

## FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF INSECURITY: HOW TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME ARE RESHAPING NIGERIA'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS

***Patience Ikyaa-Ola ABIDOYE,***

*Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Faculty of Management and Social  
Science, Baze University, Abuja,  
patience8183@bazeuniversity.edu.ng*

### ***Abstract***

*The paper sought to analyse foreign policy in the age of insecurity with focus on how terrorism and transnational crime are reshaping Nigeria's external relations. The study contends that ongoing issues like violent extremism, cross-border banditry, human trafficking, arms proliferation, cybercrime, and maritime insecurity have shifted Nigeria's external focus from mainly diplomatic efforts to a security-centric foreign policy approach. Using empirical evidence from regional security operations, multilateral agreements, and bilateral defense collaborations, the study shows how Nigeria's diplomatic focus increasingly aligns with counterterrorism efforts, intelligence-sharing, and international security frameworks within ECOWAS, the African Union, and global institutions. The paper also examines how these security challenges have reshaped Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa, positioning it as both a security provider and consumer within complex cooperative networks. Theoretically, the article contributes to foreign policy analysis by applying securitization theory and complex interdependence to explain how non-state threats influence state behavior and diplomatic decision-making. The study recommended strengthening diplomacy, enhancing regional and global cooperation and integration of human security into external relations among others.*

***Keywords:*** *Insecurity, Terrorism, Foreign Policy.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

During the past decade, global insecurity has evolved past the traditional scope of interstate warfare and expanded into a protean combination of armed conflict, extremism, and violence, respectively, and crime, which increasingly amplify suffering of the human population. The

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that homicide, singlehandedly, causes more mortality than armed conflict and terrorism combined, which exposes the deadly reach of organised crime and interpersonal violence, and how the combination of these factors is now a substantial contributor to global insecurity along with war and insurgency (UNODC, 2023). Furthermore, available conflict data shows that the last five years have recorded the highest levels of organised violence and civilian deaths, demonstrating a worsening state of enduring violence in many parts of the world (Uppsala Conflict Data Program cited in The Times, 2025). Perhaps the most important and striking dimension of contemporary global insecurity is terrorism and violent extremism, which have outgrown their previous limitations as a source of violence and now play a major shaping role in global patterns of violence

According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2025 report, the Sahel region of Africa is the new epicenter of the world's terrorism for the year 2024, with more than 50% of all the deaths due to terrorism, and having expanding violence from groups like Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State (Institute for Economics and Peace, as cited by TRT Global, 2025). The violence of these extremists as terrorism shows that the focus of all these insecurities are shifting, and that the power of regionally armed groups are increasing in proportion to the terrorism they practice globally.

Certainly, Nigeria is of great importance to the West African region due to its massive population (over 220 million people) and its consequential rate of economic productivity; the West African region is marked by its population of more than 350 million as composed of the 15 ECOWAS member states (World Bank, 2024). The whole region's economy and its subsequent economic activities are largely dependent on Nigeria as Nigeria single-handedly contributes to 60-70% of the ECOWAS total GDP (ECOWAS Commission, 2023). Additionally, Nigeria's position as the biggest oil producer in the African continent and its large consumer market means that Nigeria's economic performance determines the economic performance of its neighboring countries (IMF, 2024). Furthermore, Nigeria is critical for the West African region because of its significant role in regional security and peacekeeping. Records from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) indicate that Nigeria provided the bulk of the troops, logistics, and financing for ECOMOG activities in Sierra Leone and Liberia from 1990-2000, having supplied over 70% of the forces and provided over 70% of the financing (Adebajo, 2019). Aside from these, Nigeria has also contributed significantly in restoring peace in The Gambia (2017) and counter terrorism in the Lake Chad

Basin as part of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (International Crisis Group, 2023). Such continuing security activities reaffirm Nigeria's primary position as a security provider in West Africa. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the implications of increasing terrorism and transnational crime for Nigeria's foreign policy focus, diplomatic relations and international engagements in a world of growing international insecurity.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework consists of conceptualising terrorism in contemporary international relations, transnational organised crime and global security governance and foreign policy as a security instrument. These are subsequently discussed.

### **Conceptualising Terrorism in Contemporary International Relations**

Defining Terrorism remains the most contentious issues facing international relations (IR) today. Although scholars continue to disagree about the nuances of the definition, terrorism can be described as the use of violence (or the threat of violence) to achieve the goals of a perpetrator, who is a non-state or sub-national actor, as a means of frightening the general population in order to influence a particular policy, although it is almost always the case that the intended victims are not the focus of the defined objectives of the actor (Hoffman, 2017). Terrorism is described in the theories of modern IR as an expression of violence that is directed toward goals that are external to the state. It is in this sense that the 'map of terrorism' is almost always a reflection of violence that is instrumental in achieving political goals of the modern state, and in that regard, the modern terrorist group incorporates the elements of globalization and modern technology to achieve transnational and/or global objectives (Kennedy, 2020). Organizations like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and the Islamic State Group have the ability to operate in numerous countries, recruit foreign personnel, and take advantage of underdeveloped governance structures, resulting in the alteration of the world's political landscape. Terrorism is an international crime that threatens all nations and requires all available resources to combat it, including the collaboration of local, regional, and global stakeholders, as articulated by Weinberg et al. (2020).

In international relations, terrorism also challenges the traditional realist perspective of the superiority of states and military deterrence. For realists, terrorism is primarily a challenge to a state's sovereignty, and as such, a reliance on military resources and counter-terrorism is required. Furthermore, the political dimensions of terrorism have come to the forefront in many of its definitions. Terrorism, particularly from the perspective of weaker states, is an instrument of asymmetric warfare that is used to target more powerful countries and influence global governance.

### **Transnational Organised Crime and Global Security Governance**

Transnational organized crime encompasses illegal activities that cross national borders and have a large impact on crime, social order, economy, and governance around the world. According to UNODC (2023), crime that falls under this category include the trafficking of drugs, weapons, people, cybercrime, and the laundering/trading of natural resources and wildlife. TOC organizations take advantage of disorder to expand, posing a global security threat, and disorder in international relations, legal frameworks, and technology.

The traditional frameworks of a state's security have proven inadequate in the face of the challenges posed by transnational crime, and only through a high degree of collaboration and an integrated approach to the prevention and suppression of transnational crime will a realistic global security be possible. The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also known as the Palermo Convention, is one of the most important instruments that the world has in terms of legal framework and structure for the harmonization of laws, the establishment of extradition treaties, and civil asset forfeiture (United Nations, 2023b). TOC also facilitates the establishment of frameworks for the trafficking of humans, migrants, and arms. Regarding global governance, security, and human rights, the conflict of TOC is of great significance.

### **Foreign Policy as a Security Instrument**

Foreign policy is important to every nation as it helps to determine the interaction of that nation with others in the world and also to ensure that their nation is secure from threats from other nations through aggressions and threats. Diplomacy is important because it helps to settle issues, threats, and conflicts without the use of force. This has been the case with foreign policy with Nigeria as it has always been concerned with the securing of threats and maintenance of regional security and formation of global democratic alliances against global terrorism and

other crimes (Adam, Abdullahi, & Kellu, 2024). This gives the states security and helps to mitigate the international threats and aggressive behaviors of other states. An example is the Nigeria ECOWAS and AU cooperation in the fight against terrorism and other crimes, which is a good example of proactive use of Nigeria's foreign policy in the improvement of national and regional security, which is also the aim of the collaboration (Oba, Nte, & Isa, 2025).

### **3. THE EVOLUTION OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY ARCHITECTURE**

#### **Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy Tradition**

An Afro-centric perspective has been a key element in all Nigerian foreign policy studies by different authors. For instance, after Nigeria became independent in 1960, this Afro-centric perspective was shaped by different factors, including, economically, a robust region, a strategically advantageous geographical location, and a demographic potential as the overall most populous country in Africa, and politically, the ambitions of competing regional powers (Saliu, 2005). Additionally, political analysts agree that the 1970s radical ideological shift was a continental policy of soft and hard political aggression, where in a short time span, a policy statement as a demonstration of continental aggression was made by Nigeria in 1961, breaking diplomatic relations with France because of nuclear test in the Sahara (Aremu, 2005). Nigeria's active involvement and support of liberation struggles in Southern Africa cemented Nigeria's self-perception as a defender of African self-determination which further enhanced its continental leadership.

In addition, research on the subject has yet to reach a consensus on the extent to which Nigeria's financial and diplomatic efforts influenced the outcomes of the southern African liberation movements, or the recognition and appreciation of the supportive efforts by recipient countries (Aremu, 2010). Still, the impact of the aforementioned policy on the repositioning of Nigeria in the contemporary international relations of Africa, particularly in the recent past, is clearly evident. Such impacts include the diplomatic expansion of Nigeria in Africa, the consolidation of Nigeria's leadership in regional blocs (like ECOWAS and the African Union), the increase of Nigeria's involvement in peacekeeping missions under the United Nations, and Nigeria's prominent role as a conflict mediator in Africa. All of these impacts demonstrate the strong influence of Afrocentrism in Nigeria's international relations and relations with countries on the African continent (Saliu, 2018).

### **Post-Cold War Adjustments and Democratic Transition (1999 to 2010)**

Following the end of military rule in Nigeria in May 1999, Nigeria embraced a new form of governance which presented a new phase in Nigeria's foreign policy. During this time, Nigeria's foreign relations were influenced by the policies of President Olusegun Obasanjo, which were of unfriendly policy towards foreign countries, but reconciliatory towards the global community; thus, Nigeria, for the first time, designed a foreign policy that adopted a democratic approach by integrating the promotion, protection and sustenance of fundamental human rights, the rule of law, and the people's right to self-determination policy. Additionally, post May 1999, Nigeria's foreign policy adopted economic diplomacy, thus, for the first time, Nigeria's foreign policy focused on the sustenance of economic interests of foreign countries, the attraction of foreign economic interests to Nigeria, and the promotion of democracy, the reduction of foreign economic predicaments, and economic empowerment of Nigeria.

This segment of Nigeria's foreign relations strategy parallels what some researchers have characterized as 'shuttle diplomacy'. It entails that Nigeria, more than any country in Africa, reached out diplomatically to the great economic as well as the principal international economic entities, for the purpose of trade, development, and promoting international economic integration. This aspect of Nigeria's foreign relations policy demonstrated a new era in the history of Nigeria in that for the first time, Nigeria's development policy and Nigeria's foreign policy were in a comprehensive manner articulated to reflect the integration of Nigeria's economic and security predicaments and Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **Security Challenges and Policy Shifts Since 2011**

Nigeria's internal security scenario has been very different from the pre-2011 scenario due to the internal crisis caused by the Boko Haram Upsurge in the North-East region of Nigeria. Boko Haram Upsurge started as a home-grown radical Islamist ideology. Over the years, Boko Haram Upsurge has shifted from being one of the worst home-grown extremist abuses to one of the worst cases of international terrorism. Research statistics posit that from 2011 to 2015, Boko Haram Upsurge-related incidents were responsible for the loss of more than 20,000 lives and the displacement of over 2.3 million people across the globe, Nigeria being one of the worst-affected countries (International Crisis Group, 2017; U.S. Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023). This factor demanded changes to the internal security scenario of Nigeria by increasing the budget of the defence budget of Nigeria to establish the framework

of the MNJTF. Over time, insecurity has permeated various parts of Nigeria as banditry, kidnapping, and acts of crime in the hinterlands, as well as conflicts between herders and arable farmers, have heightened in the North-Western and North-Central zones of Nigeria. Investigations have shown that groups of armed bandits have evolved into a criminal group with a focus on massive kidnappings, stealing of cattle, as well as attacks on villages within these zones, leading to a situation where “rural insecurity has become a matter of national security” (Eneyo et al., 2023).

#### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Another fundamental dimension of this study is mapping out the interface of terrorism and international crime and its implications for Nigeria’s foreign relations. In this regard, Jones and Kotarska (2025) examine this interface in detail, particularly the international crime linkage with Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other associates. From this review, it is undeniable that the aforementioned criminal activities have not only brought more fierce military actions at home, but have also pushed Nigeria to take a more proactive posture in the regional counter-security and international counter-terrorism collaboration roles. In this review where comprehension of Nigeria’s foreign relations is illustrated from the perspective of terrorism and international crime, Nigeria is characterized as a reactive state.

This type of interface has an effect above and beyond, as the dimension of security reveals in the study of transborder crime and its impact on foreign relations. The Nigerian Foreign Policy and Transborder Crime (2024) shows how the cross-border trade in arms, the trafficking of persons, and the trade in illicit funds constitutes a direct and clear threat to Nigeria's diplomatic and regional standing.

The literature shows that due to border insecurities, Nigeria is forced to make changes to its bilateral and multilateral relations, especially with West Africa. Nigeria is trying to form partnerships with its bordering nations to manage cross-border issues. This set of studies shows that internal security issues are becoming more intertwined with external relations issues.

Piate 2025 reviews the literature on the effects of terrorism and insecurity on Nigeria's standing and position as a leader in Africa. This review shows that the ongoing insurgency has led to the decline of Nigeria's leadership position on the continent which has forced the country's policymaking to prioritize security rather than diplomatic soft-power policymaking. This particular piece, with evidence from how Nigeria's involvement in the region is viewed, argues

that internal security issues of a country determine its external relations focus and increase the dependence on regional and global security.

Trans-Border Crimes and Nigerian National Security (2024) addresses the implications of systemic issues like border management, arms trade, and organized crime on national security.

While being mainly interested in national security, it shows how these factors influence foreign policy, specially in relation to regional bodies like the African Union, by not focusing on the fact that effective foreign policy entails trade-offs between security and development.

Studies on the terrorism in Nigeria and the Boko haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region give an example of how foreign policy could be approached from a regional perspective. The focus is on how the terrorism which has been a constant in the northeast of Nigeria has influenced the country's foreign policy, especially, in terms of militaristic partnerships and peace-keeping in the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram Insurgency and Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the Lake Chad Region, 2025). This research is limited in terms of geography, but nevertheless, it helps to sustain the idea that a foreign policy, especially, in conflict, is a direct result of local instabilities. Onyeukwu and Mkpae (2025) discuss the direct impact of the sustained terrorism created by Boko Haram, ISWAP, and banditry on Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomacy. Their review emphasizes that unrelenting violence has tarnished Nigeria's international image, altered global security partnerships, and necessitated policy changes of multilateral security commitments (Onyeukwu & Mkpae, 2025). Hamidu (2025) reviews literature on the cross-border terrorist threat posed by Nigeria's northern neighbors. He explains how border porosity facilitates the movement of combatants and arms, worsening Nigeria's domestic and international relations, especially with neighbors, in terms of border management, cooperative policing, and joint security (Hamidu 2025). Oba, Nte, and Isa (2025) review literature on Nigeria's international relations and cross-border crime. In their work, international crimes such as human trafficking, arms trafficking, and terrorism are linked to international relations and regional policies, which illustrate the impact of cross-border crime on international relations and diplomacy (Oba, Nte & Isa, 2025).

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on the Nigerian security situation and its impact on foreign policy, what is under-explored is the intersection of terrorism, transnational crime, and the reality of foreign policy changes made by Nigeria in the last 10 years. The existing body of work predominantly focuses on either the internal security ramifications of

terrorism, banditry, and cross-border crime in Nigeria (Jones & Kotarska, 2025; Eneyo et al., 2023) or the theoretical and regional drivers of foreign policy change in Nigeria (Piate, 2025; Trans-Border Crimes and Nigeria's National Security, 2024). Therefore, literature on the changing patterns of insecurities and the potential consequences of such developments on Nigeria's foreign policy is particularly sparse for the years 2011-2025. Although there are some studies on the effects of border insecurity in the Lake Chad basin, and Nigeria's foreign policy, they are rather limited in addressing the terrorism, transboundary crime and foreign policy nexus in Nigeria.

## **5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The securitisation theory created by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) states that security is created through social interactions that are discursive and conceptual. They claim that an issue is framed as an 'security threat' is neither an issue nor threat, but rather through the social construction of the issue by a political authority or institution by depicting/constructing the social issue as an 'existential threat' that is of core 'existential' importance and therefore constitutes the necessity for extraordinary measures to be taken. The securitisation process is known to occur by means of a 'speech act' whereby the securitising actor 'mobilises' the audience by advocating for a 'call to action' and is therefore permitted to take action by bypassing and avoiding the ordinary political rules in the political process. The theory is known in relation to the aforementioned issues because of how the states position some issues over others (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Balzacq, 2011).

Securitization theory, while excellent, does suffer from numerous shortcomings and critiques for example, the assertion that the theory tends to be more focused along the discursive side of the nature of security, and often, as a consequence of such, tends to be more neglecting, or less regarding, the sphere of the material, or structural and institutional nature of security threats (McDonald, 2008). Furthermore, the theory has also received critiques for having somewhat of a Eurocentric notion on the focus of Western liberal democracies and the fact that there has not been sufficiently performed, and therefore, the minimalistic delineation of the key concepts central to the theory of securitization, such as, 'existential threat' or 'audience acceptance' (Huysmans, 1998; Williams, 2003). Nevertheless, the theory does lend itself to the analysis of the interrelationship of variables such as, political discourse, the perceived threat to security, and the perception of such an audience among others. An example in the field of

counterterrorism studies would place the government threat discourse as the independent variable, the acceptance or fear perception as the mediating variable, and the counterterrorism measures as the dependent variable (Buzan & Wæver, 2009).

## **6. METHODOLOGY**

The present study is going to use a qualitative data collection method based on document and content analysis of official speeches, policy statements and media coverage pertaining to the securitization of terrorism and transnational crimes in Nigeria. For the purpose of this study, official statements from the government, media coverage, and policy documents from the period of 2015 to 2025 will be analyzed to assess, using the technique of purposive sampling, the securitization of the above issues, mainly, how they have been portrayed as concepts of threats. By examining the interplay and the relationship between government discourse (which is the independent variable), the public perception and the fear (which may be the intervening variables), and the policy and the response to emergencies (which are the dependent variables), this study is going to adopt the securitization theory in a very elaborate and detailed way.

## **7. TERRORISM AND ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIA'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

The impact of terrorism on Nigeria's external relations include BHT and ISWAP, regionalisation of counter-terrorism responses and terrorism and Nigeria's engagement with global counter-terrorism regimes. These are subsequently discussed.

### **Boko Haram and ISWAP: From Domestic Insurgency to Transnational Threat**

Thus, the insurgency in northeastern Nigeria that started at the beginning of the 2000s has turned into a protest and a complex international security matter. This can be explained by the efforts of the Nigerian militants Boko Haram and its split faction, the Islamic State in West Africa Province. In 2002 in the northeastern Nigerian State of Borno, Boko Haram started as a religious reform movement that was against Western education, government corruption, and social-economic discrimination in Northern Nigeria, and which was led by Mohammed Yusuf (Onuoha, 2014; Thurston, 2018). But this violent rebellion of theirs intensified in 2009 with a rebellion and then the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf and as a result created a full-fledged insurgency and its most notorious action to date the kidnappings of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014. This conflict reached its transnational peak in 2015 when Boko Haram swore their allegiance to ISIS, which in turn lead to internal divisions with a split to ISWAP. This

was an indication of internal division within Boko Haram, as shown by a division into the ISWAP, indicating a possible change in the type of warfare, where Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau was characterized by extreme cruelty towards civilians, but ISWAP insurrection became strategic, with military goals, control of the territory, and development of the state apparatus in the Lake Chad basin (International Crisis Group, 2016; Thurston, 2020). The fact that it has extended its operations to the Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, henceforth, clarifies the transnational aspect of ISWAP, which was enabled by the porous borders that exist between nations in the Lake Chad Basin as it is postulated by ethnicity and trading (Onuoha and Oyewole, 2018). The region of Lake Chad is thus emerging as a battlefield of transnational insurrectionist organizations a phenomenon that is destabilizing the sovereignty and conventional state-based security rationales.

### **Regionalisation of Counter-Terrorism Responses**

The implementation of regionalisation in counter-terrorism has been a notable extension of the recent counter-terrorism developments in response to the global scope of terrorist challenges. West Africa again provides a clear example where, in a formal sense, this is visible with the adoption of the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2013) and Implementation Plan (2018—2022), which formalises state collaboration through the exchange of operational state provides, border management, financing streams, and a state-integrated military coalition (ECOWAS, 2013; ECOWAS, 2018). Given the perimeter of current terrorist conflict, the reasoning is clear. This created a region of conflict including the Lake Chad area from 2015 until 2020 during which Boko Haram activity and affiliated Islamic State group operations encompassed all of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The Global Terrorism Index (2023) reports that, as of 2022, terrorist violence in the Central Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) was responsible for more than 40% of all terrorism-related deaths in Africa, a staggering increase from fewer than 2,000 deaths in 2016 to over 11,000 in 2022. Another example of the aforementioned trend is military coordination structures.

Indeed, the MNJTF, revived in 2015, seems to unite Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin as possible participants in joint military operations, with claims to have reclaimed over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> from Boko Haram as of 2018 (AU Peace & Security Council, 2019). In the same way, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, created in 2017, is the first instance of formal military collaboration involving Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania, thus underscoring the adoption of a regional, as opposed to a national, defensive posture (UN Security Council,

2017). Conversely, the above assertions are not supported by the empirical evidence; in fact, the above situations are all manifestations of the unprecedented number of violent extremist acts, five times more than those recorded between 2016-2023 according to ACLED (ACLED, 2024). Like Africa, regionalised security also applies to Europe. A case from Europe is the development of the EU Counter Terrorism Strategy that has been evolving since the year 2005, and this has been evidence more so following the terror attacks in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and Manchester in the years 2015 to 2017.

Collaboration on cross-border crime and intelligence has been exemplified through the creation of the European Counter Terrorism Centre in 2016, along with other EU-wide initiatives like interoperability of information systems SIS II, ECRIS, and PNR (European Council, 2016). Operationalisation of counter-terrorism in EU states is further demonstrated by EU Member States' public records of Europol, which show an average of 1,300 counter-terrorism related arrests per year between 2016 and 2022 (Europol, 2023). This shows that the EU has primarily relied on the policy of regionalism and structural change in response to the threat of terrorism. Political divergence, insufficient capacity, and backwards of regionalism as observed in the case of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, who exited the ECOWAS' security architecture in 2023 and 2024, largely explains the persistent terrorism, despite the increased efforts (UN Security Council, 2024). This means that even with the increased number of institutions, the lack of improvement in security shows that a regional approach to terrorism requires an integrated strategy in terms of political cohesion, capacity, and financial resources. State capacity and legitimacy is the fundamental measure of the effects of regionalisation, whether positive or negative.

### **Terrorism and Nigeria's Engagement with Global Counter-Terrorism Regimes**

Nigeria is shifting its counter-terrorism response from unilateral approaches to integrate counter-terrorism response available internationally. Nigeria collaborates with the UN to implement its counter-terrorism strategy, especially focused on financing, shared intelligence, border control, and legal integration (UNOCT, 2022). Nigeria also collaborates with the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), aimed at providing assistance to terrorist organizations in the Sahel region, including military training, capacity building, and cross-border strategies (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Additionally, the US consideration of Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation in 2013 opened up opportunities for formal intelligence, counter-terrorism financed and operational collaboration (U.S. NCTC, 2023).

Operational collaboration entails intelligence provision, airstrike support, and military action directed to ISWAP and Boko Haram cells from 2016 to 2024 (U.S. Department of State, 2023; UNOCT, 2022).

### **Transnational Organised Crime as a Foreign Policy Challenge**

They consist of SALWs proliferation, human trafficking, drug networks, migration diplomacy, maritime crime and oil theft in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and financial crimes, terror financing and international sanctions risks. These are subsequently discussed.

### **Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation**

The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has graduated into a form of transnational organised crime that constitutes a major challenge to foreign policy, as it connects domestic insecurity with regional and global criminal networks. It is estimated that more than 10 million illegal small arms circulate in West Africa, about 70 per cent of which are found in Nigeria, making the country a key player in regional trafficking routes. Nigeria has over 4,000 km of predominantly porous land borders with Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, allowing continuous cross-border flows of weapons that help criminal gangs combine arms trafficking with other illegal activities, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and illegal mining. The 2011 collapse of Libya significantly heightened arms proliferation into the Sahel, with trafficking routes going through Mali and Niger into northern Nigeria, while SALW proliferation formed part of transnational criminal supply chains (UNODC, 2018; Small Arms Survey, 2021).

### **Drug Networks and Migration Diplomacy**

Also, the case of Nigeria and its fight with drug cartels and irregular migration points to the complex picture of international organised crime, which affects the nation's foreign policy significantly, with its complex connection between internal security and external diplomacy. In fact, figures show that the problem of drug trafficking is still an issue, with the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency seizing over 2.6 million kilograms of illegal drugs and arresting over 18,500 people in 2024, including famous drug dealers, as well as large-scale cannabis farms of more than 220 hectares. Yet, the data from 2021 to 2024 indicates that the NDLEA has been successful in seizing nearly 9.96 million kilograms of illicit drugs and making around 57,792 arrests. This shows the presence of traditional organised crime,

mirroring the global drug trade. This also points to the complex status of Nigeria as both a transit and a source country of drugs within the West African narco-economy, making its international commitments and relationships with partner countries, affected by the global drugs trade, complicated.

The connection between drug networks and irregular migration is clear from studies of returnees on trans-Mediterranean migration routes. Between May 2017 and April 2018, 61.3% of Nigerian migrants were found to have used drugs during migration, while 15.7% were involved in drug trafficking during their migration route. This prevalence rate clearly demonstrates how migration routes push migrants into criminal networks, which are not only a source of criminality but also a survival strategy, thereby entwining the processes of migration risk, irregular migration, and organised crime. The foreign policy link: The case of Nigeria can be considered an issue of foreign policy because of the socioeconomic issues it raises, the relations with other states on migration routes, particularly those with Nigerians in illegal activities, which might need legal cooperation between the two states.

### **Maritime Crime and Oil Theft in the Gulf of Guinea**

The examples of oil theft and maritime crime within the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) exemplify Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) and their impacts affect Nigerian foreign policy, and international maritime governance and additionally, the governance of regional security, stability, and economic wellbeing. The Gulf of Guinea has been described as a highly dangerous maritime region. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) in 2020 reported 295 piracy and armed robbery incidents with 95% of the incidents reported as kidnappings with ransoms. This is a rise in comparison to 162 piracy and armed robbery incidents reported in 2019. Water bodies in Nigeria and around the Niger Delta have remained a hotspot for violent criminal maritime activities with more piracy incidents reported than any other country in the first half of 2020. The country takes the lead with over 80 documented piracy incidents in the first quarter of 2023. The incidents are noted for boarding and kidnapping activities, and the piracy incidents are highly correlated with a rise in maritime crime and kidnapping activities, thereby increasing the cost of maritime security.

Maritime crime and oil theft in Nigeria is indicative of highly organized criminal networks, and is as such a direct threat to the Nigerian economy. The GoG region has a history of illegal oil siphoning and bunkering; the EU Council estimates Nigeria loses an average of 100,000

barrels of crude oil to theft every day, and the country's economy is dependent on the oil sector. The ongoing criminal activities in the region's waters are a result of smothering governance, resulting in the large-scale theft of oil, which in turn, is illegally resold in the region or to bordering countries. Oil theft and bunkering, especially in the GoG, are also linked to other transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, which, due to the nature of the routes used in the transportation of the illicit drugs, calls for improved diplomatic initiatives in the region.

### **Financial Crimes, Terror Financing and International Sanctions Risks**

Given Nigeria's susceptibility to financial crimes like terrorism financing this poses a serious threat to its national security. This threat level was best illustrated when Nigeria was placed on FATF's grey list in February 2023. Nigeria was considered a high-risk target for money laundering and terrorism financing. Countries on the grey list are perceived to be sanctioned and risk high financial costs to foreign investments and international trade. To address the risks of money laundering and terrorism financing Nigeria established, and strengthened the legal, institutional, and operational anti-money laundering mechanisms, cybercrime units, and special units like the Special Anti-Fraud Unit. In the Nigeria Police Force's coordinated attempts to comply with the FATF, the judiciary's output and enforcement activities are very important. The Nigeria Police Force announced that in 2025 they have made 1,088 arrests on financial terrorism, convicted 152, and seized \$11.45 million and ₦142.26 billion. They also arrested 751 for cyber crimes, demonstrating the intersection of cyber financial crimes and transnational crime. This is especially true for cybercrime because it is regulated by the FATF.

Moreover, national initiatives concerning the prosecution and conviction of more than 730 persons involved in terrorism financing show that the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) has supported more than 90 cases. These cases indicate an increasing effort to dismantle networks of financing terrorism (TheCable, 2025).

### **Nigeria's Global Security Partnerships and Strategic Alignments**

#### **Security Cooperation with the United States and the European Union**

Significant military aid and operational collaboration mark the United States and Nigeria's years of partnership. As of early 2025, the U.S. State Department recorded 590 million dollars

worth of active Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases with Nigeria. This exemplifies the U.S. commitment to Nigeria's military aid through FMS partnerships and aid focs programs (U.S. Department of State, 2025). As part of Nigeria's growing military partnership with the U.S., in January 2026, AFRICOM offered 'some' military commodities to the Nigerian army to help them fight terrorism and other Islamist criminal activities, which, in this case, exemplifies the mutual security partnership material assistance (Reuters, 2026; TVC News, 2026). Further, AFRICOM's and Nigeria's military partnership also encompasses joint operations, as evidenced, for example, by U.S.-supported airstrikes on the Islamic State's terror camps in Sokoto State in December 2025, and these operations were conducted with the consent and collaboration of the Nigerian military command (Reuters, 2025).

There also exists considerable operational collaboration and strategic alignment between the U.S. security forces and Nigeria. This operational collaboration and strategic alignment were confirmed when Nigerian officials said they briefed U.S. forces on their operational collaboration prior to the December 2025 airstrike against ISIL affiliates in northwest Nigeria. This strike can be seen as a direct approval from President Bola Tinubu after talking to the American officials, revealing this sort of strategic collaboration in counter-terrorism planning and the actual operational strike (Reuters, 2025). The U.S. Navies' provision of military supplies and ever-continuing intelligence-gathering operations demonstrate the collaborative effort aimed at constructing the U.S-supporting Nigeria in the fight against extremism. The defense partnership of the U.S. and Nigeria has, at different instances, engaged in considerable amounts of training and peacekeeping, particularly with the recent military supply aimed at enhancing Nigeria's capability in internal security crisis management.

### **Defence and Intelligence Relations with the United Kingdom**

With regards to Defence and Security, Nigeria and the United Kingdom have recognised formal Diplomacy, and this practice has since occurred through the United Kingdom-Nigeria Defence and Security Partnerships Dialogues, which facilitate the Defence Diplomacy of the two countries relating to terrorism and emerging security challenges in relation to Hyper Threats, Cyber Crimes, and Transnational Organised Crimes. Under the United Kingdom-Nigeria Defence and Security Partnerships Dialogues involving Defence Diplomacy, the Third UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnerships Dialogue of 2025 was specific in strengthening collaboration in the sphere of counter terrorism through information sharing, the enhancement of Nigeria's Maritime Domain Awareness, and the Development of Other Capacities in

Strategic Communicative and Joint Operational planning to include the provision of intelligence in the planning of Joint Operational Regional Security. Among the elements of the bilateral relations that the two countries have, is the provision of Services to the Nigerian National Counter Terrorism Centre and the Training of the Fusion Counter Terrorism and Counter Terrorism Financing Investigation Teams of the multiple agencies involved in the bilateral relations that the two countries have. As an illustration, the last Defence and Security Partnerships Dialogue involving the United Kingdom was signed at the height of national coup d'etats in the West African region, during which the United Kingdom's primary Defence Diplomacy has been to provide military training and advisory support to the Nigerian military, which has been the dominant aspect of the United Kingdom's Defence relationship with Nigeria for over a decade.

The UK has been involved with Operation Turus alongside Nigeria to formulate and combat Boko Haram and other terror-related activity. As Recent as 2023, UK military personnel, as trainers and advisors, continue to partner with Nigeria to assist in 'working' with Nigeria to combat the Boko Haram and other terror-related activities. As of 2018, UK military training has reached about 30,000 Nigerian military personnel.

### **Emerging Security Ties with China, Russia and Middle Eastern Actors**

Furthermore, Nigeria has developed its security partnership with the People's Republic of China, beyond the economic relations that have existed, to include the provision of military training along with the local production of military hardware. This was after the Federal Government of Nigeria and China agreed in January 2025 to bolster military collaboration, where China was to assist Nigeria in the fabrication of military hardware and military training to reinforce Nigeria's capacity to combat terrorism, which have been a threat to Nigeria's security(Chukwueme, 2026). This came after the meeting of Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Yusuf Tuggar, and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, in Abuja, to underscore the readiness of China to support Nigeria in the local production of military hardware, and provide military training for up to thousands of security personnel to be recruited from Africa. Nigeria and Russia have also reaffirmed their determination to strengthen military-technical collaboration, and cooperation with regards to the security architecture of the West African region. In 2025, the senior security officials of Nigeria had a meeting with their counterparts from Russia, where Russia reaffirmed support for Nigeria's security apparatus. In addition, Russia pledged to

collaborate with Nigeria in providing training, logistics, arms, and intelligence support. Nigeria also appreciated the pivotal position that it holds in the West African security constellation.

### **Strategic Autonomy versus Dependency in Security Assistance**

Due to the impact of foreign security assistance on Nigeria's military and defence strategies, Nigeria's military and defence strategies have shown improvements and/or setbacks. The US military partnership with Nigeria, for example, has included extensive and many foreign military sales, and also gives foreign military training and foreign military intelligence to Nigeria for the purpose of countering Boko Haram and other terrorist groups. The foreign military sales, which are over \$1.5 billion and include sales of AH-1Z attack helicopters and A-29 Super Tucano jets, are also complemented by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, which trained and equipped (and funded) many millions of dollars to Nigeria between the years of 2016 to 2023 (Adeola & Ogunnoiki, 2020; Akwaya, 2019). This essentially shows that there has been much more dependence on external military equipment and training rather than the development of internal military capabilities (African Journal of Law, Political Research and Administration, 2024; ThisDayLive, 2026).

### **The Operational Consequences of the aforementioned Dependency**

Studies regarding the country's aerial power apart from its intelligence capabilities in the practice of its counter-insurgency strategy have depicted that although the country owns some drones and aircraft from different sources across the globe, it still has to depend on external support in a bid to cover the technological gap in the absence of a precise target in crafting its operations in the remote war-torn areas in the country (Regional Security Analysis, 2026). This technological gap is evidence of the aforementioned problematic ties in the long-term practice of self-autonomy in the country, regarding the craft of its security strategy in the face of, or in the absence of, external support in attaining its mission objectives.

### **Challenges on Nigeria's Security-Driven Foreign Policy**

#### **Institutional Coordination and Capacity Deficits**

Besides issues involving institutional coordination and capacity gaps, Nigeria's response to terrorism and transnational crime in so many ways erodes diplomacy on the country's internal and external sides. Certainly, Nigeria expresses her commitment to regional collaboration to

counter cross-border threats like the proliferation of small arms and the criminal networks that assist insurgents, but role overlaps, poor collaboration, and even inter-agency rivalries among security outfits often lead to a more fragmented approach instead of a more integrated national response. Identifiable domestic challenges such as restrictive and inefficient information sharing, ineffective operationalization of the security architecture, and the bureaucratic slowness of the procurement cycle, all of which hamper the country's ability to effectively monitor and respond to terrorism, undermine Nigeria's position in the front of the window to negotiate and sustain multilateral security pacts with her immediate neighbors and other countries.

### **Civil-Military Relations and Policy Coherence**

This follows the challenge that insecurities pose in Nigeria, which have led to poor relations between the military and the civilian government, as well as huge policy coherence issues that affect the country's foreign policy. Traditionally, civilians and the military have had poor relationships that have caused issues of trust and poor role definition with regard to their shared responsibilities in addressing security challenges such as Boko Haram attacks and banditry affecting the country (Kennedy, 2020). This poor relationship between civilians and the military would logically reduce the role of the Nigerian foreign policy machinery in ensuring that the country presents a clear position when dealing with international partners on counter-terrorism operations, as well as in collaborative efforts to address insecurities affecting some countries in the region. This becomes essential in addressing terrorism and banditry activities spearheaded by organizations such as Al Qaeda and similar international outlawed groups that have become almost impossible to address through civilian foreign policy machinery alone due to their military operations as explained by Ayandeji (2025) and as presented by the publication done by NOUN International Journal of Political Science & International Relations (2025).

In addition, the fragmentation of policy in handling transnational security introduces another dimension of complexity into Nigeria's international relations, given the inconsistency in handling security issues along Nigeria's borders. Transnational criminal organisations have been exploiting the lack of synchronisation between security and diplomatic policies across nations to conduct their operations. It affects Nigeria's foreign policy in important ways, promoting peace and security in the country (NOUN International Journal of Political Science & International Relations, 2025). Improved civil-military relations and synchronisation of

security policies with Nigeria's foreign policy are important for enhancing Nigeria's foreign policy in handling the complexities of the security situation in the country.

### **Internal Governance Challenges and Foreign Policy Effectiveness**

Nigeria's capacity for efficient foreign policy has been greatly undermined by ongoing domestic governance challenges stemming from issues of terrorism and insecurity. Boko Haram has been one of the major agents of instability in Nigeria since the start of the terrorist war, which began in 2009. By the mid-2020s, the Boko Haram conflict had been responsible for the death of 35,000 civilians while displacing over 2 million people in the northeastern part of Nigeria. This instability has weakened Nigeria's foreign relations capabilities and made it imperative for the nation to forge alliances with the armed forces of other countries, such as the US, to combat the Islamist menace. In addition to this, Nigeria's internal governance challenges have been made clear by its efforts in addressing its international-related cybercrime syndicates when, as a result of the federal government's efforts, by August and October of 2025, Nigeria successfully concluded the deportation of 192 foreign nationals convicted of cyber-terrorist syndicates and Internet fraud, and similar financial cybercrimes, indicating the existence of internal governance challenges related to cybersecurity and syndicates of foreign criminals and their impacts on national security and international narratives on Nigeria's rule of law.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECALIBRATING NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

### **Strengthening Security Diplomacy**

So, in order to enhance security diplomacy, the government of Nigeria can focus on further enhancing its engagement in multi-local/region-wide cooperation, as seen in the existing platforms such as the Economic Community of West African States, African Union, and Lake Chad Basin Commission. Where there is an issue, such as the threat of terrorism and transnational crime, further cooperation in the exchange and conduct of intelligence, military, and surveillance operations to foster security and reduce threats would significantly alleviate the issue. The establishment of liaison offices/communication, as well as involving other bordering states, would play a vital role in addressing security concerns effectively, without delayed responses. Measures of cybersecurity would play a critical role in addressing the emerging security issue around transnational crime on cyber grounds, which has been adopted so keenly in undermining local and international governance/acceptability.

## **Enhancing Regional and Global Cooperation**

To make Nigeria's foreign policy even more effective in the face of terrorism and transnational crime, regional cooperation must take precedence, with greater engagement in institutions such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. This approach will likely dilute some of the operational advantages that insurgents and transnational criminals enjoy, stemming from the intelligence, border patrols, and laws they share and respect. For instance, regional rapid response teams or even combined military exercises can help Nigeria and the relevant nations in the region improve interoperability on the operational level. ECOWAS missions in Mali and Burkina Faso have already made it difficult for insurgents to traverse the regions and have been effective in protecting local populations. Apart from this, intensive dialogue enables Nigeria and the relevant nations in the region to develop harmonised security plans, facilitating synergy of efforts in the face of emerging threats and thereby making Nigeria's position even more credible in the international community.

## **Integrating Human Security into External Relations**

To improve Nigeria's foreign policy effectiveness in the face of growing insecurity challenges, it is recommended that human security be incorporated into Nigeria's foreign policy. This approach underscores Nigerians' security from challenges such as terrorism, transnational crime, and human trafficking as a critical feature of Nigeria's foreign policy, going beyond state security or military approaches. The implementation of human security in Nigeria's foreign policy involves promoting regional relations with other countries, engaging non-state actors such as the United Nations and ECOWAS, and designing measures to mitigate insecurity, protect lives, and alleviate socioeconomic challenges in the nation. The adoption of human security in Nigeria's foreign policy relations is essential because it helps Nigeria portray a credible and ethical image to the international community, build robust relations with other nations, and access development assistance from external partners.

To effectively integrate human security into Nigeria's external relations, there should be close coordination among foreign, security, and development agencies through a jointly mandated human security policy unit instituted within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Security Council, and relevant line ministries for identifying cross-border threats, intelligence sharing, and designing preventive measures. Capacity building in human security principles-such as conflict sensitivity, refugee protection, and human rights diplomacy-for diplomats and Foreign

Service staff will underpin active engagement in international discussions and negotiations. Moreover, establishing an associated monitoring and evaluation system to measure the impact of human security initiatives on regional stability, trade, and development will enhance accountability and continuous improvement. It is now time to adopt a human-centred foreign policy that lessens the negative impact of insecurity on Nigeria's external relations and positions Nigeria as a leader in ethical, resilient diplomacy.

### **Improving Institutional Synergy**

To enhance this synergy, therefore, the various security, intelligence, and foreign policy agencies of the Nigerian state could develop structures that enable the efficient sharing of information and strategic planning towards a common end. At present, the ad hoc efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Department of State Services, and similar agencies complicate the development of a cohesive strategy to fight terrorism and international crime in West Africa, for instance. The formation of inter-agency task forces with standardized reporting procedures, common platforms of information sharing, and collective briefings could thus facilitate this much-needed inter-agency coordination and intelligence sharing in Nigeria, as a case in point, the creation of a state security platform that gathers and compiles information from the military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies could help improve the state of situational awareness, minimize duplication of efforts, and foster proactive foreign policy in the state, among other benefits.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the analysis above shows that terrorism and transnational crime have altered Nigeria's foreign policy in different ways and to a great extent, illuminating fault lines in governance, borders, and interagency coordination. The insurgency perpetrated by Boko Haram and ISWAP, and transnational cybercrime syndicates, apart from undermining security in Nigeria, have impacted its foreign policy in the region, as evidenced by events from 2009 to 2025. From the concept, it is evident that while these challenges and foreign policy have undermined Nigeria's capability, it has also partially compelled the entity to adopt regional and international cooperation, which, in some instances, calls for external support to secure its own interests and flag the interdependence of domestic security and international credibility.

However, currently, insecurity in Nigeria is not only an internal issue for the country; it also has International and Transnational aspects that play a very important role in International

Affairs, including diplomacy between various economies globally. This has therefore created a platform where, due to a lack of inter-institutional synergies and the failure of border control measures, the country can act only to a limited extent as a leading player in addressing various aspects of international security and foreign direct investment. However, an adaptive foreign policy, which will help address various issues, for instance, the influence of terrorism, by ensuring the active sharing of intelligence, will be required to address the current issue of insecurity in Nigeria, which will not only help in ensuring the issue is not made worse, but it will also ensure the role of the state, as a leading player, is minimized in addressing various international affairs, diplomacy, and negotiations to boost the position of the state globally, or in various international meetings or conferences.

In the future, for a new Nigeria, it is expected that, in the face of insecurity, the country's foreign policy will have sufficiently addressed issues of governance. Consequently, transnational crime prevention is also expected to be a primary concern. However, for the country to improve its security and gain greater global recognition, its institutional coordination and capacity-building will be instrumental. Indeed, by aligning the country's foreign policy with its security concerns, it is expected that, apart from improving its internal security and independence, it will also be in a position to lead other countries and the regional government in peace and security matters. In conclusion,

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