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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

The Nigeria's foreign policy is fundamentally guided by key principles, including non-alignment, African solidarity, economic diplomacy, peacekeeping, international cooperation, national interest, regional integration, multilateralism, cultural diplomacy, and national sovereignty these principles shape Nigeria's interactions with the international community, promoting economic development, peace and cooperation while protecting national interests. The said principles are glaringly reflected in Nigeria's engagement with international organizations, its participation in global governance and its bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries. By adhering to these principles, Nigeria seeks to maintain its independence, promote just and peaceful world. This paper examines the evolution and application o these principles in Nigeria's foreign policy, highlighting their significance in international relations. The paper uses historical approach in its analysis.

Keywords:
Fundamental Principles, Nigerian Foreign Policy, International Relations, Non-alignment, International Peace and Security, Multilateralism.

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Introduction

Nigerian foreign policy refers to the principles and actions guiding Nigeria's interactions with other countries and international organizations. As a sovereign state, Nigeria has developed a distinct approach to international relations, shaped by its history, geography, culture, and national interests. The fundamental principles of Nigerian foreign policy since independence are guided by non-alignment, African solidarity, economic diplomacy, peacekeeping, regional integration and national interest among others (Adaora,2023). These principles guide Nigeria's interactions with the international community, shaping its relationships, policies, and actions in the global arena.

When Tafawa Balewa assumed office as the first Prime Minister of Independent Nigeria in 1960, he outlined the broad principles of Nigeria's Foreign policy. The fundamental principles are as follows; Promotion of Nigeria's national interest and World peace, Pursuance of policy of neutrality and non-alignment, respect for the Sovereign and equality of all nations, Promotion of Friendship and Cooperation among the various countries in the world, Maintenance of the principle of non interference and non-aggression in other countries of the world, promotion of the rapid decolonization of Africa, Maintaining a modest approach to pursuit of Nigeria's Foreign Policy, Support of Cooperation and Integration among African states (Osita, 2001). It is from this standpoint, that this paper will explain the principle of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. Foreign policy, albeit having no general definition, can be expressed as the formulation of and exertions towards implementing guidelines stipulated by a state for the maximization for her variegated national interests in the process of extended relations within the international system. Foreign policy is the category of actions a government takes which deals with defense, security, international political relations and international economic relations (Yunusa, 2023). It is the activity whereby a State deals with other States, nongovernmental organizations, international

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organizations, and certain individuals, thus, Frankel (Frankel, 1978), defines Foreign Policy thus:

> a range of actions, as well as a set of principles influencing these actions, taken with reference to external situations and factors... the summation of thoughts, actions and principle on external affairs taken by decision-makers with the intention of achieving long-range goals and short-term objectives.

Considering the above, national interest is very essential to the material based on which foreign policy is made. National interest may explain the aspirations of the state, from time immemorial, leaders of states justify their actions in the name of national interest. For example, Columbus and Wolfe narrate: 'Alcibiades said he was acting in ancient Athens launched what turned out to be the disastrous Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian War' (Osita, 2001). However, principles and objectives are considered similar by some scholars of Foreign policy analysts. In this paper, principles are considered separate from objectives. Objectives are considered to be achievable trough the nation's principles. The paper summarized the broad principles into five main important ones.

Overview on the Principles of Nigerian Foreign Policy

Since independence, Nigeria's foreign policy has been guided by certain objectives and principles. These are: the protection of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Nigerian State; the promotion of the economic and social well-being of Nigeria, the enhancement of Nigeria's image and status in the world at large, the promotion of unity as well as the total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Nigeria and Africa, the promotion of the rights of black people and others under colonial rule, the promotion of international cooperation conducive to the consolidation of world peace and

security, mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and states, redressing the imbalance in the international power structures which tends to frustrate the legitimate aspirations of developing countries, respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all nations; and the promotion of world peace based on the principles of freedom, mutual respect and equality of the world (Oshewele, 2019).

From 1960 to date, Nigeria has maintained a relatively consistent foreign policy considering the fact that the country had experienced varied forms of government within this period. Right from independence, Africa was the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy with emphasis on the emancipation, development and unity of Africans both within and outside the continent (Akintola,2007).

Thus, Olusanya and Akindele (1986) have identified the following five major principles as influencing and guiding the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy: non-alignment (not successful as she unabashedly tilted to the West), the legal equality of all states, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, multilateral diplomacy, and Afrocentricism.

Principles of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

National Interests

National interest refers to the goals, desires, and priorities of a nation state that guide its interactions with other countries and international organizations. It encompasses a broad range of issues, including security, economic well-being, political influence, territorial protection and international cooperation among other things (Abegunrin, 2015). In general, national interest is a key factor in foreign policy formulation, and all foreign policies of nations must consider survival as their minimum requirement since national interest is paramount. In the context of Nigerian foreign policy, 'national interest' refers to the promotion and protection of Nigeria's interests, including the interest the interests of its citizens and the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a whole (Yunusa, 2019). This principle is a key

consideration in the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy, and is reflected in the country's interactions with other nations and international organizations. However, some foreign policy experts believe that Nigeria has no clear cut political ideology and national interest. Notwithstanding, Nigeria's foreign policy over the years has been guided by the country's national interest, which is focused on promoting economic development, peace, and cooperation, while protecting national sovereignty and security (Aje, 2007).

Non-Alignment and Non-Interference

On the main issue of the non-alignment and non-interference content in the Nigerian foreign policy, this study found that, during different political eras in Nigeria, different mixes of factors were at work. Namely, during the First Republic, the factors of a government made up of a coalition of moderates, and the significant role of assertive radical elements in the fringes of the governmental structure, and as pressure groups, resulted in Nigeria being able to be nonaligned (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986) .The succeeding Ironsi government, due to its very brief, and crisis-ridden, duration, was also found to manifest nonalignment phenomenon in the same way as did the First Republic (Osita,2001). The Gowon government that followed, however, due to the realities of the Civil War, and the existence of a cautious government, was able to exhibit a nonaligned posture that, despite warm relations with the East, was still firmly adequate. The assertive national leadership during the Muhammed/Obasanjo government meant also an assertive nonaligned posture, while the Second Republic nonalignment phenomenon was, more or less, a replication of the First Republic dynamics and posture (Oshewole, 2019).

Additionally, although the nonaligned content of the Nigerian foreign policy varied with different political eras, all of the eras (especially the last three) were found to have manifested a mostly Afro-centric conceptual perspective, and foreign policy mechanism dimension of nonalignment.

Multi-lateral Diplomacy

i. **Relations with her Neighboring States**

Nigeria had cordial relations with all its neighbors Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea-as well as with other countries in the West African sub region, with most of which it had bilateral agreements. There had been occasional border disputes with Chad and Cameroon, and military action against these neighbors was contemplated by the civilian government in 1982 and 1983. Another problem arose in the early 1980s, when Nigeria decided to expel many illegal immigrants, mainly Ghanaians, but this dispute also was resolved amicably (Bukola,2007). The guiding principle of Nigeria's regional foreign policy was that of good neighborliness and friendship. In this spirit, it helped to resolve conflicts between Liberia and Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Mali, and Togo and Ghana. Nigeria also tried to make its neighbors "safe" friends, partly to reinforce boundary claims and protect human rights of Nigerian citizens who were migrant workers and partly to stabilize relations between the immediate neighboring countries. For example, since 1988 it has established a strong presence in Equatorial Guinea (Bukola, 2007).

To pursue the economic interests through of foreign relations within West Africa, Nigeria championed the formation of ECOWAS and, in spite of competing allegiances to rival organizations within the subcontinent, continued to support the organization's objectives. Strengthening ECOWAS promoted Nigeria's national interests through encouraging development of the region's economy and discouraging its neighbors' reliance on extra-African countries for military, political, and economic survival, thus serving such security interests as weakening colonial divisions within West Africa, ending border disputes, contributing to African unity, and strengthening West Africa's bargaining positions vis-a-vis the EEC (Bukola, 2007).

ii. Relations with the Rest of Africa and the World

The prevailing perception in Nigeria's foreign policy was that, as predominant the African leader, it should play a big brother role in relations with African states. Nigeria was a founding member of the OAU and often channeled major policy initiatives through that organization. Most of its relations with other African states took place outside the OAU framework but were guided

by OAU principles (Amao, 2019). Nigeria's primary African commitment was to liberate the continent from the last vestiges of colonialism and to eradicate apartheid in South Africa. Promoting liberation had grown from a weak and conservative stance during the 1960s to an increasingly firm push after the civil war. This commitment was pursued most actively after Murtala Muhammad successfully backed the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola's ascent to power in Angola in 1975 by providing the swing vote in the OAU decision to recognize the MPLA. Nigeria had played a role in the independence of Zimbabwe and in the late 1980s was active in assisting Namibia to achieve independence of Namibia (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986). In the latter case, it contributed about US$20 million to assist the South West Africa People's Organization in the 1989 elections and other preparations for Namibian independence. The country also contributed financially to liberation movements in South Africa and to the front line states of Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, which were constantly harassed by South Africa. Although Nigeria's armed forces were among the largest in black Africa in the early 1990s, sizable military might has rarely been used in foreign policy. The army participated in peacekeeping forces, either alone or through the OAU and contributed personnel to United Nations peace keeping missions. In line with its ECOWAS commitment, Nigeria was one of the main contributors of troops to the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) sent to Liberia August 23, 1990 after the peace talks there failed. Additional forces were sent in late September 1990 under a Nigerian field commander, General Doganyaro (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986). Threats to fight for southern African liberation were made but not acted on, but Nigeria did give military and financial aid to the African National Congress for its efforts against the apartheid regime in South Africa and provided military equipments to Mozambique to help its struggle South African-backed guerrillas (Bukola,2007).

In addition, Nigeria gave aid and technical assistance to several African states, often through the African Development Bank of which it was a major

benefactor. In 1987 a Technical Aid Corps, operating along the lines of the United States Peace Corps, was established. Under it, young Nigerian professionals served in other African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries where their expertise was needed. Nigeria also provided scholarships and fellowships, training facilities, grants, equipment, and medical supplies, and subsidized oil during the 1970s' oil crisis to African countries under certain conditions (Bukola, 2007).

Afrocentrism and Equality of All States

Anti-racism and Anti-colonialism: Nigeria has shown that Africa is the centre piece of her foreign policy by ensuring total eradication of colonialism in any part of Africa. For example, the support for the M.P.L.A, this led to the liberation of Angola. Shagari donated 10Million naira to Zimbabwe for her independence celebration in 1980 (Olsanya & Akindele, 1985). Support of O.A.U: Successive administration in Nigeria has supported the Organization of Africa Unity politically, financially and in the areas of diplomacy. Nigeria believes that O.A.U is the best. Nigeria has demonstrated that Africa is the centre piece of her foreign policy formulation by establishing friendly relations with all African states. Assistance to Sister African States: To show that Africa is truly the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and also for the spirit of brotherhood, Nigeria has provided technical aid and expertise to sister African States (Daniel, et-al, 2023). Resolution of Conflicts: Nigeria is committed to peaceful resolution of political conflicts and Inter-state disputes (Osita,2002)." Nigeria took active role in the settlement of political crisis in Liberia and Sierra Leone through the formation of ECOWAS. Encouragement of Democracy: In the bid of demonstrating her interest in Africa, Nigeria encourages democracy in all parts of Africa. Economic Co-operation: Nigeria is also involved in the promotion of economic cooperation. The establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 and African Economic Community are examples. Sports: Promotion of intra-Africa sports such as hosting important

sporting events for instance, All Africa games, Africa Nations Cup and so on (Osita, 2002).

Cultural Assistance: Nigeria has also promoted cultural ties amongst Africa States. For example, FESTAC Promotion of Unity: Nigeria has also demonstrated that Africa is the centre piece of her foreign policy by promoting unity and solidarity, especially at the international community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the principles of Nigerian foreign policy are centered on prompting the country's national interest, non-alignment, African solidarity, multilateral diplomacy and Afrocentricism. Nigeria's foreign policy is guided by a commitment to regional integration, cultural diplomacy and national sovereignty. These principles have shaped Nigeria's interactions with other international community and continue to influence its relationships with other nations and international organizations. As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of global politics, its foreign policy principles remain a crucial framework for promoting its interests and contributing to global peace and development.

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