical closeness even more critical, as any genuine threat to the national interests and territorial integrity of any one state is likely connected to actions or events within each state. Historically, the willingness of several neighboring countries to engage in defense agreements with former colonial powers ran counter to Nigeria's interests in the region. General Olusegun Obasanjo made this clear in 1970 when he claimed Africa has no need for outside policing because foreign "do-gooders" cannot create a security vacuum to be filled. In line with this, President Shehu Shagari questioned in 1981 the existence of military or defense pacts between certain OAU members and extra-

continental nations. Consequently, when Nigeria's then External Affairs Minister articulated Nigeria's foreign policy in the sub-region, it was made explicit that collective strengthening of regional security was necessary to withstand outside aggression and control threats such as religious unrest, armed robbery, and the challenges posed by foreigners residing illegally in the respective nations.

Nigeria had the largest troop contingent in the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), and over 12,000 members of its armed forces were deployed in ECOMOG peace-support operations in the Liberia and Sierra Leone crises. Under UN auspices, Nigeria sent 3,404 soldiers to peacekeeping operations worldwide in 2000; she was the second-largest troop-contributing nation after Bangladesh. Nigeria's military contributions to UN operations increased, with 5,271 soldiers deployed between December 2007 and April 2008. By 2013, Nigerian soldiers under UN command in various conflict zones numbered over 6,000. The country's total troop deployment for peace support operations to date exceeds 100,000.

Nigeria has been actively involved in peace initiatives in West Africa (especially in Liberia) and other parts of Africa. Unfortunately, earlier Nigerian efforts were not duly appreciated. Nigeria paid USD 82 million for the peacekeeping mission in Chad between 1979 and 1982. Nigeria lost 1,000 soldiers and spent USD 12 billion intervening in the Liberian conflict starting in 1991-92. For all its peacekeeping operations up to 2009, Nigeria provided more than 80% of ECOMOG's funding. Nigerian troops sent for the January 2013 intervention in Mali cost Nigeria USD 34 million. Nigeria also spent USD 8 billion and lost 500 troops in the 1999 Sierra Leone mission. For the sustenance of troops and other supplies in Liberia, Nigeria was spending approximately USD 1 million per day. Lt. General Victor Malu (Rtd.), former ECOMOG Force Commander and former Chief of Army Staff, testified before a commission of inquiry on communal clashes in Nigeria's Middle Belt, noting how an unprecedented number of Nigerian soldiers killed in Liberia were brought home and he had ordered that they "be buried quietly at night to avoid national uproar and panic." The Nigerian Army reported that it spent N135 million on medical care for about 150 ECOMOG troops who sustained gunshot and other battle injuries in the Liberia operations.

The painful point from the foregoing is that, domestically, Nigeria faces major problems requiring government attention; yet, as one-time Federal Minister Paul Unongo observed, the country's generosity in foreign interventions appeared to be "charity beginning abroad instead of at home." More vexingly, these generous acts were not appreciated, nor have they—in the words of Sagay [50]—received any gestures of gratitude commensurate with the exertions made on behalf of "brotherly" African states (including Liberia, which displayed ingratitude and hostility toward Nigeria). Even Charles Taylor, whose rise to power Nigeria had facilitated through ECOMOG's intervention, turned around to antagonize Nigeria and

Nigerians at every opportunity.

Nigeria recognizes that the pursuit of economic objectives cannot be separated from the security issues discussed above. The stability brought about by the latter is necessary for the former to succeed. Nigerian authorities believe that economic cooperation within the sub-region will help reduce West African states' dependence on non-African nations and promote sub-regional development.

Nigeria's foreign policy objectives have led it to participate in numerous ECOWAS regional initiatives, thereby aiding the progress of regional integration in West Africa. Many ECOWAS laws, treaties, protocols, and conventions have been adopted to further the economic growth and expansion of the region. In line with United Nations calls for countries to engage in regional cooperation—to boost free trade, create common markets, ensure political stability, protect life and property, and encourage humanitarian and cultural collaboration—Nigeria's active role, enabled by its foreign policy initiative, is a direct response to accommodate the needs of its West African neighbours.

Conclusion

Nigeria's foreign policy in West Africa from 1967-2007 was shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including regional security concerns, economic interests, and domestic politics. Throughout this period, Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in West Africa were driven by a desire to assert its leadership role in the region, promote regional stability and security, and protect its economic interests. However, as the analysis revealed, this situation also entails onerous obligations that have tended to obscure the distinctive perspective of foreign policy in the sub-region. To be sure, Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region promoted good neighbourliness. Restrained from a domineering posture by its Afrocentric stance and the great economic endowment it enjoys vis-à-vis other countries in the sub-region, Nigeria has maintained its humility; yet most of her sub-regional neighbours have often misinterpreted her benign and progressive actions. Nigeria's particular interest in the West African sub-region needs to be reinforced, especially in light of the need to harmonize military policies to reduce the threat of terrorism now ravaging the North East of the nation and the sub-region.

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