

From Non-Alignment to Multi-alignment in the Emerging Global Order: Options for Nigeria as a Middle Power

Kayode Fayemi

“21st century global order will be shaped not by major powers, but by the proliferation of middle powers” - Dino Patti Djalal

Key Judgements

Nigeria’s Role and Importance as a Middle Power

Periods of transition from one global order to another tend to occur gradually, sometimes imperceptibly, over a long period. However, the forces of change that undergird the transition from one order to the other progress inexorably until the shift that they bring about bursts into the open. The unipolar moment which emerged under the hegemony of the United States as the sole standing superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union began gradually to erode almost as soon as it was consolidated. That process of erosion was mainly driven by the re-emergence of China as a major global economic powerhouse with commensurate ambitions for global leadership, the military-political resurgence of Russia, and the dynamism of several middle powers such as India, Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Nigeria amongst others seeking to carve a place for themselves in global governance.

Scholars seeking to characterize the current international balance of power among nations talk about the emergence of a multipolar global order with multiple competing centers coexisting, albeit uneasily. As old certitudes are dissolved, new pecking orders emerge, and new alliances are forged, existing global governance institutions find themselves struggling to cope with the multiple and conflicting demands of a nascent new order whose contours are still being shaped. As the United Nations’ Secretary-General observed: “we are now at an inflection point...power dynamics have become increasingly fragmented as new poles of influence emerge, new economic blocs form and axes of contestation are redefined.”⁴.

In such periods of multiple change as we are presently experiencing, there are those who take the view that a full-scale conflict between the big powers is almost inevitable. The underlying assumption is that change from one old order to a new order happens only in the context of war. However, there are others who suggest that a multipolar world order offers the best chance for achieving the kinds of balances that are needed to keep the world at peace. Within this multipolarity, the role of middle powers in the present dispensation, particularly as agents of global

⁴ United Nations. *A New Agenda for Peace*. Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9. New York: United Nations, 2023

development and stability, cannot be over-emphasized.^{5,6} As the world grapples with multifaceted development, security and governance challenges, including climate change, terrorism, poverty and economic inequality, pandemics, and the like, middle power-states like Nigeria yearn for increasing recognition as strategic partners in the global endeavors for sustainable solutions. More importantly, as the world speedily evolves into a multipolar geopolitical theatre, with the advent of neo-superpower contest and contestations, the role of the middle powers in bridging and balancing the associated geopolitical divides cannot be discountenanced.

Nigeria's middle power status is reflected in its outstanding regional leadership role, which it has demonstrated in steering the affairs of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the African Union (AU) over the years. It is also reflected in the country's paramount economic influence in Africa as the continent's leading economy. Nigeria's middle power position is also evident in its leading role in peacekeeping and collective security promotion in Africa and beyond. At the regional level, Nigeria is considered a global player, especially in decolonization efforts, the liberation of African nations which earned it frontline status among Southern African states, and its dominant role in ECOWAS. Its peacekeeping roles such as during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone awarded it remarkable global recognition.⁷ This is in addition to the country's active participation in international institutions such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations and the World Trade Organizations among others.

Although Nigeria's status and prospects as a middle power has been challenged from time to time by the precarious state of its economy and security, the country still exerts considerable influence in global politics within Africa and the wider world. Even in challenging economic circumstances, an important factor that has always been at play is leadership capacity to manage cycles of relative stability and instability in politics and the economy. Some of the best moments in Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy engagements have tallied with periods when the country has deliberately and purposefully sought to drive a national rebirth and progress with a leadership that is fired up and ready to make a difference regardless of the country's economic circumstances. Periods of domestic national reset inevitably get refracted into foreign policy to produce a robust foreign policy posture. For example, the period Nigeria embedded the principle of mutual reciprocity firmly in its foreign policy engagements ending a period of timidity and tentativeness that characterized its early post-independence foreign policy also coincided with the "Africa has

⁵ Cox, Robert. "Middle Powermanship: Japan, and Future World Order." *International Journal* 44, no. 4 (1989): 823–862.

⁶ Cabada, Lubomír. "The New International Role of Small(er) States." *The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association* 1, no. 1 (2005): 30–45.

⁷ Nuamah, Rosemary. "Nigeria's Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Domestic, Regional, and External Influences." PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2003.

come of age” ideological underpinnings of its post civil-war domestic agenda buoyed by its prominent role in OPEC and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Foreign policy activism anchored on a sense of national purpose and a leadership’s preparedness to leverage the various natural endowments of the country saw Nigeria play crucial roles in the establishment of the new African Union – AU - and the formation of what has become the foremost regional bloc - ECOWAS even before then. It was also such foreign policy activism that saw Nigeria championing a role for itself and other medium powers in the quest for a more stable and equitable global order. Nigeria’s pursuit of a Concert of Middle Powers and the South Atlantic Treaty Organization was reflective of the national ambition to ensure that in a reformed international multilateral system, Africa would have its rightful place at the table as a co-rule maker. Although the idea of the Concert of Medium Powers did not gain full traction at the time, there was no mistaking the medium power responsibilities of Nigeria in Africa when it had to lead ECOWAS to intervene militarily in Liberia and Sierra Leone to help end civil wars that engulfed both countries at a time Nigeria’s economic situation was parlous.

In light of the above, Keohane’s⁸ classification of states provides a strong theoretical foundation, offering a structured framework to analyze state influence in the international system. Keohane categorizes States based on their perceived capacity to exert influence, distinguishing between "system-determining," "system-influencing," "system-affecting," and "system-ineffectual" states. These classifications correspond to great powers, secondary powers, middle powers, and small states, respectively. But in assessing Nigeria’s status as a middle power, a crucial question might be asked: Where does Nigeria position itself within the hierarchy of global influence? Additionally, what strategic resources and capabilities does the nation possess to sustain its momentum and assert regional and sub-regional leadership in pursuit of its strategic objectives?

To objectively engage with these questions, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Sisyphean burden of advancing Nigeria’s influence is paradoxically intertwined with the very challenges that have long constrained its progress. As Africa’s largest economy and most populous nation, Nigeria holds immense economic potential. Its vast natural and human resources—including oil, gas, agricultural wealth, and resourceful population—position it as a pivotal player in global markets. However, the extent to which these resources can elevate Nigeria’s global and regional standing depends on its ability to overcome persistent structural and governance challenges that have historically impeded its progress.⁹ Understanding Nigeria’s middle power status from the prism of Middle Power Theory [MPT] therefore enables one to better grasp the country’s prominent place in international relations and its potential for leadership and influence in both regional and global affairs.

⁸ Keohane, “Lilliputians' Dilemmas,” 291-310

⁹ Mickler, David, D. M. Sulieman, and B. Maiangwa. *Weak State, Regional Power, Global Player: Nigeria and the Response to Boko Haram*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2019.

Nigeria's Political and Macro-economic Landscape: Regional Hegemon, Continental Superpower or Underwhelming Middle Power?

Nigeria enjoys natural endowments that position it to be a major player in the international system. Its ranking as the most populous country in Africa and one of the most populous in the world automatically places it high among actors with important power potentialities. With the country projected to become the third most populous country in the world after India and China in the next few decades, that power potentiality is bound to be enhanced, cementing Nigeria's place as the natural giant of Africa.

It is important to note that several accounts have been provided on Nigeria's foreign policy, from both scholars and practitioners, from the theoretical/academic traditions to biographical accounts since it attained independence in 1960. Akinyemi¹⁰, in his depiction of Nigeria as a regional power in international relations, advanced his argument by highlighting several key moments of progressive foreign policy practice, despite its display of 'episodic realism', especially in the immediate post-independence era in 1960. He outlines Nigeria's break with France over its atomic tests in the Algerian Sahara, which led to the killing of several Algerians and an exposure to radioactivity, among other things. Other such bold moves include the nationalization of British Petroleum, peacekeeping efforts in Chad, recognition of Nigeria as a frontline state during the apartheid struggle, despite not sharing a contiguous border with Southern Africa. Akinyemi buttressed Nigeria's growing standing as a major international player in African affairs by mentioning the outright refusal of Nigeria to entertain the then-influential poster boy of US foreign policy, Henry Kissinger's request to explain the US government's position on Angola. He also highlighted the constant reference made by American and British leaders to consultations with Nigeria over key African matters¹¹.

Nigeria's role as one of the leading states in Africa, and as the regional hegemon in West Africa, has hardly been faulted since attaining independence in 1960. From its leading efforts in the agitation for decolonization and liberation of other African states, to ending apartheid rule in Southern Africa, Nigeria's natural predilection to leading on continental and sub-regional initiatives, is widely acknowledged. Various expressions that have been used to describe the leading role that Nigeria has thrust upon herself include Nigeria's 'manifest destiny', the 'crippled giant' and the 'Giant of Africa', Nigeria's 'missionary zeal', 'West African Giant', 'Older brother'¹², and other similar terms. It is evident that Nigerian scholars and practitioners have never lacked the right phrases to describe this mission and mind-set.

Chapter 2, Section 19 of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 expressly highlights Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. It stipulates the promotion and protection of national interest, African integration

¹⁰ Akinyemi, B. "The Emergence of Nigeria as a Regional Power in International Relations." *Studia Diplomatica* 35, no. 3 (1982): 227–243

¹¹ Ibid, 231

¹² Adebajo, Adekeye. "Pax Nigeriana and the Responsibility to Protect." *Global Responsibility to Protect* 2, no. 2 (2010): 414–418.

and support for African unity, international cooperation for the purposes of the consolidation of universal peace, respect for international law and treaty obligations. It also expressly emphasizes the seeking of the settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and adjudication, as well as the promotion of a just world economic order. Placing Africa at the centerpiece of its foreign policy objectives was not by happenstance for Nigeria. Despite the cautious, conservative approach, that Nigeria had adopted towards foreign policy issues immediately after independence, by pitching its tent with the Monrovia Group, instead of the more radical Casablanca Group¹³. Nigeria, having learnt from its bitter experience during the Nigeria civil war of 1967-1970, during which a number of sister African states recognized the breakaway Republic of Biafra, adopted an Afrocentric foreign policy. This further cemented Nigeria's foreign policy posture as largely undergirded by global norms and standards, which places the emancipation of Africa at the heart of its foreign policy implementation efforts. In line with this position, Adebajo has asserted that *Pax Nigeriana* derives its mandate from the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which has undergirded Nigeria's various peacekeeping interventions across West Africa¹⁴.

In spite of the clearly defined foreign policy objectives, various epochal normative missions have shaped Nigeria's foreign policy interventions. From the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, which marked the first phase, Nigeria was preoccupied with supporting decolonization efforts of African states and with efforts to end settler colonialism and apartheid rule in Southern Africa. From the late 1980s until the early 2000s, Nigeria's main preoccupation was how to stabilize a West African sub-region riven by conflict and humanitarian disasters. From the early 2000s, Nigeria, alongside other regional hegemony across the continent such as South Africa, Ethiopia, and Algeria, advanced the new thinking that led to the conceptualization and operationalization of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). During this era, which coincided with the return to democratic rule, Nigeria had under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, an international affairs enthusiast himself, relaunched herself actively into the international terrain. This era was characterized by the lifting of the suspension of Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth, and Obasanjo's chairing of the African Union from 2004-2006. Nigeria had hosted the peace talks on the devastating conflict in Darfur, Sudan conflict, and hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja in 2003. In spite of this role at the continental level, Nigeria did not abandon its sub-regional leadership roles and responsibilities.

From around 2010, Nigeria's commitments towards the West African sub-region and the commitment to continental and regional issues began to dwindle, for two reasons. Firstly, there was a decision by the government to give priority to domestic challenges due to the country's prevailing fragile security landscape, inadequate and collapsing infrastructure, failing mono-

¹³ In the early 1960s, the debates around what form of unity the newly independent African states should adopt, led to the establishment of two main ideological blocs - the Casablanca and Monrovia Groups, the former arguing for immediate and holistic integration agenda and the latter pushing a more gradual approach for continental integration.

¹⁴ Adebajo, "Pax Nigeriana and the Responsibility to Protect," 414-418.

product economy dependent on oil exports, among others, all of which combined to constrain the capacity of the country to project its power beyond its immediate region.¹⁵ Despite the reticence that replaced Nigeria's foreign policy activism and its reduced involvement in international engagements, Nigeria has had to play an active role in security engagements with contiguous neighbors such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and its potential and prospects as a global middle power have remained evident.

What seems clear from the above account of Nigeria's foreign policy trajectory is that it is by its salient economic and demographic metrics or by its military force posture and global power projection, Nigeria ranks as a middle power in contemporary global order. Apart from being Africa's largest economy and most populous country, Nigeria possesses recognizable credentials of a potent global middle-power state. With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of over \$477 billion, a formidable military ranked among the continents' best three, and a strong diplomatic presence across the world, Nigeria has demonstrated a capacity to influence both regional and global processes and outcomes.^{16,17} Considering its role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in the African Union (AU), UNCTAD G-77, OPEC and other global forums such as the Commonwealth, Nigeria has emerged as a prominent actor in contemporary African and global affairs.

Over the years, a major theme that has characterized the foreign policy posture of the Nigerian state has been its non-alignment policy.¹⁸ This was reflected in the continued swing by the country's foreign policy pendulum between the East and the West, even though arguably in favor of the latter rather than the former.¹⁹ Yet, Nigeria has consistently formed a part of many international coalitions in the Global South aimed at undergirding a multipolar world in response to the foreign policy tradition of liberal internationalism that claims to make the world 'safe for democracy'. Groupings that promoted a new international economic order like the G-77 or organizations such as the oil trading cartel - OPEC where Nigeria joined other oil producers to assert greater leverage over control of natural energy resources. In this context, Nigeria succeeded in influencing international norms and global standards alongside other members of such groupings, on nuclear nonproliferation, trade, global finance architecture, energy and the environment 'codifying in international law the need for forms of distributive justice to

¹⁵ Diamond, Larry. "Afterword: Nigeria's Long Search for a Viable Political Order." In *Democracy and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Governance, Political Economy and the Party Politics 1999-2023*, edited by Wale Adebawale, 327-340. Bodija: Bookcraft Ltd., 2023.

¹⁶ Kim, Jiwon. "Between a Regional Hegemon and a Middle Power: The Case of Nigeria." In *Global Political Transitions*, edited by Gabriele Abondanza and Thomas S. Wilkins, 221-241. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan (Springer), 2022.

¹⁷ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). *Gross Domestic Product Q2/ Q3*. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics, 2023.

¹⁸ Ogunbadejo, Oye. *Foreign Policy Under Nigeria's Presidential System*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1980.

¹⁹ Ibid

compensate countries that had emerged from the ravages of colonialism.’ It is pertinent to note that following the country’s independence in 1960, this policy would set the stage for Africa becoming the cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy. Historically, Nigeria’s foreign policy towards Africa, has been undergirded by four principles which include sovereign equality for all states irrespective of their size; respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of every African state; non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; and the commitment to functional cooperation as a means of promoting inter-African unity.²⁰

In the post-colonial era, Nigeria maintained close and functional ties with member states of the Commonwealth. The exigencies of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) brought about a major setback in Nigeria’s rising as an important global player. Nonetheless, Nigeria continued to play a prominent role within the fora of the Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement. The discovery of oil in Nigeria in the 1950s, and the subsequent oil boom in the country in the 1960s and early 1970s, transformed Nigeria’s fortunes by making the country one of the largest oil producing states in the world. Buoyed up by a high inflow of revenues from the export of oil which in part also translated into a higher per capita income, the country took a frontline role in the struggle for the liberation of Southern Africa from settler colonialism and apartheid racism while striving to strengthen a reawakening of bonds of solidarity in the African world. The hosting of the Second World Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 was a salutary example of soft power with other similar initiatives such as the Technical Aid Corps Scheme[TACS].

From the mid 1970s, Nigeria began to play a dominant role in the politics and governance of the West African sub-region with the establishment of the regional economic community – ECOWAS aimed at fostering economic integration in the sub-region. By the 1990s, Nigeria started spearheading major peacekeeping efforts in the sub-region and successfully halted the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It also played a prominent role in the activities of Africa’s Pan-continental body – the African Union (AU). The consolidation of democracy in Nigeria in the 2000s, coupled with the burgeoning oil economy of the country in that era catapulted Nigeria to the position of global reckoning. Since then, Nigeria has played a dominant role in African politics and diplomacy. It has also been a force to reckon with in aspects of global affairs. Nigeria possesses a few attributes that define its place as a middle power that cannot be ignored in contemporary global affairs (see Table 2). Firstly, the country has a large and growing economy with a GDP estimated at over USD 477 billion. As the largest economy in Africa, the country is endowed with a variety of strategic natural resources including oil, gas, and solid minerals. The economy is characterized by burgeoning and viable sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Nigeria also continues to leverage its economic resources in exchange for geostrategic influence and relevance as it has done in the past such as when the country provided Liberia with debt relief

²⁰ Aluko, Olajide. *The “New” Nigerian Foreign Policy*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1976; Ihonvbere, O. Julius. *Economic Contraction and Foreign Policy in the Periphery: A Study of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy Towards Africa in The Second Republic (1979-1983)*. Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs at GIGA, 1982.

and financing for some road and educational projects.²¹ Or such as when it had maintained its provision of concessional oil supply to all West African states as a way of keeping them actively involved in ECOMOG's Operation Liberty²² and bankrolling government wages in the Caribbean.

Politically, Nigeria has had a stable and continuous democratic rule and transition since 1999. It has played a leading role in regional organization such as ECOWAS and AU. It has also engaged in multilateral diplomacy and peacekeeping mission in Africa and the wider world. With a large well-equipped military, Nigeria ranks as the third military power in Africa.²³ The country has committed its military ability and resources to peacekeeping mission in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It has also prominently participated in regional security initiatives such as the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) - a collective security mechanism dedicated to combating Boko Haram and allied insurgencies/ terrorisms in the Lake Chad region.²⁴ For instance, it has been argued that the greatest success stories of its foreign policy have been its earlier contributions towards decolonization and the anti-apartheid struggle, in which the country had invested over \$1billion.²⁵

Nigeria is also endowed with significant soft power diplomatic assets. Complementing the current and projected sizes of its national population are a number of important demographic facts that deserve to be teased out for their significance. The sheer youthfulness of Nigeria's population, comprising some seventy per cent of the demographics, also stands the country out alongside African states as a potential powerhouse of knowledge, skills and innovation with an enormous pace-setting and game changing capacity if properly harnessed and made into a dividend. Nigeria has consistently deployed these soft power assets through initiatives such as the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS), through which it sends Nigerian professionals – such as health professionals and teachers, to less endowed countries in Africa and the Caribbean since the mid 1980s. We have seen what this youthful population is capable of delivering in terms of innovative activities in the efflorescence of artistic ingenuity and roaring successes in globally competitive art, music, literature, film and sports in recent times. This is in addition to the country's large and influential diaspora community with significant cultural and economic ties to the country. Further to this is a viable digital economy and tech industry that have produced the highest number of

²¹ Howe, Herbert. "Lessons of Liberia: ECOMOG and Regional Peacekeeping." *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1997): 145-176. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.21.3.145>.

²² Ibid

²³ Global Fire Power (GFP). *African Military Strength 2025*. Global Fire Power, 2025.

²⁴ Okoli, A. Chukwuma. "Boko Haram Insurgency and the Necessity for Trans-Territorial Forestland Governance in the Lower Lake Chad Basin." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 19, no. 1 (2019): 37-56.

²⁵ Osuntokun, Akinjide. "Gulliver and the Lilliputians: Nigeria and Its Neighbours." In *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, edited by [Editor's Name if available]. Kwazulu: University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2008

Unicorns (Tech start ups worth \$1 billion and above) adding value to the economic growth and transformation in the country.

Specifically, the Nigerian diaspora also presents an opportunity to advance Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. The long years spent by Nigeria's significant diaspora outside Nigeria have reinforced their sense of connection to Nigeria. Nigerians in the diaspora are as concerned and committed to national development as their counterparts at home, having developed the skills and resources to contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic growth. Leveraging cultural activities, the diaspora remains a potent and foremost army of ambassadors for a positive international image. In 2023, with an estimated \$25 billion, Nigeria ranked fifth among developing countries and the highest in Africa for remittance. Consistently, diaspora remittance has ranked higher than foreign direct investment in Nigeria's GDP in the last the last decade underscoring the importance of this segment of Nigeria's population. More importantly, this attribute enables the country to exert influence and shape outcomes in global and regional affairs in a sub-liminal manner.

Policy Objectives: Nigeria's Foreign Relations

Over the years, Nigeria navigates the complex dynamics of the evolving international system by strategically positioning itself to leverage the on-going competition between the great powers specifically the United States and China, rather than bowing to external pressures. Nigeria seemingly understands that the multiple choice of United States and China may not always serve its interests, however, Nigeria designed its foreign policy to be adaptative, which aims to create space for cooperation between both states rather than competition or conflict. Nigeria has had thriving relations with both the United States and China and other great powers. It has had a long-standing strategic partnership with the United States as evidenced in their cooperation on trade especially in the oil and gas sector, security (particularly counter terrorism), and human capital development (particularly in the health sector). The United States is currently Nigeria's third largest trade partner, following the lead of the EU and China.²⁶ Nigeria has strategically used this duality to its benefits for instance, it turns to China for arms to enhance its military capabilities especially when faced with difficulties in obtaining certain equipment from Western partners due to vetting processes²⁷, for example; in May 2025, Nigeria signed a MoU with the Chinese government in a bid to acquire arms and establish a regional hub for Chinese military equipment and maintenance. This diversification displays Nigeria's ability to diversify partnerships and not overly reliant on a single great power, this also paves path for both US and China to compete in their offers of engagement.

²⁶ European Union. *Official Website of the European Union*. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.europa.eu/eeaas/>

²⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace *Nigeria in the Emerging World Order*. Accessed June 21, 2025 <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/12/nigeria-in-the-emerging-world-order>

Economically, Nigeria's recent attempt to diversify its economy would certainly help diminish any form of external influence or leverage any great power attempts to hold on it. By expanding trade and investment relationships globally and prioritizing economic reforms Nigeria would be able to reduce the effect of conditionalities usually attached to the offers, aid or investments from global powers such as US and China, this strategic economic recalibration, would help create a strong foundation for an independent foreign policy²⁸. It is pertinent to note that Nigeria is a voice in the Global South and a proponent of multilateralism, consistently advocating for a more equitable international system, thereby pushing for various reforms in global institutions such as the UN security council, and seeking permanent representation and full membership in G20 and BRICS. Notably, the Nigeria President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, attended the G20 Leaders' summits in New Delhi, India and Brasilia, Brazil in 2023 and 2024, where he met with both the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and the Brazilian President, Luis Inacio Lula de Silva, to discuss issues of bilateral and global concerns, including Nigeria's ascension to full membership of the Group. It is also active in on-going G20 talks as South Africa hosts in 2025. Nigeria's aspiration for full membership of the G20 and BRICS is borne out of a desire to benefit from the geo-strategic gains that are accruable from such organizations, especially in terms of fostering multilateral solidarity in spheres of mutual interest and championing the interests of developing nations and addressing shared challenges of trade equity, insecurity and climate change, Nigeria subtly nudges both the US and China relations towards cooperation rather than competitive approaches²⁹. Furthermore, Nigeria has had a long-standing relationship with the EU, with cooperation on areas of trade, development, security and migration.³⁶

It is also actively pursuing support from Gulf states like UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which have made commitments to the tune of more than \$8 billion and \$50.7 billion from Turkey. These kinds of support remain crucial to the pursuit of Nigeria's strategic interests which require it to be both forward thinking and clear-headed in its diplomatic engagement. President Tinubu has been taking

²⁸, Usman Z. Economic Diversification in Nigeria: The Politics of Building a Post-Oil Economy. *Bloomsbury Publishing* . (2022) no 1, 19-21, doi: [10.5040/9781350237674](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350237674)

²⁹ The Nation Newspaper. "Nigeria's foreign policy, from Afrocentrism to ambiguity?" *The Nation Newspaper*, May 11, 2023. Accessed June 21, 2025. <https://thenationonlineng.net/nigerias-foreign-policy-from-afrocentrism-to-ambiguity/>

international engagement seriously, with recent visits to India³⁰, Qatar³¹, UAE³² for COP28 and Brazil for BRICS in July 2025. On his visit to Qatar, the president signed seven multi-sectoral agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on education, labor, tourism, trade, mining, agriculture and sports.

Similarly, Nigeria's decision to participate in the Global Financing Pact Summit convened by President Macron in June 2023, barely a month after assuming the presidency, demonstrated Nigeria's prioritization of development financing even as it relates to the Global South. It is significant to note that President Tinubu had called for strengthened cooperation with France to combat terrorism in early January 2024. Nigeria's participation at the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, also demonstrates President Tinubu's commitment to pursuing mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development, and inclusive multilateralism.

At COP28 in Dubai, the Nigerian president announced Nigeria's significant step towards a sustainable and eco-friendly future by deploying a fleet of 100 electric buses³³. This follows the earlier net zero pledge at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland by President Buhari. In India, President Tinubu led a delegation of Nigeria's top private sector players to secure significant investment pledges amounting to nearly \$14 billion U.S. dollars during the Nigeria-India Presidential Roundtable and Conference³⁴ in New Delhi, India. The commitments from India span steel, petrochemicals and fertilizer production, power generation, digital economic transformation, space communications and defense equipment manufacturing. Overall, since assuming presidency,

³⁰ Nigerian State House. "President Tinubu Arrives India and Heads Straight into Top-Level Investment Meeting with Hinduja Chairman After 15-Hour Journey." *Nigerian State House*, September 5, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-tinubu-arrives-india-and-heads-straight-into-top-level-investment-meeting-with-hinduja-chairman-after-15-hour-journey/>

³¹ Premium Times Nigeria. "President Tinubu, Amir of Qatar's Pact to Secure the Future." *Premium Times*, December 5, 2023. Accessed February 6, 2025. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/675751-president-tinubu-amir-of-qatars-pact-to-secure-the-future-by-oche-echejia-egwa.html?tztc=1>

³² Nigerian State House. "President Tinubu to Attend COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai." *Nigerian State House*, November 27, 2023. Accessed February 12, 2025. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-tinubu-to-attend-cop28-climate-summit-in-dubai/>

³³ Nigerian State House. "COP28: President Tinubu Unveils Bold Vision for a Greener Nigeria with Rollout of 100 Electric Buses." *Nigerian State House*, December 2, 2023. Accessed February 6, 2025. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/cop28-president-tinubu-unveils-bold-vision-for-a-greener-nigeria-with-rollout-of-100-electric-buses/>

³⁴ Nigerian State House. "President Tinubu to Indian Investors: Do Not Procrastinate as Nigeria Offers the Best Return on Investment, Lauds \$14 Billion in New Investment Pledges at Nigeria-India Economic Roundtable." *Nigerian State House*, September 6, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-tinubu-to-indian-investors-do-not-procrastinate-as-nigeria-offers-the-best-return-on-investment-lauds-14-billion-in-new-investment-pledges-at-nigeria-india-economic-roundtable/>

Nigeria under President Tinubu has attracted \$30 billion pledges in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)³⁵ commitments into Nigeria’s real economy, including manufacturing, telecoms, healthcare, oil & gas, and others.

Nigeria has also asserted its influence on the global stage, such as during its call for the de-escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas on 7th October 2023, including calling for a humanitarian truce, as well as de-escalation following Iran’s attack on Israel in April 2024. An attestation to the recognition accorded to Nigeria’s global leadership potential is its inclusion as part of the Ministerial Committee of 8 Foreign Ministers assigned by the Joint Arab-Islamic Summit in advocating for a cessation of hostilities in the Israeli-Gaza conflict in November 2023.

To bolster and sustain its status and stake as a middle power, Nigeria needs to reposition its foreign policy strategy by leveraging its competitive economic, diplomatic, and cultural strengths to achieve its national interest. This entails optimizing the country’s middle power capabilities to exert influence and shape regional and global outcomes in a more strategic and rewarding way. Such a move should emphasize a few critical priorities as highlighted in Table 3 below:

Table 1: Priority Area of Nigeria’s Middle Power Strategy

Priority	Remarks(s)
Regional Leadership	Reinvigorating the country’s stake and role in regional organizations such as ECOWAS and AU
Multilateral Engagement	Active participation in global forums such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth.
Diplomatic Mediation:	Continued mediation in regional conflicts through third-person diplomacy
Cultural Diplomacy:	Leveraging the country’s cultural assets, such as music, sports, film, and tourism and hospitalities to promote the national image and build functional relationships with other nations.
Economic Diplomacy:	Promoting the country’s economic interests through diplomatic tactics, including negotiating favorable trade and investments terms and opportunities.

Source: Author’s original compilation (2025)

³⁵ Punch Newspapers. “Nigeria’s Economy Not Distressed, Says Tinubu.” *Punch*, November 8, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://punchng.com/nigerias-economy-not-distressed-says-tinubu/>

Nigeria's Geostrategic Interests in the Age of Great Power Competition: Navigating US -China Competition.

To the extent that Nigeria is central to the emerging strategic interests of the United States and China in the ongoing great power competition, it is useful to assess the historical origins, strategic objectives, engagement principles, current realities and future trajectories of Nigeria's relations with the two great powers as well as with Russia in light of emerging geo-strategic imperatives. The centrality of Nigeria to the interest of these great powers is arguably hinged on Nigeria's preponderant material and immaterial resources, geostrategic leadership position in Africa,³⁶ and the ability to shape the interest and preference of the continent in global politics. As stated inter alia, Nigeria occupies the position of the most populous country in Africa and the third most populous globally by 2050, after India and China. Nigeria's huge human population, abundant natural and economic resources, and potentials makes it the epicenter of great power competition on the continent.³⁷

Beyond the broad relationships with the US, China, and Russia, Nigeria's middle power strategy emphasizes proactive engagement on major and key global areas of discussion such as Climate and Energy, Trade and Finance, and Technology. These areas of discussion are not just sectors where external influence leverages on Nigeria; they are key issues integral to the national development of Nigeria and its efforts as a middle power to strategically navigate the competition among the great powers and bolster its autonomy. This section would further analyze Nigeria's position in these key areas and enable us determine Nigeria's active role in shaping global trajectories by strategically utilizing its assets and confronting limitations, rather than merely reacting to global dynamics.

Climate and Energy

One of the most critical pillars that form Nigeria's geopolitical interest is the approach to global climate and energy issues, which reflects Nigeria's resource endowment and commitment to sustainable development. It can be said that Nigeria is mostly defined by its contribution to OPEC in this context, likewise the vast oil and gas reserves, while strategically positioning itself within the global green energy transition. Through this, Nigeria has been able to maintain its identity as an oil producer. Although Nigeria's crude oil production figures consistently fall short of national targets, creating significant fiscal pressures. For example, in April 2025, production averaged 1.486 million barrels per day (mbpd), with the first quarter of 2025 averaging 1.468 mbpd, figures

³⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Nigeria in the Emerging World Order*. December 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/12/nigeria-in-the-emerging-world-order?lang=en¢er=russia-eurasia>

³⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook: Nigeria*. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/>

considerably below the government's 2.0 mbpd target for the 2025 budget³⁸. Despite these shortfalls, Nigeria retains its position as Africa's largest crude oil exporter. Historically, crude oil production averaged 1.885 million barrels per day from January 2002 to January 2025, reaching a peak of 2.496 million barrels per day in November 2005, though it also hit a low of 1.015 million barrels per day in September 2022³⁹. The Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas exports⁴⁰ and the bulk of government revenues are derived from these exports. For instance, the 2025 budget projected N21 trillion from oil revenue, representing approximately 50% of the total federal government's retained revenues⁴¹. The consistent failure to meet oil production targets directly translates into lower-than-projected oil revenues, which exacerbate Nigeria's record fiscal deficit, projected at N14.1 trillion in the 2025 budget⁴². This inherent reliance on hydrocarbon extraction and sales to bridge fiscal gaps often creates a powerful economic imperative that can slow the pace of transition away from fossil fuels, highlighting the nation's vulnerability to global oil price fluctuations and domestic production challenges. Despite these challenges Nigeria continues to attract significant attention from global powers, especially US and China, both countries, over the years, have pledged significant investments in the Nigerian Oil and Gas sector, notably the \$25 billion Atlantic Africa pipeline project designed to transport natural gas and green hydrogen to European countries⁴³.

While the US-China relationship with Nigeria is heavily influenced by energy, climate change was once a key area of cooperation for both countries. For instance, in 2023, China's imports from Nigeria were dominated by mineral fuels, accounting for nearly 60% of the total trade value, with \$1.41 billion worth of mineral fuels and oils imported⁴⁴. Total exports to China in September 2024 were \$105.763 million⁴⁵, while in September 2024, Nigeria's total exports to the US amounted to

³⁸ NairaMetrics. *Nigeria Averages 1.488mbpd in April 2025, according to OPEC*. Accessed June 28, 2025.

<https://nairametrics.com/2025/05/15/nigeria-averages-1-486mbpd-in-april-2025-according-to-opec/>

³⁹ CEIC data. *Nigeria's Crude oil; Production*. Accessed June 28, 2025.

<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/nigeria/crude-oil-production>

⁴⁰ Abdallah, M., Odetukun, K. (2023). *Enhancing Energy Security in Nigeria: An Analysis of International Efforts 2015-2024*. South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics, 22(1), 29-37.

⁴¹ Afor A, *The potential, barriers. and strategies to upscale renewable energy adoption in developing countries: Nigeria as a case study*. OPEN ACCESS Engineering Science & Technology Journal. Volume 4, Issue 2, P.No. 46-55, June 2023 DOI: 10.51594/estj/v4i2.1288

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ Oil Review. *US-China to invest in Atlantic- Africa Pipeline Project*. Accessed June 28, 2025

<https://oilreviewafrica.com/gas/gas/us-china-to-invest-in-atlantic-africa-pipeline-project>

⁴⁴ Intel Points. *Mineral Fuels dominate China imports from Nigeria*. Accessed June 28, 2025
<https://intelpoint.co/insights/mineral-fuels-dominate-chinas-imports-from-nigeria-accounting-for-nearly-60-of-the-total-trade-value/>

⁴⁵ CEIC data. *Nigeria total export to China*. Accessed June 28, 2025

\$124.857 million⁴⁶. Beyond oil, Nigeria holds over 210 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves, with 76% untapped, making it Africa's largest gas holder and a global top ten player⁴⁷.

Furthermore, Nigeria is committed to green energy transmission, it is evident in the 'Decade of Gas initiative', underscoring its interest in leveraging gas for economic development and energy dependence. Nigeria has formally pledged to net-zero carbon emissions by 2060, with an interim target for 2030 outlined in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). During COP28, in 2023 President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, announced a pioneering initiative that launched 100 electric buses to reduce carbon footprint and position Nigeria as a frontier for green manufacturing in Africa⁴⁸. Other key initiatives driven by the green energy transition include; Solar PV technology, Hydropower, various legislative reforms such as the Electricity Act of 2023, Innovations supporting pay-as-you-go (PAYG) models which are aimed at improving energy access for over 2million households and likewise create about 10,000 jobs in the Solar industry. Nigerian government also aims to convert One million vehicles to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by 2027⁴⁹, which seemingly aligns with its pledge to eliminate gas flaring.

Some interconnected challenges pose a risk to the adoption of renewable energy despite its clear benefits, such as inadequate infrastructure, a lack of diverse and affordable financing options and inconsistent and unstable policy and regulatory frameworks that deter investment through cumbersome permit processes and fragmented agency oversight. The ongoing dominance of the fossil fuel industry, often propped up by subsidies, further distorts market incentives for renewables, which already face high upfront costs and a shortage of skilled professionals.

To navigate the great power interests in the green energy transition, Nigeria and China, through the FOCAC initiative⁵⁰, have been able to deepen their bilateral relationship while the United States engages Nigeria with a dual approach, showing interest in investing in its natural gas reserves and supporting the energy transition through technical assistance.

However, despite being among the top ten countries that are vulnerable to climate change impact despite contributing less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, Nigeria has leveraged this

<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/nigeria/total-exports-to-china>

⁴⁶ US Energy Information Administration Data. *Petroleum and other Liquids*. Accessed June 28, 2025

<https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=MTTIMUSNI1&f=M>

⁴⁷ David, I. C., & Tijjani, A. (2025). *Enhancing energy security in Nigeria: An analysis of international efforts (2015–2024)*. *South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics*, 22(1), 29–37. <https://doi.org/10.9734/sajsse/2025/v22i1942>

⁴⁸ <https://dailytrust.com/cop28-tinubu-unveils-initiative-to-deploy-100-electric-buses/>

⁴⁹ Ukoima, K. N. *Nigeria's renewable energy sector: Analysis of the present and future prospects*. (2025) Solar Compass. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.solcom.2025.100123>

⁵⁰ Ibid

vulnerability by launching a diplomatic campaign to host the 32nd Conference of Parties (COP32) in 2027⁵¹, in efforts to position itself as a key player in shaping climate action across Africa.

To achieve long term geo-strategic relevance and economic resilience, Nigeria will need to bridge implementation gaps and overcome challenges that pose a risk to the green energy transition initiative by diversifying its economy beyond hydrocarbons and translate its diplomatic aspirations into tangible domestic actions.

Technology

While Nigeria is navigating the great power competition, it considers technological advancement and the digital economy to be important aspects of its national development priorities. Possessing a vibrant tech industry and a rapidly growing digital infrastructure, Nigeria finds itself in the US-China rivalry for technological influence. Nigeria's digital economy is a significant contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with the ICT sector contributing 11.30% to nominal GDP in Q3 2024, and the broader digital economy peaking at an unprecedented 19.78% in Q2 2024⁵². This improvement can be attributed to the rise of various technology-driven and private start-up companies each valued at over \$1 billion, such as Moniepoint, Opay, Flutterwave, Andela and Interswitch notably assisting 90% of Nigeria's small and medium-sized firms in formalising their operations⁵³. Nigeria boasts of being Africa's largest internet market, with over 142 million active internet subscribers and 169.3 million active mobile subscriptions in January 2025, an upsurge that took place after a brief decline from the National Identification Number (NIN)-SIM linkage policy. Broadband penetration reached 48.15% in April 2025, though it missed the ambitious 70% target for 2025. Challenges persist, including low-speed internet deployment (4G at 47%, 5G at 2.4%), multiple taxation, and infrastructure vandalism. Despite these challenges, internet usage surged to over 1 million terabytes in January 2025, a 93.35% increase from January 2023. In terms of scientific output, Nigerian institutions like the University of Nigeria Nsukka and University of Ibadan are highly productive, though translating this research into commercialised products remains a challenge due to funding and collaboration gaps.

Meanwhile, amidst an intensifying U.S.-China rivalry for technological influence, Nigeria's digital transformation is growing. For instance, China has established a significant footprint in Nigeria's telecommunications market through state-linked firms like Huawei and ZTE, which have built a

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Buza, M., & Taha, S. *Digital Policy Alert Digital Digest: Nigeria*. Digital Policy Alert. Accessed June 28, 2025
<https://digitalpolicyalert.org/digest/dpa-digital-digest-nigeria>

⁵³ Itana Africa Blog. *2025 Nigeria economic outlook: Opportunities for digital entrepreneurs*. Accessed June 29, 2025.
https://www.itana.africa/blog/2025-nigeria-economic-outlook?utm_source=social&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=2025_economic_outlook

substantial portion of Africa's 3G and 4G networks⁵⁴. China's success is driven by competitive pricing up to 30% cheaper than Western rivals and attractive financial terms, including concessional loans with fewer political conditions⁵⁵. Chinese investments include early rural telephony projects, the Nigerian Communications Satellite NIGCOMSAT projects (\$200 million and \$399.5 million loans), and the national fiber optic backbone (\$100 million and \$347.4 million loans)⁵⁶. More recently, Nigeria partnered with Chinese firm Galaxy Space to deploy direct-to-device (D2D) satellite communication technology nationwide by the end of 2025, aiming to eliminate network blind spots and facilitate technology transfer.

In contrast, the US holds a leading position in global cloud services, with Amazon Web Services (AWS) holding 31% market share, Microsoft Azure 21%, and Google Cloud Platform (GCP) 12% globally. Nigeria's cloud computing market is estimated at \$1.03 billion in 2025, projected to grow to \$3.28 billion by 2030. While US companies dominate, Chinese tech giant Huawei also offers cloud solutions in Nigeria, and MTN Nigeria recently partnered with Microsoft to deliver data hosting solutions via Azure Cloud. This distinct division of influence means Nigeria's digital ecosystem relies on both powers, creating a complex dependency structure.

Nigeria implements a deliberate strategy to the US-China technology competition by meticulously choosing telecommunication infrastructure that offers affordable pricing such as Chinese firms that influence Nigeria telecommunication industry, although this reliance raises security concerns, including potential espionage and data transfer risks as highlighted by US government, even despite these warnings, Nigerian government approved the deployment of 5G in September 2021 after trials and asserts its safety to national security. Nigeria, as a significant African nation and a rising middle power, is increasingly asserting its influence in global technology governance. African countries, including Nigeria, are actively engaging in dialogues and devising roadmaps for emerging technologies, leveraging their growing economic strength to influence institutions like the African Union, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the United Nations. Technology is now viewed as a lever of diplomacy, sovereignty, and regional integration⁵⁷. Nigeria actively participates in pan-African digital alignment efforts, emphasizing harmonized fintech regulations and shared cybersecurity protocols within frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)⁵⁸. The African Union has introduced frameworks such as the AU Data

⁵⁴ Voice of Nigeria . *China reaffirms commitment to advance Africa economic Partnerships*. Accessed June 29, 2025

<https://von.gov.ng/china-reaffirms-commitment-to-advance-africa-economic-partnerships/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10670564.2024.2439405>

⁵⁶3Gimbals blog. *Chinese telecom infrastructure in Africa shapes new Strategic risks for US security* . Accessed June 29, 2025.

<https://3gimbals.com/insights/chinese-telecom-infrastructure-in-africa-shapes-new-strategic-risks-for-u-s-security/>

⁵⁷Diplomatist. *Africas Tech landscape highlights from Gitex*. Accessed June 29, 2025

<https://diplomatist.com/2025/05/27/africas-tech-landscape-highlights-from-gitex-africa-2025/>

⁵⁸ Ibid

Policy Framework and the Malabo Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection to guide member states in harmonizing national AI regulation and data protection laws⁵⁹. Nigeria's National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) is also developing its own digital public infrastructure (DPI) standards, aiming for interoperability, data security, and digital privacy, while seeking international partnerships with entities like Google and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)⁶⁰. To enhance technological diplomacy, Nigeria's Communications and Digital Economy Minister just assumed the leadership of the ITU as Vice Chairman of the Board. He also sits as co-chair of the World Alliance for Digital Development and of the International Advisory Board on Submarine Cable Resilience. This proactive development of indigenous standards and infrastructure demonstrates Nigeria's commitment to building technological autonomy.

Nigeria's active participation in international standards-setting bodies is crucial to prevent "technological colonization," ensuring its interests are represented in global tech standards. A joint statement by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Nigerian Ministry of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy affirmed shared priorities for strengthening the digital economy, promoting innovation, and increasing digital trade and investment, including cooperation on AI research and international standards development to support interoperability⁶¹. This strategic engagement allows Nigeria to benefit from the competition between major tech powers, attracting investment and expertise while safeguarding its national interests and promoting a more equitable global digital future.

Trade and Finance

Trade and finance are foundational to Nigeria's economic development priorities and its quest for enhanced prosperity and diversification within the global economy. Nigeria actively seeks to attract foreign direct investment, drive regional integration, and secure its place in influential economic forums like the G20 and BRICS⁶². One of Nigeria's primary economic development goals is to diversify its economy and export sector beyond its reliance on Oil. Nigeria also aims to

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Hassan, M. A. *Partnership with JICA has put Nigeria's startup ecosystem in global map – DG NITDA (2024)*. National Information Technology Development Agency. Accessed June 29, 2025 <https://nitda.gov.ng/partnership-with-jica-has-put-nigerias-startup-ecosystem-in-global-map-dg-nitda/8453/>

⁶¹ Isime Esene. *Nigeria-U.S. agree to harness artificial intelligence, facilitate data flows and empower digital upskilling; issue joint statement*. Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy (2025) <https://fmide.gov.ng/u-s-nigeria-reach-agreement-to-harness-artificial-intelligence-facilitate-data-flows-and-empower-digital-upskilling-issue-joint-statement/>

⁶² Andohol, J. T., Tarzoor, T., & Nomor, D. T. (2024). *Trade liberalization, non-oil export and economic growth in Nigeria*. Department of Economics, Benue State University, Makurdi. DOI: 10.33429/Cjas.15124.4/8

boost its prosperity by significantly enhancing and investing in the production and distribution of non-oil and value-added items by leveraging agricultural and mineral resources to produce textiles and manufactured products. This strategic move, however, is important to enable the reduction in reliance on volatile oil products and to foster industrial growth.

In efforts to achieve these goals, President Bola Tinubu's administration has actively pursued foreign direct investment, securing over \$50 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) commitments between May 2023 and January 2025. Notable pledges include \$14 billion from India, \$10 billion from ExxonMobil, \$8 billion from Indorama, and \$3 billion each from Jindal Steel and Shell, among others. These investments target important sectors such as manufacturing, telecommunications, healthcare, and oil & gas, reflecting a broad approach to economic growth.

Nigeria's trade relations with major global players are complex. The United States is a significant trading partner; in April 2025, U.S. exports to Nigeria increased by 72.2% to \$484 million, while imports from Nigeria decreased by 17.5% to \$604 million, resulting in a negative trade balance for the U.S and China, however, is Nigeria's largest importer, and the trade relationship is characterized by a significant imbalance⁶³. In September 2024, Nigeria's total exports to China were \$105.763 million, while imports from China were \$802.488 million. In 2023, mineral fuels dominated China's imports from Nigeria, accounting for nearly 60% of the total trade value (\$1.41 billion), with minimal contribution from manufactured goods. This asymmetry, where Nigerian imports far outstrip exports, undermines local manufacturing and raises concerns about economic dependence.

Nigeria's aspirations for full G20 and BRICS membership are borne out of a desire to benefit from geo-strategic gains and foster multilateral solidarity. As a BRICS partner, Nigeria aims to amplify its voice on the global stage and leverage the platform for shared development goals in trade, investment, energy security, infrastructure, and technology transfer. This engagement also reflects a broader ambition to influence the international monetary and financial systems, including challenging U.S. dollar dominance in global trade.

However, Nigeria's development financing is heavily influenced by its debt profile. Chinese loans have significantly contributed to Nigeria's infrastructure development, particularly in transportation, energy, and telecommunications. While these loans have helped bridge critical infrastructure gaps, they have also led to an increased debt burden, raising concerns about fiscal sustainability, debt servicing capacity, and economic sovereignty due to a lack of transparency and over-reliance on external financing. This situation necessitates that Nigeria adopts smarter

⁶³ Obafemi, Y. A. (2022). *Non-oil sectors, economic diversification and growth in Nigeria: Further empirical evidence*. *Studies in Business and Economics*, 17(1), 290–311.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/sbe-2022-0019>

borrowing practices and diversify its financing sources to mitigate risks and ensure long-term financial stability.

Nigeria and U.S. Relations:

Relations between Nigeria and the United States have been largely cordial since Nigeria's independence in 1960. Whilst the U.S. foreign policy stance in the early years of Nigeria's independence was largely driven by the policy of containment against communism and the Soviet bloc, and this was so expressed by the representative of the U.S. President, Governor Rockefeller of New York on the occasion of Nigeria's independence in October 1960. Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria however made it clear in his speech on Nigeria's admission into the United Nations his country's wish not to be dragged into the Cold War rivalry between the East and the West stating that Nigeria, as a matter of policy, would not be a member of any power bloc. Actions taken by the Balewa administration and all subsequent administrations have remained consistent with the principle of non-alignment as enunciated by the first Prime Minister.

While the substance of Nigeria–US relations has remained broadly consistent, the style, tone and tenor of relations has changed with successive governments, often in line with the geopolitical context of international politics. For example, the Gowon administration that prosecuted the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970 was peeved by the refusal of the American government to sell weapons to Nigeria accusing United States of pro-Biafra neutrality whilst procuring needed arms to prosecute the war from the Soviet Union as well as other countries. At the end of the war in 1970, US – Nigeria relations remained cordial despite the diplomatic challenges experienced during the war. Moreover, increased oil revenues on the back of improved trade relations with the United States also strengthened relations.

By the time the Murtala Muhammed administration replaced the Gowon government in 1975, bilateral relations were significantly re-shaped by the decision of the Muhammed regime to adopt a more assertive, pan Africanist outlook, particularly on the issue of Apartheid and settler colonialism in Southern Africa. Within the overarching ambit of the doctrine of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, Nigeria led the decision of the Organisation of African Unity to recognize the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) as the legitimate liberation vehicle to adopt in Angola against Holden Roberto's FNLA that the United States was in favor of. In taking the decision, General Mohammed affirmed that "Africa has come of Age" and the "continent would no longer entertain interference from extra continental powers." Equally, Nigeria rejected US' conditionality of Soviet and Cuban military personnel withdrawal from Angola as a basis for the recognition of the MPLA led government in Angola. Although General Muhammed was assassinated in 1976, his successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo continued with the assertive pan African foreign policy stance, leading to the nationalization of British Petroleum and increasing brickbats between the departing Ford administration and the Nigerian government.

With the arrival of Jimmy Carter in the American Presidency in 1977, Carter's conciliatory, non-abrasive style and consultative approach won over the Nigerian leadership and the *rapprochement* positively affected bilateral relations, although it did not necessarily represent a change of policy on both sides but the two countries treated each other as relevant to decision making on regional matters and international policy⁶⁴. Unlike Henry Kissinger's Cold War rhetoric which dominated the preceding era, President Carter's cardinal principle was to "weave a world wide web of bilateral, political and, where appropriate, economic relations with new emerging regional 'influentials.' Nigeria, in President Carter's view, was one such influential country. This pattern in the 1980s and 1990s was dominated by economic considerations under Presidents Reagan and Bush when direct oil sales to the United States rose to over 50% of Nigeria's production, thus strengthening trade relations even when discordant tunes often dominated political and diplomatic relations.

With the ending of the Cold War and the simultaneous rise of electoral democracies across the African continent from 1990, a new agenda for peace, security and economic growth began to take shape. The agenda as formalized in the UN Secretary General's *Agenda for Peace (1992)*⁶⁵ emphasized peacekeeping and the rebuilding of fragile states, away from authoritarianism and the 'new wars' that ensued in many African states in the democratization struggle. With the failure of the international community to stem the tide of conflict as witnessed in Somalia, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, prominent African countries like Nigeria led the drive for African solutions to African problems. This coincided with the loss of appetite for American boots on ground in international peacekeeping operations, following the debacle in Somalia in 1991. Nigeria's role in international peacekeeping had become pronounced at the time and it was convenient for the United States to support Nigeria led peacekeeping operations in Liberia and subsequently in Sierra Leone even as the Clinton administration remained ambivalent about calls for heavy sanctions against the Nigerian military dictatorship under General Sani Abacha.

Nigeria-US relations hardly recovered from this security focused agenda even when democracy returned in 1999. Although President Obasanjo's foreign policy credentials were hardly in doubt, the period did not elicit a significant change in trade relations which had declined, but it saw increased military aid, particularly in terms of training and retooling of the armed forces during President Obasanjo's tenure. In the last two decades, Nigeria – US relations has not seen any significant shift in its geostrategic engagements, although both parties continue to stress the importance of the relations. Despite the dwindling of the United States' interests in Africa's most

⁶⁴ Musikilu, Mojeed. *The Letterman: Inside the 'Secret' Letters of Former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo*. Lagos: Premium Times Books, 2023.

⁶⁵ Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*. Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on January 31, 1992. UN Document A/47/277 - S/24111, June 17, 1992

populous country, Nigeria is still the second most important trading partner of the United States in Africa, which makes Nigeria a beneficiary of the opportunities embedded in the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act.⁶⁶ Nigeria continues to occupy a strategic position in the United States' interest of promoting strategic partnership pivotal to the promotion of its interest in Africa. The United States is a major supplier of arms to Nigeria⁶⁷ and Nigeria depended on the United States for the sale of critical military tools in combating the Boko - Haram insurgency.⁶⁸ However, China emerged as Nigeria's top arms supplier⁶⁹ amidst the refusal⁷⁰ of the United States to supply critical ammunitions due to allegations of poor human rights record.⁷¹ As of 2021, while the United States supplied only about 2% of Nigeria's arms imports, China provided Nigeria with nearly one-third of its arms imports within the period.⁷²

As things currently stand, it would appear that Nigeria is not significantly beholden to the United States. Yet with sub-Saharan Africa occupying a critical place in the advancement of United States' global priorities and Nigeria as the most populous and fastest growing country in Africa, the future of the two countries is inextricably intertwined. Nigeria is bound to factor critically in efforts on trade, population dynamics and labour migration, reversing the global tide of democratic backsliding, confronting terrorism, conflict and international crime as well as regulation and management of cyber and emerging technologies. The influence of China on Nigeria in particular and the African region at large must also be concerning to the American government, given that China sees Africa as a conducive testing ground for its own challenge to the collapsing rules based international system. With the above, it is reasonable to surmise that Nigeria will continue to feature prominently in the calculation of American foreign policy drivers in the foreseeable future.

Nigeria – China Relations:

⁶⁶Wilson Center. "U.S.-Nigeria Partnership in a Changing Global Arena: A Conversation with the Foreign Minister of Nigeria, H.E. Amb. Yusuf Tuggar." *Wilson Center*, November 15, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/us-nigeria-partnership-changing-global-arena-conversation-foreign-minister-nigeria-h-e-amb-y>

⁶⁷Center for Civilians in Conflict. *CIVIC Nigeria Brief*. June 2024. Accessed February 7, 2025. https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CIVIC_Nigeria_Brief_Web.pdf

⁶⁸Ibid

⁶⁹Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Nigeria in the emerging world order*.

⁷⁰The New York Times. "Boko Haram, Nigeria, U.S. Arms Sales, and Warplanes." *The New York Times*, May 16, 2016. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/16/world/africa/boko-haram-nigeria-us-arms-sales-warplanes.html>

⁷¹Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). "Notorious Nigerien Weapons Broker Lands Secret Arms Deal in Senegal." *OCCRP*, December 10, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigation/notorious-nigerien-weapons-broker-lands-secret-arms-deal-in-senegal>

⁷²Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). *SIPRI Arms Trade Database*. Accessed February 7, 2025. https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

The origins of Sino-Nigeria relations dates to 1971, the same year that the Communist People's Republic of China assumed membership of the UN Security Council. This relationship had developed with China's old status as a developing country but with a clear plan and effort towards economic and security power aspirations. It was therefore not surprising that China evolved into a superpower, ranking second behind the USA, and with the dynamics in the Sino-Nigeria relations changing as a result. As China grows in influence and wealth, its Africa centered policy has also evolved. The emerging changes concentrate in four broad areas. The first change is the sectoral expansion of its peace and security involvement but largely driven under the rubric of developmental peace; secondly, China seeks to be a norm maker rather than a norm complier; third, actors involved in Sino-Nigeria relations are becoming more diversified beyond national leaders to business enterprises and civil society organizations/academia and fourthly, China places emphasis on opportunities presented at the multilateral stage to influence changes, for example at the United Nations and the African Union. China has sought to do all of these through a policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of their partner countries like Nigeria. On a continent where countries resent the imperious attitude of the West in tying development assistance to human rights and democracy conditionalities, China's non-interference policy endears the country to many of its partner countries on the continent. And this way, China was able to encourage Nigeria to stick to the One China policy, leading to Nigeria's withdrawal of Taiwan's diplomatic status under President Buhari.

Although China's entry to Nigeria was primarily targeted at purely trade relations, over the years it has focused on arms supplies and developmental peace through contributions to nation building processes, particularly in the areas of infrastructural development. While China's main exports to Nigeria are light mechanical, industrial and electric products, it has targeted Nigeria's extractive sector as the supplier of much-needed oil and gas, and other natural resources⁷³. In Nigeria, China has several Chinese-wholly owned or joint ventures currently engaged in construction, oil and gas, technology, services, and education⁷⁴. In terms of infrastructures, China has exploited the vacuum created by the declining interest of the United States to advance its economic interest in Nigeria using infrastructural investment as a tool of winning the support of the Nigerian government.⁷⁵

In trade relations, Nigeria imports more from China than the United States. According to the World Bank, 24% of Nigeria's total importation come from China.⁷⁶ Amidst the decline in the funding of infrastructural projects by the United States, Nigeria secured Chinese loans to fund the construction of several railway, airports, power plants and technological infrastructures in

⁷³ Rindap, M. *An Assessment of Nigeria-China Economic Relations from 1994–2014*. 2015

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). "Notorious Nigerian Weapons Broker Lands Secret Arms Deal in Senegal." *OCCRP*, December 10, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigation/notorious-nigerien-weapons-broker-lands-secret-arms-deal-in-senegal>

⁷⁶ World Bank. (n.d.). *Nigeria country snapshot: Trade and investment data*. World Integrated Trade Solution. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountrySnapshot/en/NGA>

Nigeria.⁷⁷ However, the cutback of China's funding of infrastructures across Africa may force Nigeria to look up to the United States or Europe to fund its ongoing projects.⁷⁸ Yet, even with the cut back, FOCAC Beijing Action Plan(2025-27) still promises US\$50 billion financial support to Africa and a commitment to finance 1000 projects during the same period to improve people's livelihoods. A number of scholars, mostly using the dependency theory, have analyzed the relationship between both countries and have come to the conclusion that despite the increase in the volume of trade over the decades, there exists a huge trade imbalance that needs to be addressed⁷⁹. Despite the efforts being made to bridge this trade deficit, Oyeranti *et al*⁸⁰ note that despite the doubling of FDI inflow from China from 2003 to 2006, the share of the oil and gas sector, which was about 75%, indicated the strong interest of China in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. It is instructive to quote copiously from Osimen, who notes that:

Nigeria exclusively imports more from China than from USA and India combined, with little exports in return. China only imports unprocessed agricultural items like cotton and timber and minerals like crude oil from Nigeria. China has added mechanical and human expertise and investment capital to its list of exports to Nigeria with over 200 Chinese companies operating in Nigeria. The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation is almost exclusively in charge of rehabilitating Nigeria's railway system. The China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and the China National Petroleum and Chemicals Corporation (CNPCC) are getting juicy projects and making enviable inroads into Nigeria's deep water oil fields. China National Overseas Company (CNOOC) won a 45% stake in OPL 246 in Nigeria's Akpo oil field. In that deal, CNOOC is to have 70% of the profit whilst Nigeria's NNPC goes home with 30%. Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was awarded the license for four oil blocks. OPL 471, 721, 732 and 298; in return, CNPC was to help rehabilitate the Kaduna refinery estimated to cost \$2billion.⁸¹

In May 2007, Nigeria's first communications satellite, known as NIGCOMSAT-1, was launched and was Africa's first contribution to the Global Navigation Satellite System. This satellite launch aimed to facilitate telecommunications in several parts of Africa, especially in the areas of

⁷⁷Bloomberg News. "China Infrastructure Funding Stalls for Nigeria." *Bloomberg*, May 17, 2022. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-17/china-infrastructure-funding-stalls-for-nigeria?embedded-checkout=true>.

⁷⁸Guardian Nigeria. "Amaechi Announces Delay in Rail Projects as China Suspends Funding." *The Guardian*. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://guardian.ng/news/amaechi-announces-delay-in-rail-projects-as-china-suspends-funding/>

⁷⁹ Agubamah, E. "Bilateral Relations: Periscoping Nigeria and China Relations." *European Scientific Journal* 10, no. 14 (2014); Rindap, M. *An Assessment of Nigeria-China Economic Relations from 1994–2014*. 2015; Oyeranti, O., A. Babatunde, O. Ognkola, and A. Bankole. "The Impact of China-Africa Investment Relations." *AERC Collaborative Research China-Africa Project* 81 (2010); Osimen, G. "Nigeria-China Economic Relations: Matters Arising." *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 10, no. 3 (2022).

⁸⁰ Oyeranti, 2010

⁸¹ Osimen, 2022: 46

broadcasting, internet access and telemedicine. NIGCOMSAT-1 was de-orbited in 2008 due to operational failure and has since been replaced by additional satellites, all courtesy of technical and financial assistance by China. In 2018, the Nigerian government had announced China's US\$500 million assistance to fund the launch of two additional satellites, to boost the output of the first satellite by providing satellite communications services to Nigerian companies who had resorted to sourcing from abroad.⁸²

China's sponsorship of the NIGCOMSAT satellites, in addition to the enormous confidence reposed in it to lead on the provision of services and maintenance in the oil and gas and general infrastructure sectors such as railways and roads, is further testament to the cordial business relations between China and Nigeria. From 1999, under former President Obasanjo, to the current Presidency under Bola Tinubu, all successive Nigerian Presidents have visited China and have played host to Chinese leaders. China on the other hand is keen on advancing its geostrategic interests in the exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources and human population for its market using infrastructural projects and loans as tools of enticing Nigeria. Russia, though no longer a big player in Nigeria on the other hand is keen on advancing a combination of military, political and economic interests in the continent that might have implications for Nigeria's regional influence. It is also keen on gaining control of important natural and energy resources in the continent.

Having learnt from its past errors, Nigeria seems to have adopted the posture of playing all sides rather than aligning with any great power in the contemporary global order. Nigeria is conscious that Russia has nothing to offer for the time being, given its ongoing war in Ukraine. Nigeria currently advances its economic interest by exploiting the economic opportunities the United States and China offer amidst the withdrawal of Russia from the continent due to the war in Ukraine⁸³.

Technology is a fundamental sector that animates the great power technological rivalry in Africa. Nigeria's response to keen competition between the United States and China underscores its ability to assert its will by playing both sides. Nigeria's digital infrastructural landscape epitomizes this assertion. As argued *inter alia*, China currently dominates the Nigerian telecommunications market. However, the United States remains dominant in the provision of cloud services⁸⁴ whereas local telecommunications companies like MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile dominate the

⁸² Reddy, V. S. "China's Design to Capture Regional SatCom Markets." *Observer Research Foundation*, 2018. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230522214240.pdf>

⁸³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (n.d.).

⁸⁴ Business Day Nigeria. "Redefining Data Sovereignty: How Nigeria's Local Cloud Providers Are Driving Cost-Efficient Solutions." *BusinessDay*, December 14, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://businessday.ng/news/legal-business/article/redefining-data-sovereignty-how-nigerias-local-cloud-providers-are-driving-cost-efficient-solutions/>

internet provider space⁸⁵. While the jury is still out on the technological competition between China and the United States, any observable technological supremacy of China over the United States in the core areas of modern technologies could impact on the disposition of Nigeria to the great powers. (For example, the release of Deepseek as an open source technology has posed a significant challenge to OpenAI.) Although China's likely technological ascendancy could become a basis for Nigeria to side with China in the expansion of its technological and human capital capabilities, it is doubtful that Nigeria will openly do so given the determination to maintain cordiality with the United States. Ultimately, a coalition of middle power recipients of these technologies might be able to influence both United States and China to privilege interoperability over monopoly since most countries don't have control over the technology they use. The concern though remains how to deal with this – especially for those at the intersection of commercial technology and national security.

Nevertheless, Chinese digital technology offers Nigeria relatively cheaper access to more affordable Chinese smartphones compared with American iPhone and other Apple products which are too exorbitant for the majority of Nigerians. This is an area that the current Government in Nigeria is determined to prioritise in the country's development agenda.

Nigeria's Middle Power Partnerships

Nigeria as a middle power strategically imbibes diverse partnerships with other middle powers to enhance its global stance and navigate complex global dynamics. These collaborations are essential for its survival in the global arena.

- A) **South - South cooperation;** Nigeria actively participates in activities that fosters its relationship with other global south countries by exploring sectors economic, technical and cultural ties. This involves significant relationships with countries like Brazil, India and China. Partnership with China has brought significant infrastructural development to Nigeria such as power plants, railway systems, and knowledge transfer in agriculture aiming to reduce import dependency⁸⁶.
- B) **Joint Initiatives in Peacekeeping:** Nigeria has a great record of peacekeeping efforts particularly under the United Nations, it has record of strategic alliances with other Middle power countries within ECOWAS and AU such as Ghana and South Africa, and within the UN India and Pakistan notably. Through joint exercises and training programs with other middle powers, Nigeria has been able to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces and

⁸⁵Nairametrics. "Top 10 Internet Service Providers in Nigeria by Customer Number as of Q3 2023." *Nairametrics*, December 14, 2023. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://nairametrics.com/2023/12/14/top-10-internet-service-providers-in-nigeria-by-customer-number-as-of-q3-2023/>

⁸⁶The Cable. "US vs China: Nigeria at a crossroads of a changing world". May 17, 2023. *The Cable*. Accessed June 21, 2025. The <https://www.thecable.ng/us-vs-china-nigeria-at-a-crossroads-of-a-changing-world/>

security agencies improving their effectiveness in complex peace keeping environments. Consistent deployment of troops and resources in missions like ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and Liberia underscore its significant contribution to security and stability⁸⁷.

C) Navigating US-China Rivalry: Nigeria is aware of the fact that it cannot navigate the great powers dynamics in isolation, hence, it maintains a multi-alignment strategy instead of being forced to choose between Washington and Beijing. Its diverse relationship with countries like Turkey, Brazil, South Africa and India allows it to navigate different sources of investment, diplomatic engagement, technological innovations among other benefits, which allows it to be free from depending solely on any great power. Also, by coordinating and forming blocs with other middle powers in the UN and G77, Nigeria has the power to exert influence on global issues and prevent the great power dominance narratives.

D) Diplomatic Engagements: To promote an advanced multilateral international system, Nigeria engages with other middle powers diplomatically by leveraging its unique position in its region and globally. It promotes African regional interests during global engagements through building of consensus on issues such as debt relief among other issues. It plays an active role in ECOWAS through its commitment to regional integration⁸⁸, despite the breakout of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to form the AES, Nigeria still engages with these countries.

However, it is important to note that Nigeria's relationship with other middle powers is not transactional but rather is deep rooted in promoting shared prosperity and peaceful global order while these collaborations can provide Nigeria with economic opportunities and diplomatic leverage, likewise security cooperation necessary to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and assert its influence as a significant actor on world stage.

Leveraging Middle Power Status in influencing the Changing World Order: The Nigeria example

In the contemporary era of intense competition and shifts in global power dynamics, states that do not clearly fall within the categories of great or emerging powers find themselves in a state of

⁸⁷ UN Peacekeeping. "Service and Sacrifice: Honouring Nigeria's contribution to UN peacekeeping" Feb 18, 2018. *UN Peacekeeping*. Accessed June 21, 2025 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/un-news/service-and-sacrifice-honouring-nigerias-contribution-to-un-peacekeeping>

⁸⁸ Temitope S.M. "The role of Nigeria in the regional integration process in west Africa (1975 - 2023): Case study of Ecowas" *International Journal of Science and Technology Research Archive*. October 2024, 7(2):001-014. DOI: [10.53771/ijstra.2024.7.2.0059](https://doi.org/10.53771/ijstra.2024.7.2.0059)

uncertainty and quandary and are often left to the whims and caprices of rule makers. Yet there are areas where middle powers have “sufficient overlapping interests and are able to exert their collective weight to sway the evolving geopolitical order towards cooperation and greater stability.” Middle Powers have also demonstrated sufficient latitude in exhibiting distinctive approaches in particular policy areas that allow them to influence global efforts to seize opportunities or tackle challenges in these specific domains – in a manner that can create incentives or dampen the overall temperature of US-China relations.

Nigeria has over the years defined its strategic role and identity in the international system utilising such opportunities. This section focuses on areas where Nigeria has used such a pragmatic approach to leverage its strategic advantages in forging specific alignments based on shared interests and compatible geopolitical objectives. These include the reform of the Global governance agenda, Global tax reform agenda, Regional Security, Population dynamics and Labour Migration and Technology adaptation.

A) Reform of Global Governance

The question of the global governance institutional reform or transformation is as old as the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. Indeed, the body has undergone several changes over the years. Every Secretary-General of the United Nations has introduced a number of reforms but these have been largely seen as tokenistic tinkering at the edges and not “nuts and bolts” changes, especially on the issue of equitable representation. Nigeria has been at the forefront of the struggle to redress the historical injustice of a UN Security Council without any permanent representation from Africa. Having played a frontline role in the decolonisation project and the subsequent struggle against apartheid and settler colonialism, Nigeria has always been seen as a likely nominee of the Security Council were the decision to be taken for underrepresented parts of the world to get permanent seats. And this was not just on account of its foreign policy activism, but also on account of its size and population. Even when it was recommended that Africa would get three security council seats, the thinking was that the seats would go to Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa. Leading the Africa Group at the UN, Nigeria joined forces with other victims of the historical injustice from Asia and Latin America like Brazil and India to put pressure on other countries on the UN reform agenda. Although the struggle is not over and there is evidence to suggest that the election of President Trump might further diminish the relevance of the United Nations if the congressional campaign on the defunding of the UN is anything to go by, the outcome documents of the Summit of the Future held by World leaders in September 2024 recognised the urgent need to make the “UN more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable” and agreed the parameters of reform to include “redressing the injustice against Africa as a priority and, while treating Africa as a special case, improve the representation of the under-represented and unrepresented regions and groups, such as Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.” (UN Summit of the Future, Outcome Documents, September 2024).

Beyond the campaign for correcting the historical injustice in the United Nations, Nigeria's quest for membership of BRICS and G20 derives from the same principle of working with countries of sufficiently overlapping interests in order to exert their collective weight to sway the evolving geopolitical order. BRICS is an evolving bloc of countries with rising influence and agency who believe that the United States has disproportionate influence over the global financial system – an influence that has become more concerning in light of the punitive economic actions and rhetorical threats by the Trump administration. Whilst the objective is more South-South cooperation and more balanced and diversified partnerships rather than knee jerk opposition to the United States since many in BRICS membership and partners are also strategic partners of the United States, there is no question that US' continued retreat from its leadership role by undercutting the norms that have shaped multilateralism since the end of the Second World War would allow BRICS to grow as an alternative platform, especially for potential members drawn to the emphasis on trade and investment benefits and providing members with a leverage to influence China and Russia thus impacting the reform of global governance, financial and multilateral architecture. This equally applies to the proposed G20 membership since Nigeria believes that membership offers the opportunity of working with like minded countries to address pertinent issues around the international financial architecture.

B) Global Tax Reform Agenda

Over the past decade, Nigeria has led the Africa group at the UN, working closely with the G-77 to address international tax abuse and illicit financial flows. At the United Nations General Assembly in September 2024, the Resolution on the “Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the UN” proposed by Nigeria on behalf of the Group of African States scaled through with 125 votes in favour, 8 against and 46 abstentions (including all of the European Union). The UN vote comes a decade after the African Union/UN Economic Commission for Africa established the High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa chaired by former South Africa President, Thabo Mbeki in 2012. The Panel in its report had called on African leaders to step up efforts to ensure that the UN played a more prominent role in tackling illicit financial flows. The report noted that the issue of illicit financial flows was not firmly on the policy agenda of the UN system. It urged more rigorous efforts in support of a unified global architecture on the issue of illicit financial flows. (High Level Panel report on Illicit financial flows)

Given the role Nigeria had played in bringing the High-Level Panel about at the African Union, it decided to lead the African Group at the UN, working with the G-77 and campaign relentlessly to eventually achieve the objective of a UN Tax Convention to: establish an inclusive, fair, transparent, efficient, equitable and effective international tax system for sustainable development with a view to enhancing gathering legitimacy, certainty, resilience and fairness of international tax rules while addressing challenges to strengthening domestic resource mobilization. The Mbeki report had argued that at least \$50 billion is lost annually by African countries to illicit financial flows from Africa. The convention seeks to address taxation of income derived from the provision

of cross border services in an increasingly digitalized and globalized economy as well as tackling illicit financial flows and taxation of high networth individuals and corporations engaging in transfer pricing among other issues.

Now that the concrete negotiations on the global tax convention are in full swing at the United Nations, Nigeria's leading role in coordinating not only the Africa group but also working closely with the G-77 underscores the possibilities and capacity of a middle power exhibiting doggedness and savvy in the pursuit of an agenda that is beneficial to not just the country but several others in the global south. Tax and financial systems are the most powerful tools for creating a just society that gives equal weight to the needs of everyone and effectively helps to address questions of poverty and inequality. By opposing this major reform of the global financial architecture, major countries like the United Kingdom and United States and members of the European Union countries who abstained create the impression that they are against a fair and equitable world. Interestingly, the eight countries that voted against the terms of reference for the UN tax convention negotiations also represent 8% of the world population but are responsible for \$212 billion or 43% of the tax issues in contention.

C) Population Dynamics & Labor Migration

By 2033, projections by the African Development Bank (AfDB) indicate a significant expansion of the youth population. The data further shows that between 2030 and 2050, Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to contribute approximately 90% of the global increase in the working-age population, with Nigeria accounting for a substantial share of this growth. By 2050, Nigeria is projected to become the third most populous country after India and China. The extent to which this demographic shift translates into economic and social progress will depend on how effectively the country prepares for it. Strategic investments in job creation, skills development, and social inclusion will be critical in harnessing the potential of this youth bulge while mitigating the risks associated with rapid urbanisation in an evolving globe where labour migration is bound to become a negotiating factor for middle powers like Nigeria with large, skilled populations. This development clearly positions Nigeria as a country that requires a distinctive approach to this increasingly prominent policy issue and the way Nigeria responds may help sway others towards greater stability and mutual benefit and accountability on labour migration issues.

Africa as a continent is experiencing seismic shifts in terms of migration flows, both within the continent and outwards to Europe, North America and the Middle East particularly. Of the estimated 150 million migrants around the world, more than 50 million are estimated to be Africans⁸⁹. Given that the number is rising and that the trend is likely to persist for a variety of reasons like violent conflicts and search for better economic opportunities in the foreseeable future, the management of migration is one of the most critical issues confronting international relations in contemporary times. Evidently, well managed migration holds a substantial positive impact both

⁸⁹ International Organization for Migration. *World Migration Report 2020*. Geneva: IOM, 2019.

for the countries of origin as well as significant benefits to the destination countries and, more importantly for global stability and security.

Already, migration features strongly in the EU – Africa relations and immigration is a prime subject in contemporary American politics. It is also known that by 2030, Europe is likely to be confronted with an aged population and a high dependency ratio, which, particularly under conditions of economic growth, are likely to result in an increased labor demand in both low skilled and specific high waged sectors of the economy. So, EU countries are likely to face an increasing scarcity of higher and lower skilled labor, but the significance of this shortage will depend on levels of economic growth, changes in production systems, advances in labor mechanization and external outsourcing of industrial and service sector operations. (International Migration Institute, Exploring the Future of Migration in Europe). Since studies continue to show strong, positive relationship between economic growth and immigration in Europe, we can expect immigration to Europe to increase and to remain a vital factor in meeting expanding European economies' demand for labor. The likelihood of that skilled labor gap being filled by migrant labor from Africa is real.

Since the influence of population flows and, by extension, the role of immigration on labor market dynamics has been established, the criticality of the most populous country in Africa on migration becomes pertinent. Nigeria is strategically positioned to lead the African countries, particularly those with overlapping interests on migration to produce a coordinated, policy response on a continental level to the challenge of population flows and labor migration. While this responsibility is strategically audacious, it presents an opportunity for Nigeria to define and consolidate its middle power status whilst also addressing a strategic national interest. Nigeria must take ownership of its future in an increasingly multi-polar world, and addressing population dynamics and labor migration would go a long way in helping the country achieve this. The African Common Position on Migration and Development already underscores the need for collective effort to address the fundamental causes of migration, the need to see migration from a development perspective, the loss of heavy investments made by African governments in training and human resource development in priority sectors and the negative impacts of the brain drain on these sectors, the impact of labor migration, the impact of remittance flow from migrant labour which is now twice the amount of development assistance (foreign aid) to Africa, the link between migration and peace, security and stability amongst other cross cutting issues of human rights, gender, the elderly, children and youth, health, environment, trade and access to social services and migration.

In light of the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the world, migration is another issue through which Nigeria can enhance its middle power status by leading the continental agenda for migration and development.

D) Regional Security

The primary duty of any nation is the security and welfare of the citizens. As explained in earlier sections of this chapter, Nigeria has consistently defined its security obligations beyond its

nationally defined borders to incorporate the concentric circles of its immediate neighbours, the sub-regional states and then, to the countries from the continent. This informed its pan-African duty against colonialism and apartheid in Southern Africa and its extensive peacekeeping duties in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and the Gambia. With current developments in the West African sub-region where ECOWAS has earned credibility for its pioneering peacekeeping intervention in guaranteeing regional security, particularly with the exit of AES states from ECOWAS, Nigeria must now take this moment as an opportunity to re-imagine and recalibrate the regional security project in all its dimensions. The current crisis also presents a chance on how ECOWAS can move beyond being an elite driven institution to one that truly represents and serves the West African peoples. The challenges of poverty, inequality, governance deficits, and insecurity cannot be addressed by ECOWAS in its current form. There is an urgent need for a new, citizen-centred approach that responds to the real concerns of ordinary Africans, rather than focusing solely on the priorities of the political leaders.

As ECOWAS reaches the half century mark, the period must serve as a moment of reckoning, a time for deep reflection, bold reforms and a renewed commitment to the principles of regional integration, security and inclusive governance. Nigeria must also reflect on how best to address the instability in the region. A key part of that reflection must focus on security and the role of the military in the region, particularly in curbing proliferating insurgencies, terrorism, and militancy. It seems clear now that traditional military strategies alone are inadequate in tackling complex threats posed by the insurgent and terrorist groups. Many of the groups are now deeply embedded within communities and even, in some cases, within the military itself. What is needed is a more sophisticated intelligence-based approach, combined with efforts to address the underlying social and economic drivers of insecurity. Military force alone will not resolve the region's security challenges. What is required is a comprehensive human security strategy that deals with the issues of poverty, inequality and governance failures which extremist groups continue to exploit.

To do the above however, Nigeria still has a duty, indeed a responsibility to help restore confidence in the regional integration project by security its people. To address this immediate need, Nigeria has championed the establishment of the African Standby Force. This is Nigeria's opportunity to deploy its middle power attributes to reassert its influence and restore peace. This regional responsibility will also serve the objectives of security internal security and stability in Nigeria since the local franchises of insurgency are inextricably linked with its external wings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria's identity as a middle power is shaped by three different ingredients of state power potentiality within international relations: natural, tangible and intangible sources of power.⁹⁰ The country ranks as the 8th largest by surface area, measuring 923,770 km², with an estimated 76.6% classified as arable land under permanent crops and pastures. In other parts of Africa with large land mass for agricultural cultivation, Nigeria proved to be faring better. For instance, among the top eight largest countries, like Algeria, Sudan, Libya, Chad, Niger, Angola, Mali, and the

⁹⁰ Mingst, Karen A., Heather E. McKibben, and Ivan M. Arreguín-Toft. *Essentials of International Relations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.

Democratic Republic of Congo, with their share of 31.4% average is less than half of the cultivable land in Nigeria.⁹¹

This shows that Nigeria is a significant producer or has the potential to become a leading provider of agricultural supplies, thereby contributing to Africa's and global food security, which can complement both the US/China's efforts. Nonetheless, the insecurity in the Northeast and certain areas of the Northwest due to terrorist organizations and bandits, the armed conflicts between cattle herders and farmers in parts of the North-central and Southwest, as well as the sporadic secessionist movements in the Southeast and parts of the South-south, impede Nigeria's ability to realize its potential as a food security guarantor.

The US-China dynamic, rather than being competitive, can complement each other, with the US offering more security-tailored intelligence and industrial capacity building while the Chinese supporting with concessional development lending and technology expertise with more freedom on domestic Nigerian or African contract tenders. The population size and the availability of natural resources, including gold, iron ore, limestone, oil, natural gas, and coal, also position Nigeria as a significant regional power in West Africa. This status is further underscored by its emerging role in the continent's economic landscape, as evidenced by gross domestic output and various socioeconomic indicators relative to countries within the continent.

In addition to its natural source of power, it possesses tangible attributes such as industrial development, infrastructure quality, and military strength. Nigeria has historically been acknowledged for its substantial involvement with transnational and transcontinental corporations in diverse sectors, including oil, pharmaceuticals, and production and distribution operations. Notwithstanding the infrastructural disparity between rural and urban areas, marked by inadequate road conditions and extensive railway initiatives, Nigeria stands out as an investment hub and a catalyst for domestic innovation, tackling its challenges while pioneering novel methodologies, technologies, and governance strategies to confront some of the globe's most enduring developmental issues, offering valuable lessons for the US, China, and the international community.

Instead of rivalry, the partnership between the US and China in Africa strengthens Nigeria's role as a crucial middle power – a bridge between the two, thereby increasing its influence in regional and global diplomatic spheres. Nigeria, supported by both powers in its efforts towards economic development, infrastructure improvement, and governance reforms, is positioned to spearhead African representation in global decision-making. The country's prominent role in climate negotiations, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), global finance architecture and

⁹¹ World Bank. *Agricultural Land (% of Land Area) – Africa*. World Bank Group, 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS?locations=A9>

energy diplomacy via OPEC is bolstered by a stable geopolitical landscape, wherein external collaborations prioritize shared advancement over competition.

Also, its track record of leadership in spearheading and championing transnational development cooperation agreements like the 1975 Lome Convention, 2000 Cotonou and 2023 Samoa Agreements, all with the European Union, with expertise, knowledge, and information through both its state, network and market apparatus makes it a significant actor as Africa's geostrategic lever which countries can lean onto. In addition to accelerating economic diversification, improving governance, and solidifying its position in sub-Saharan African multilateral institutions, the Nigerian government can exploit opportunities by bolstering domestic institutions, maintaining security, and encouraging economic resilience and knowledge production. Nigeria's active participation in multilateral institutions within Africa and the global state system is a noteworthy achievement that involves greater responsibility and provides more chances for deeper engagement.

It is crucial to consider Nigeria's contribution to West African peace and stability, particularly during the turbulent Liberian and Sierra Leonean Wars. Its reputation as a stabilizing force in Africa is strengthened by its support of UN peacekeeping operations and its leadership in regional conflict resolution, as demonstrated by its involvement in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Similarly, its involvement in the struggle for African liberation, including the confrontation with a superpowers such as the US, which backed the white minority regimes in Southern Africa during the latter half of the 20th century, illustrates its willingness to participate in global international politics, especially as the geopolitical competition between the US and China intensifies in Africa.

Nigeria's neutral stance in the global geopolitical rivalry necessitates a more pragmatic foreign policy that fosters cooperation with both the US and China, just as it has managed to do over the years. However, Nigeria should apply a re-invigorated pace to place its interests and those of Africa above superpower rivalry. By leveraging its historic goodwill, it can serve as a model for integrating the two superpowers to promote complementary, mutual, and significant development. This approach may facilitate increased engagement with African nations in various multilateral initiatives, enhancing its intangible assets of national prestige and public leadership within Africa's immediate geopolitical context and on the global stage.

Additionally, Nigeria's engagement with global institutions like the United Nations, the G20 (as an observer in the 2023 meetings in India and a member of the AU, the 21st full member, where its influences sway), and the Non-Aligned Movement reflects its aspiration to shape global governance while maintaining strategic autonomy. Such natural, tangible, and intangible potentials, exemplified in how Nigeria treads, are a gain to Africa, as the US and China operate in Africa and on the world stage. However, domestic challenges—including governance deficits, economic instability, corruption, and security threats such as terrorism and insurgency—must be addressed by Nigeria since they limit its ability to leverage its middle-power status for broader international influence fully.

Hence, the US and China should establish a trilateral cooperation framework with Nigeria focused on joint infrastructure development, economic diversification, and security assistance because that is what matters most to Africans, whether in Africa or in the diaspora. Ensuring that investments align with Nigeria-Africa development priorities rather than geopolitical competition is a plus to Beijing and Washington, who have rhetorically argued their concerns for a more peaceful and prosperous world order.

In this chapter, efforts have been made to explore Nigeria's place as a middle power in contemporary international relations. The chapter started by considering Nigeria's credentials as a middle power vis-à-vis its economic, military, diplomatic, demographic, and strategic capabilities. Problematizing Nigeria's middle power capabilities in the context of the current global multipolar geopolitical dynamics. Whilst acknowledging its place and potentials, it also analyses the challenges and prospects of the country's middle power status in relation to its domestic politics and foreign policy.

In conclusion, the chapter argues that Nigeria's status as a middle power in the present-day global affairs is a remarkable development with significant implications for regional and global governance. The strategic import of such is that Nigeria is leveraging on its relative influence to make impact in terms of shaping outcomes on key regional and global issues. This is despite numerous security, governance and development challenges the country has had to grapple with domestically over the years.

Through its permanent leadership role in continental regional organizations, such as ECOWAS and the African Union, Nigeria has contributed immensely to promoting the cause of regional integration, peace and security in Africa. Similarly, Nigeria's active engagement in global multilateral forums, including the United Nations and the Commonwealth, has enabled it to canvas for Africa's interests in the process of global decision-making. However, to sustain its middle power status and optimize the strategic advantage associated with that, Nigeria needs to address its domestic challenges, particularly the spiraling insecurity, economic vulnerabilities and collapsing institutions. This is in addition to leveraging cultural and diplomatic strength to build strategic partnerships towards promoting its national interest.

Nigeria's middle power status offers significant possibilities for the country to push its strategic interests more vigorously amid the dynamic multipolar geopolitical competitions that characterise the present world order. It also presents opportunities for the country to play a more active role in shaping global affairs, advancing African interests, and contributing to addressing global concerns. As the international system continues to evolve and transform, Nigeria's ability to reinvent its strength through strategic statecraft is a necessity for its continued relevance in global politics and diplomacy. Nigeria's ability to adapt, innovate, and lead will be critical determinants of its

prospects for maintaining significant influence, stake, and reckoning in the ever competitive and dynamic global affairs.⁹²

⁹² Fayemi, Kayode. *If This Giant Must Rise*. Lagos: Masobe Books, 2025