

Impact Assessment of Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy on Peace and Security in West Africa

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ABSTRACT: The paper analyzes the impact of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy on peace and security in West Africa. Its goal is to assess how Nigeria's foreign policy has contributed to regional stability in Africa through diplomatic leadership, institutional academic growth, economic integration, and military efforts. Using case studies, research, and scholarly evidence, this paper evaluates Nigeria's influence on regional cooperation, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution, while also highlighting key limitations across the continent. It begins by examining the historical background of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy and how it has evolved under different governments. It also assesses Nigeria's role in peacekeeping, conflict mediation, and capacity-building within ECOWAS, the African Union, and leadership in economic initiatives like AfCFTA. The paper uses a secondary source of data collection with thematic content analysis of data. Moreover, the paper adopted Regional Hegemony Theory, which posits that within geopolitical regions, dominant states often assume leadership roles, exercising influence through diplomatic, military, and economic instruments to maintain stability, shape regional norms, and promote their national interests. The findings show that Nigeria's Afrocentric policy has provided significant support for peace, development, economic challenges, and governance issues, although legitimacy concerns among regional peers sometimes diminish its impact. The paper also recommends practical reforms to enhance Nigeria's capacity and leadership in fostering sustainable peace and security across Africa.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Afrocentrism, ECOWAS, African Union, peacekeeping, regional development, foreign policy

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, often described as the "Giant of Africa," is Africa's most populous country and holds one of the continent's largest economies. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has projected its identity and responsibilities through a foreign policy framework rooted in Afrocentrism, a doctrine that prioritizes Africa in all foreign policy orientations. This ideological foundation was laid by the country's founding leaders, notably Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who declared in 1960 that "Nigeria will not forget her African brothers." This commitment has evolved into a consistent foreign policy strategy that identifies Africa's peace, unity, and development as inseparable from Nigeria's national interests (Gambari, 1989).

From the early 1960s through the post-Cold War period, Nigeria adopted an activist and interventionist stance in African affairs. It became a major proponent of decolonization, anti-apartheid campaigns, and the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 (Gambari, 1989). As a result of this, Nigeria offered political, financial, and military support to liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, thereby reinforcing its Afrocentric leadership role. This period established Nigeria's reputation as a continental leader advocating Pan-African solidarity, non-alignment, and peaceful coexistence.

Similarly, the emergence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 provided Nigeria with an institutional platform to turn its Afrocentric ideals into tangible actions in regional security, trade, and diplomacy. Nigeria took on a leading role in ECOWAS by making consistent financial contributions, leading peacekeeping efforts, and mediating diplomatically. The country's military-led peace enforcement through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s exemplified Nigeria's commitment to regional peace and security. These actions marked a shift from passive diplomacy to active regional peacebuilding and security efforts (Adebajo, 2002).

During the political period from 1999 to 2015, successive Nigerian administrations continued to embrace Afrocentrism, albeit with varying intensity. For instance, Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan led Nigeria in playing a prominent role in the African Union (AU). They championed democratic governance and mediated crises in Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and The Gambia. Nigeria's involvement in the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) further demonstrated its multidimensional approach to peacebuilding by integrating security, diplomacy, and economic cooperation.

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Despite its normative commitment to Afrocentrism, Nigeria's foreign policy has at times been marked by contradictions, inconsistencies, and domestic limitations. As a result of Economic challenges, internal insecurity, especially the Boko Haram insurgency, and governance deficits have constrained Nigeria's ability to sustain its regional leadership. Furthermore, the perception of hegemonic ambition has occasionally led to distrust among fellow African states, undermining cooperation within ECOWAS and the AU (Obi, 2021).

Nevertheless, Nigeria remains a pivotal actor in African international relations. Its population size, economic potential, military capacity, and historical investments in continental affairs place it at the center of Africa's efforts to achieve peace and development. It is against this background that paper seeks to examine the impact of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy on regional development, with a focus on peace and security.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted secondary source data collection with the use of the internet, books, newspapers, and historical-institutional analysis to explain issues in the Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy and its implications for regional peace, security, and political development.

Research Design

The paper adopted explanatory research design with the use of multiple case studies. These case studies were selected to reflect Nigeria's role in diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping operations, and regional integration, thus offering empirical grounding to broader policy evaluations. This approach enables a contextual understanding of how Nigeria operationalizes Afrocentrism in practice.

Case Selection Criteria and Data Sources

Purposive sampling was used to select representative cases based on Nigeria's pivotal involvement and policy relevance. These include ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Diplomatic mediation in The Gambia (2017) and Côte d'Ivoire, Military cooperation via the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin, and Economic integration efforts through Nigeria's role in the AfCFTA and infrastructural diplomacy initiatives. These cases capture both security and economic dimensions of Afrocentric policy and provide balanced geographic and temporal coverage.

Analysis Method

Thematic content analysis was used to distill recurring policy patterns, strategic shifts, and institutional impacts across six domains, which include Diplomatic conflict resolution, Peacekeeping operations, Institutional capacity-building, Counterterrorism and security cooperation, Economic diplomacy, and Internal limitations to Nigeria's leadership.

By triangulating across scholarly works and institutional reports, the study ensures validity and richness in interpretation, offering an evidence-informed assessment of Nigeria's evolving Afrocentric engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Concept of Peace

Peace refers to the absence of conflict and the presence of conditions conducive to harmonious coexistence, justice, and sustainable development. In African international relations, peace goes beyond the cessation of violence to include positive peace characterized by human security, political stability, and inclusive governance (Williams, 2020). Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy views peace as both a moral obligation and a strategic necessity, positioning the country as a central actor in regional conflict prevention and resolution efforts, such as its leadership in ECOWAS peace missions and support for AU mediation efforts.

According to American military history, the word peace essentially means the absence of war. Therefore, by military fighting wars to win the peace, or they use force to maintain peace. In this case, in military paradigms, peace is seen as an ultimate or ideal goal rather than a means to an end. Therefore, the word peace, refers to the peaceful society and the beautiful world. However, many peace scholars do not agree with giving an emphasis on peace in the sense of an absence of war only. Peace, in their opinions, is something more meaningful, valuable, and important than that. According to Albert Einstein's view, peace is not only an absence of war, but it means or includes the presence of justice, law, order or government in the society, as he said —Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short of government. Martin Luther King, Jr., a famous human rights activist, is the one who was not satisfied with the definition of peace, which focused only on the absence of unhappy situations. In his view, peace must include justice in society too as in his saying —True peace is not merely the absence of tension: It is the presence of justice.

Security

In the context of Nigeria's foreign policy, Security encompasses state stability, human security, and the protection of sovereignty from external and internal threats. It reflects both traditional military defense and broader developmental components like economic

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stability, political governance, and public safety (Obi, 2021; Okoli & Orinya, 2021). Nigeria has actively contributed to regional security through military peacekeeping (e.g., ECOMOG), counter-terrorism cooperation (e.g., MNJTF), and institution-building for collective security within ECOWAS and the African Union. It is on the above explanation that (Turkish Language Society, 2021) describe the concept of security as the execution of the legal order in social life without interruption, the ability of people to live without fear, and safety. In the same vein, Ozcan, (2004) states that the word security is a state of safety and a feeling of being safe from harm and danger. Acikmese, (2011). However, National security in the classical sense is the protection of state sovereignty and its citizens from external threats.

Concept of Afrocentric

Afrocentrism is an ideological framework that centers Africa in its cultural, historical, and political narratives. In foreign policy, it translates to the prioritization of African affairs in a state's diplomatic engagements. For Nigeria, Afrocentrism manifests in its commitment to Pan-African ideals, continental unity, and African-led solutions to African problems (Bach, 2021). Afrocentrism shapes Nigeria's identity as a leader within Africa and informs its approach to diplomacy, peacebuilding, and development. Afrocentricity is defined as a key construct in the development of African studies, focusing on the coherence of Afrocentric thought through systematic comparisons of different schools of thought within the discipline. However, the concept of Afrocentricity is a philosophical framework developed by Molefi Kete Asante, aimed at reestablishing the cultural identity and heritage of African Americans who have historically faced disconnection from their roots due to slavery and systemic oppression. This ideology advocates for a shift from a Eurocentric worldview to one that honors and prioritizes the cultural achievements and values of Africans and the African diaspora. In this case, Mgbeadichie, in Asante (2015) emphasizes the importance of embracing a coherent African cultural system, which includes the reclamation of history, language, and identity, while cautioning against the infusion of foreign cultural elements that dilute traditional African values. Therefore, Afrocentricity is a notion that personal and collective liberation for African Americans is intertwined with political and cultural freedom.

In the same vein, Mgbeadichie, in Asante (2015) states that Afrocentrism as an ideology that resists forms of marginalisation of African peoples, places African culture at the centre of inquiry, and promotes African peoples as subjects rather than objects of humanity. It is on this case that Afrocentrism a challenge to the Eurocentric views on Africa. This is because Eurocentric methods are phenomena in the European experience that their experiences are were universal and Africa cannot challenge them.

Nigeria's Afrocentric Policy

In the first place, the concept of Afrocentric foreign policy refers to a diplomatic strategy that places the African continent at the core of a country's external engagements. Nigeria's version of this policy emphasizes Pan-Africanism, regional leadership, and proactive involvement in African institutions. It operates through frameworks such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and APSA, reflecting both idealist goals and realist calculations for regional hegemony (Obi, 2021; AU, 2023).

Therefore, Nigeria's Afrocentric policy is a foreign policy orientation rooted in the belief that Nigeria's national interests are intertwined with Africa's collective peace, security, and development. This policy emerged in post-independence and was articulated by Nigeria's first leaders as a commitment to African solidarity (Gambari, 1989). This informed Nigeria's actions in decolonization efforts, peacekeeping missions, diplomatic mediation, and economic integration efforts such as AfCFTA (Adebajo, 2017; Gambari, 1989) to champion the affairs of the Africa.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Nigeria's foreign policy encompasses the strategies and principles guiding its interactions with other states and international institutions. Since independence, Nigeria's foreign policy has undergone shifts from Pan-African solidarity and non-alignment to democratic diplomacy and economic pragmatism. Afrocentrism remains a core principle, shaping engagements in peacekeeping, mediation, and regional integration. However, its effectiveness often depends on internal coherence, economic capacity, and international partnerships (Agbu, 2021).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies reinforce the complex realities of Nigeria's foreign policy performance. Adebajo (2017) documents Nigeria's role in peace enforcement in West Africa, while Williams (2020) critically examines the operational limitations of its peacekeeping missions. Economic analyses by AfDB (2022) and UNECA (2023) highlight Nigeria's instrumental role in AfCFTA while acknowledging contradictions posed by domestic protectionist policies. Maiangwa (2021) and Okoli & Orinya (2021) further critique how internal insecurity, especially the Boko Haram insurgency, dilutes Nigeria's external influence and credibility. The empirical literature converges on one point: while Nigeria retains symbolic leadership in Africa, its capacity for sustained regional influence is contingent upon political stability, strategic reforms, and policy coherence.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is Regional Hegemony Theory.

Regional Hegemony Theory

Regional Hegemony Theory provides a compelling lens through which Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy can be analyzed. This theory posits that within specific geopolitical regions, dominant states often assume leadership roles, exercising influence through diplomatic, military, and economic instruments to maintain stability, shape regional norms, and promote their national interests (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2015).

Regional Hegemony Theory

At its core, Regional Hegemony Theory draws from neorealist assumptions about the anarchic international system but applies them at a regional level. It argues that regional powers by their relative capabilities, tend to act as stabilizers, norm-setters, and conflict managers within their immediate neighborhood (Prys-Hansen, 2020). Unlike global hegemonies, regional hegemonies operate within a confined geopolitical zone where they may face contestation, bandwagoning, or balancing from neighboring states.

Nigeria as a Regional Hegemon in West Africa

Nigeria's demographic weight, economic scale, military capabilities, and historical legacy make it a classic case of a regional hegemon in West Africa. With over 200 million people, an economy that consistently ranks among the top in Africa, and a history of engagement in regional peacekeeping and diplomacy, Nigeria has exercised hegemonic influence in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since its founding in 1975.

Nigeria's peace enforcement missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone through ECOMOG in the 1990s, its leadership in mediating electoral crises in The Gambia (2017) and Côte d'Ivoire, and its financial dominance in ECOWAS, contributing over 60% of its budget, exemplify the practical application of regional hegemony (Adebajo, 2021; Obi, 2021).

These actions align with regional hegemonic behavior, where a leading state undertakes the burden of collective security and governance, sometimes without proportional benefits. However, Nigeria's hegemonic role has not been absolute; it has faced resistance from regional peers such as Ghana and Senegal, particularly when its policies are perceived as self-serving or overly assertive (Bach, 2021).

Constraints on Nigeria's Hegemonic Role

Despite its potential, Nigeria's hegemonic posture is constrained by several internal and external dynamics. Domestically, persistent insecurity, governance challenges, corruption, and economic volatility (e.g., oil dependency and inflation) undermine its legitimacy and capacity to lead effectively (Agbu, 2021). Internationally, growing assertiveness from mid-tier African powers like South Africa, Kenya, and Rwanda challenges Nigeria's monopoly on continental leadership (Prys-Hansen, 2020).

Furthermore, instances such as the 2019 border closure with neighboring countries, while domestically motivated, undermine the perception of Nigeria as a benevolent regional leader, exposing the tension between national interest and regional integration (UNECA, 2023).

Synthesis and Relevance to Afrocentric Policy

By applying Regional Hegemony Theory, Nigeria's Afrocentric policy can be understood not merely as altruistic Pan-Africanism but as a strategic tool to legitimize and reinforce its regional dominance. Nigeria's proactive roles in ECOWAS and the African Union (AU), its financial support for continental institutions, and its military and diplomatic engagements are indicative of hegemonic behavior wrapped in Afrocentric rhetoric.

This theoretical framing does not negate Nigeria's ideological commitments to African unity; rather, it situates those commitments within the realities of power, influence, and strategic interest. Thus, Regional Hegemony Theory provides an analytical balance between normative aspirations and realpolitik calculations in Nigeria's foreign policy.

The Impact of Nigerian Afrocentric Foreign Policy on Peace and Security in Africa

Diplomatic Leadership and Conflict Resolution

Nigeria's diplomatic leadership has been a cornerstone of its Afrocentric policy. Its involvement in regional mediation reflects a tradition of proactive diplomacy, particularly through ECOWAS. Nigeria played a decisive role in the 1989–1997 Liberian Civil War and the 1991–2002 Sierra Leonean conflict, not only deploying military personnel but also facilitating ceasefire negotiations, peace accords (e.g., Abuja and Lomé Agreements), and transitional governance arrangements (Adebajo, 2002).

In Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria's shuttle diplomacy helped stabilize post-election violence between 2002 and 2011. Through the AU and ECOWAS frameworks, Nigeria backed the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, supported UN operations, and coordinated humanitarian aid. Similarly, Nigeria's diplomatic engagement in Guinea-Bissau's 2012–2014 political crisis emphasized constitutional order and led to a multi-national stabilization mission under ECOWAS.

The 2017 Gambian transition exemplifies Nigeria's modern approach to non-military coercive diplomacy. When former President Yahya Jammeh refused to concede defeat, Nigeria alongside Ghana and Senegal played a leading role in negotiating his peaceful

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exile, backed by ECOWAS's threat of military intervention. Former President Muhammadu Buhari served as chief envoy, reinforcing Nigeria's reputation as a continental peacemaker.

These efforts illustrate the alignment between Afrocentric ideals and Nigeria's quest for continental leadership. However, critics argue that the sustainability of such diplomacy depends on Nigeria's domestic coherence, long-term institutional support, and the ability to navigate regional rivalries.

Peacekeeping and Military Engagement

Nigeria has demonstrated an enduring commitment to peace enforcement and peacekeeping across Africa. The most visible manifestations of this commitment were its leadership in ECOMOG operations in Liberia (1990–1997) and Sierra Leone (1997–1999), where it deployed over 10,000 troops at peak levels. These interventions helped halt civil wars and facilitated democratic transitions, albeit at great financial and human cost (Williams, 2020).

Beyond ECOWAS, Nigeria has participated in more than 25 UN peacekeeping operations globally. These include deployments in Sudan (UNAMID), Somalia (AMISOM), Mali (MINUSMA), Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), and Darfur (UNMIS). Nigeria's peacekeepers have been praised for their discipline and professionalism, although occasional reports of misconduct have emerged.

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), established in 2015, represents Nigeria's new model of collaborative military engagement. It targets Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgents in the Lake Chad Basin, coordinating with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. Despite logistical challenges, the MNJTF has weakened insurgent strongholds, reclaimed territory, and facilitated humanitarian access (Maiangwa, 2021).

However, Nigeria's military diplomacy faces significant constraints: declining defense budgets, overstretched forces, lack of modern equipment, and weak civil-military coordination. Moreover, its ability to lead peacekeeping depends on aligning military strategy with diplomatic vision and regional consensus.

Institutional Capacity and Regional Integration

Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy extends beyond crisis response to include institution-building. Its support for ECOWAS goes beyond rhetoric: Nigeria contributes over 60% of the organization's annual budget and has historically dominated its leadership structures, including the presidency of the ECOWAS Commission and leadership in technical directorates (ECOWAS, 2021). Nigeria also backs operational frameworks such as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), the Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), and the Mediation and Security Council. These mechanisms strengthen ECOWAS's ability to pre-empt, manage, and resolve conflicts within the sub-region.

At the continental level, Nigeria plays a critical role in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). It supports the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), African Standby Force (ASF), and Panel of the Wise key components of Africa's homegrown security mechanisms. Nigerian diplomats have also shaped the AU's normative frameworks on unconstitutional changes of government and humanitarian intervention (AU, 2023).

Legal institutions such as the ECOWAS Court of Justice, with jurisdiction over human rights, have also benefited from Nigeria's support. Nigeria's promotion of regional rule of law aligns with its broader agenda of institutionalizing governance standards across West Africa.

Economic Diplomacy and Regional Stability

Nigeria's Afrocentric policy has evolved to integrate economic diplomacy as a peacebuilding tool. The country has been instrumental in pushing for regional economic integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which seeks to create a single market of over 1.3 billion people with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion.

Nigeria delayed ratification in 2019 due to concerns about domestic industrial competitiveness but eventually signed on after consulting business leaders and trade unions. This cautious embrace of AfCFTA reflects Nigeria's dual role as a continental giant and a protector of domestic industries. Nigeria's infrastructural diplomacy complements its trade policy. Projects like the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, the Trans-Saharan Highway, and the West African Power Pool (WAPP) aim to boost energy security, cross-border connectivity, and regional value chains.

The Nigerian private sector has also become an agent of diplomacy. Conglomerates such as Dangote Group, Globacom, and UBA operate in over 15 African countries, spreading economic influence, creating jobs, and fostering interdependence.

Despite these achievements, protectionist policies like the 2019–2020 border closure with Benin and Niger exposed contradictions in Nigeria's trade strategy. Critics argue that while Nigeria promotes integration on paper, its domestic political economy often resists liberalization.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy stands as a foundational pillar of its international identity and regional engagement strategy. Rooted in Pan-African ideals and a historical commitment to African unity, this policy framework has shaped Nigeria's diplomatic,

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military, and economic interactions across the continent since independence. From spearheading liberation movements and mediating political crises, to leading peacekeeping operations and championing regional integration through instruments like ECOWAS and AfCFTA, Nigeria has consistently positioned itself as a key actors in promoting Africa's peace, security, and development.

Despite these notable efforts and achievements, Nigeria's foreign policy outcomes have been mixed due to a host of structural and operational challenges. Internally, insecurity, economic volatility, weak governance, and institutional limitations have hampered Nigeria's ability to project consistent and credible leadership abroad. Externally, rising competition from other African powers and perceptions of hegemonic ambition have constrained Nigeria's influence and complicated regional diplomacy.

Nonetheless, Nigeria's demographic size, economic potential, and strategic geographic location provide it with unique leverage to remain a central player in Africa's international relations. The country possesses the capacity to shape regional norms, foster cross-border cooperation, and serve as a bridge between West Africa and broader continental initiatives. However, for Nigeria to maintain and enhance its Afrocentric leadership role, it must undertake strategic reforms that align its domestic stability with its foreign policy ambitions.

This includes institutionalizing foreign policy processes, investing in diplomatic capacity-building, enhancing military professionalism, and addressing internal socio-political fragilities. Additionally, Nigeria must rebrand its leadership style from one of perceived dominance to that of partnership and cooperation, anchored on mutual respect and shared regional aspirations.

In conclusion, the sustainability and relevance of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy depend on its ability to align ideals with capabilities, rhetoric with action, and vision with credibility. A more stable, prosperous, and democratic Nigeria will not only serve its own national interest but also act as a cornerstone for peace, unity, and development across the African continent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintaining leadership requires more than historical credentials. It demands an adaptive strategy, strong domestic foundations, and credible partnerships. To enhance its Afrocentric policy, Nigeria should:

- Institutionalize foreign policy planning and funding mechanisms
- Reform and strengthen its military and diplomatic corps
- Prioritize governance and human rights to reclaim moral leadership
- Champion inclusive regional trade and digital innovation
- Foster youth-focused and Pan-African education exchanges

In conclusion, Nigeria's destiny is inseparable from Africa's. A stronger, more coherent Nigeria can be a cornerstone of Africa's peace, prosperity, and global relevance.

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