

NON-ALIGNMENT REVISITED: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY BETWEEN GLOBAL POWER BLOCS

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 investigates Nigeria's foreign policy between global power blocs by revisiting non-alignment. It employed in this research is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical, with the focus being on investigating the foreign policies of Nigeria within the context of contemporary global political realities, involving multipolarity. The theoretical framework was anchored on the Neo-Non-Alignment Strategic Hedging Theory, which is a contemporary concept that seeks an updated form of traditional non-alignment notions, taking into consideration the realities of our contemporary world environment of multiple centres of power and multiple alliances and strategic blocs and rising powers. The study found that during the period when Nigeria remained non-aligned in the context of the Cold War, in reality, elements of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions were strategically driven. The key insights suggest that Nigeria's non-aligned foreign policy reflected ideals of stronger nation-state leadership in Africa and of seeking alliances in economic and military relations. The study recommended that in order for Nigeria to rebuild its posture of non-alignment for the 21st century, there is a need to develop a strategic balancing that will weigh engagement with diverse global powers without compromising national sovereignty and freedom of decision-making. Also, comprehensive and impactful institutional changes would greatly enhance the capabilities and efficiency of the country's foreign institutions and foreign policy.

Keywords: *Non-Alignment, Foreign Policy, Global Power Blocs, Post-Independent Diplomacy.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mounting geopolitical shifts suggest the global hierarchy prioritizing the United States as the dominant power is beginning to level out. A number of states, including China, India, Brazil, and Russia, are revising their foreign policy strategies, and rather than align with one of the great powers, are fostering relationships with a number of influential states and balancing their

possessive inter-state relationships (Parmar, 2019). Considering the diplomatic and military capabilities of each nation involved, the current relevant geopolitical environment is a combination of bilateral and multi-centric systems, with the United States and China as the cores, while the other states are posited on the periphery. This is a realistic ascription of the current state of global multipolarity (Degterev, 2019; Parmar, 2019). The initial activities outlining the existence of the geopolitical shifts stem from significant changes in the economics, military, and structural systems of international relations (Degterev, 2019; Parmar, 2019).

At the time of Nigeria's decolonization in 1960, the Non-Aligned Movement was similar to a policy of self-restraint, designed to impart a sense of control, following a period of international power structures being heavily divided during the Cold War. Historical evidence shows Nigeria's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) due to Nigeria Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Non-Alignment, Nigeria, Cold War, Nigeria's Achievements and Challenges of Nigeria's Non-Alignment Movement Diplomacy. NAM participation is based on military alliance and non-military alliance with both the Eastern and Western NATO countries, obtaining military and economic aids, and maintaining diplomatic relationships. (Akinyemi, 1989; Gambari, 2008). Nigeria's participation in the first three Nams and Flexible A New Diplomacy of Nigeria. Nigeria's Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Non-Alignment, Nigeria, Cold War, Nigeria's Achievements and Challenges of Nigeria's Non-Alignment Movement Diplomacy. Nigeria; (1979) Nigeria and the Non-Alignment Movement; Aluko (1981). The Anti-Colonial Movement in Southern Africa and Nigeria's Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Non-Alignment, Nigeria, Cold War, Nigeria. Nigeria's Participation in the Cold War. Flexible A New Diplomacy of Nigeria: Non-Alignment Movement and Anti-Colonial Freedom Movements Activism Diplomacy. Aluko (1981) the Cold War and Flexible New Diplomacy.

Nigeria's status as a dominant power in Africa reaffirms non-alignment as a fundamental aspect of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria's support of African continental integration through its non-aligned participation in the global south opposing imperialism and colonialism in international relations and Africa's international relations, is demonstrated through its active engagement with the African Union and the defunct Organisation of African Unity (Gambari, 2008). This engagement signifies that Nigeria's non-alignment is no longer merely a political abstraction, posturing, or rhetorical device, but is now a working policy in the contemporary and multiplex

international system (Gambari, 2008; Ate, 2011). The tradition of non-aligned foreign relations which Nigeria has always practiced has become more and more relevant given the complicated global realities of contemporary politics with its multi-polarity. In that respect, this kind of foreign relations became more relevant during the Cold War when African countries were divided along the Cold War lines(Kennedy, 2020). However, the growing partnerships between Nigeria and Asian countries, Nigeria's energy partnership with Russia, and the growing security partnerships of Nigeria with Western (US and European Union) countries raise the question of how Nigeria conceptualizes and implements non-aligned relations. The few studies on the operationalization of Nigeria's non-aligned relations make the question of how to operationalize non-aligned relations even more difficult. Existing studies on Nigeria's non-aligned relations have been more normative than explanatory. Thus, it becomes important to examine the operationalization of Nigeria's non-aligned relations to determine whether Nigeria's foreign relations are autonomous or derived from other relations of various degrees of alignment.

Given the current global conditions, this study will likely be the first to shed some light on Nigeria's non-aligned foreign relations and assist in the country's reinscription into the currently emerging multipolar global order and its associated bloc politics. The study provides Nigeria's non-aligned foreign relations some relevance in the present international relations theoretical discourse and African politics. The study illustrates the actual position of Nigeria's non-aligned foreign relations in the global context of power, especially regarding the Western Bloc, the Russia-China Alliance, and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa grouping, and justifies the relevance of neo-non-alignment as a foreign relations approach and shifted it from the perspective of Cold War politics. The present multipolar international system is the basis upon which Nigeria's foreign policy is positioned, especially concerning the competing global power blocs. At the beginning in 2015, there has been an increase in attention to bloc politics, global power competition, and strategic realignments. This study attempts to bring together theory and history in examining Nigeria's non-aligned tradition - its diplomacy, economics, security, and multi-lateralism vis-a-vis the United States, China, Russia, the EU, and the new players in international relations, the BRICS - as well as her engagements with them in the context of the theory of non-alignment, neo-non-alignment, multipolarity, and strategic hedging and autonomy. The study aims to see how Nigeria practices bloc politics. For this purpose, the author has analyzed secondary data, policy papers, data on global voting behavior, and contemporary geopolitical events.

2. THE HISTORY OF NIGERIA'S NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY

Post-Independent Diplomacy (1960-1979)

Nigeria gained her independence on October 1, 1960. Immediately, the country adopted a foreign policy of non-alignment and strategic independence. This policy clearly outlined the country's intention to participate in the then-existing bipolar world of the Cold War without associating herself with either the Western or Eastern blocs. Upon his initial statements concerning foreign relations, Nigeria's first prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, mentioned that the country's foreign policy would, above all, preserve Nigeria's sovereignty, encourage Nigeria's participation in the Commonwealth and United Nations, support the decolonization of Africa, and promote unity within Africa. This was referenced by Bariledum, Nwigbo & Abang, (2016), who noted that Balewa's speech was delivered as early as the end of the 1960s. Nigeria's endorsement of peacekeeping operations within the United Nations, specifically the deployment of Nigerian soldiers to the Congo, was a clear demonstration to the rest of the world that Nigeria was not going to align itself with any superpower ' bloc (Mays, 2014, turn0search). Furthermore, Nigeria's inability to meet the anti-imperialist and anti-apartheid agenda as stated in policy documents further emphasized the gap between policy statements and implementation (Ajayi, 1985). This implies that in the years that followed Nigeria's independence, the country's foreign policy was based on an unfortunate mix of idealism and dependency, which made it impossible to firmly establish a foreign policy of complete non-alignment.

Cold War Positioning and African Diplomacy

Particularly, Nigeria has sought to assert itself as the regional leader in Africa, yet simultaneously maintain the notion of non-alignment in the Cold War world order. Nigeria's foreign policy, therefore, has revolved around the need to encourage African decolonization processes, including the fight against apartheid politics, in combination with promoting continental political unity, including efforts entailed in the formation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963 (Akindele, 1987). For instance, in the midst of the Congo conflict, Nigeria took the position of a key facilitator in the efforts to resolve post-independence conflict in the African continent, including the Congo conflict (1960-1964), when Nigeria deployed its troops to the Congo in the efforts to maintain stability in the region, yet in no way sought to

accommodate any of the Cold War protagonists, including the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. (Ajayi, 1985).

Effectively, the state's foreign policy during the Cold War was shaped by pragmatic elements such as its economic dependence on other nations or its insecurity, which occasionally interfered with its utility of absolute non-alignment. For instance, academic literature indicates that the state's leaders were committed, on many occasions, to collaborating with European countries with the intention of accessing development support, military training, and political support to facilitate its developmental projects within the region, such as the treaty with Britain or the US (Akindele, 1987; Ajayi, 1985).

Post-Cold War Alignments

The closure of the Cold War in the early 1990s and the ending of the bipolar world system offered Nigeria not only challenges but opportunities in terms of executing foreign policy. There is clear evidence that Nigeria attempted to improve or align non-aligned states policy in a more pragmatic fashion in terms of global powers in confrontational alignments around world or regional issues. However, Nigeria has managed to retain a non-aligned position in Africa and in multilateralism. Nigeria participated frequently in ECOWAS and played important roles in several ECOMOG missions in Liberia from 1990 to 1997 and in Sierra Leone from 1997 to 1999. Nigeria always relied upon Western support but at the same time managed to retain non-aligned state political independence in decision-making in field missions (Okolo, 2002; Adebajo, 2008).

Further, Nigeria strengthened its diplomacy and trade with newly emerging leaders such as China and India, acknowledging the emergence of a new world order with multiple powers. Statistical information has revealed information showing trade with China increased its value from \$50 million in 1995 to \$2 Billion and above in 2010, substantiating Nigeria's realistic nature with external actors (Omenma, 2014). Moreover, Nigeria's engagement with regional and global bodies such as the AU and NEPAD signified its strategic and issue-based concept of non-alignment rather than an overt earmarking of its ideology with either of the global super-states (Akinyemi, 2011).

Democratic Era Foreign Policy Recalibration (1999 to 2015)

However, it is evident that after the democratic leadership of Nigeria in 1999, the nation changed gear and emphasized diplomacy centered on the African continent and integration of the countries therein, as well as the involvement of worldwide powers while maintaining the non-aligned attributes. There exist facts to proof Nigeria has engaged itself in regional peacekeeping and solution-seeking after the leadership of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), and Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015), specifically participating in the regional peacekeeping of the ECOWAS countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. This shows that Nigeria has moved from the path of aligning itself with either of the warring parties of the Cold War to embracing African leadership (Adebajo, 2010; Obi, 2014). Nigeria also pursued the notion of diplomacy by advocating for changes to the United Nations. This approach reflects a blend of strategic independence and coalition-building with emerging powers and traditional Western allies (Akindele & Olaopa, 2013).

Nevertheless, even with renewed emphasis on Africa and global relations, there were periods during this period when foreign policy in Nigeria was dominated by internal factors, such as political instability, economic dependence, and institutional limitations. For instance, even though there was renewed support for regional Peace and Security initiatives by the AU, there were still significant internal dependence on Western funding for peacekeeping ventures, as indicated by Adebajo (2010).

Contemporary Foreign Policy Shift from 2015 to Date

Since 2015, Nigeria has strategized its foreign policy to address the rise of multipolarity worldwide and the question of regional security matters and the economy. Data from several authors demonstrate that the foreign relations of Nigeria during the Buhari administration (2015 to date) have been enhanced via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), wherein more than \$20 billion of investment from the People's Republic of China to Nigeria, specifically on infrastructural, energy, and technology sectors, transacted from 2015 to 2022 (Adeyemo, 2021). Beyond the aforementioned, however, Nigeria's foreign policy in recent times has been influenced, particularly, by domestic/regions' priorities. The rising security threat of the Boko Haram insurgency in the West African sub-region has in this case influenced Nigeria's foreign policy, especially in intensifying its regional efforts in promoting regional

security, especially in the MNJTF, as well as the African Union's operations on the African Peace and Security Council, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin, as discussed in Omotola (2021), irrespective of the need to maintain its operational control. Economically, Nigeria has mostly leveraged its foreign policy in the sense that it has found solace in its bilateral/multilateral relations in advancing its economic recovery and growth plan (ERGP), especially in garnering more foreign direct investment than simply relying on the major powers in the West, as discussed in Adeyemo (2021), thereby advancing Nigeria's foreign policy on the path to moving from its 'non-alignment' foreign policy to an advanced form described as 'neo-non-alignment' whereby Nigeria engages in collaboration with powerful powers globally.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

However, since the attainment of independence, non-alignment has remained an important theme in foreign policy analysis in Nigeria. Non-alignment, which was part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), was perceived, particularly during the Cold War, to be a strategy for newly independent states to avoid ideological or even political conflicts between the USSR and the USA (Ajayi, 1985; Bariledum, Nwigbo, & Abang, 2016). Nigeria was a pioneer in the ideology of non-alignment, which was ideological, strategic, and aimed, amongst other aspects, to ensure sovereignty, support decolonization in Africa, and participate in world peacekeeping. However, it has also been emphasized by various scholars that while non-alignment was a focus for Nigeria, its foreign policy was not entirely ideological, based solely on the ideology of the Non-Aligned states, rather than a number of pragmatic concerns and influences (Akinyemi, 1986; Obi, 2020).

Early studies of Nigerian non-alignment examined its symbolic role in demonstrating independence from former colonial powers. Akinyemi's 1986 paper, for example, argued that, through non-alignment, Nigeria could pursue an independent foreign policy, thereby separating it from colonial and neo-colonial influence, especially in West Africa. Nigeria's involvement in United Nations peacekeeping during the 1960s and 1970s - most notably the offer of troops for the Congo crisis - demonstrated a commitment to world peace beyond bloc politics (Mays, cited in Bariledum et al., 2016). However, evidence shows that actual practice of non-alignment was far from coherent. For example, Nigeria's early security agreements, such as the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement of 1961, reflected alignment with Western strategic interests, despite declarations of independence (Bariledum et al., 2016). Archival research by Ajayi (1985) suggests that these formulations revealed a structural dependence on Western

economic and military aid, which impeded the full independence expected from policies of non-alignment.

However, after the end of the Cold War in the latter half of the twentieth century, academic studies began to explore the economics of the decline of non-alignment diplomacy in favor of new complexities in foreign policy views. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the new position of the US as the single hegemony in world politics prompted questions about the usefulness of non-alignment in a unipolar world (Ibekwe, 2001; Momoh, 2000). According to Ibekwe (2001), in the 1990s Nigeria's foreign policy took a new turn in favor of political and economic alliances in the Western world, especially in terms of cooperation in the fields of democratisation and economic restructuring in Africa in relation to the US and EU states. The above studies indicate that in the new world order at the end of the Cold War in the latter half of the twentieth century, non-neutrality in favor of political and economic alliances in Africa was unavoidable.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Neo-Non-Alignment and Strategic Hedging Theory is a contemporary concept that seeks an updated form of traditional non-alignment notions, taking into consideration the realities of our contemporary world environment of multiple centers of power and multiple alliances and strategic blocs and rising powers. While rooted firmly within the tradition of the Cold War concept of non-alignment, this theory seeks to build upon the field of international relations' theory of hedging to understand the middle and rising powers of the world, such as Nigeria. This theory would be particularly useful when explaining Nigeria's reaction and adaptation of its foreign policy within the context of the 21st century, particularly when confronted with influences from both the West and the newly developed alliances of both China and Russia and the newly developed blocs of BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

By the early 2000s, as China's impact on the world, regional multipolarity, and the diffusion of power among major countries rose, the theory of strategic hedging was conceptualized to shed more light on the foreign policies of middle powers and major countries. Although the theory was first based on the economic risks and management options of countries, it was transformed, and today, strategic theory provides guidance on the means employed by countries to avoid the dominance of one country, and this, in essence, is done by seeking alliances with more than one country. Some prominent foreign policy theorists involved in the

conceptualization of the theory include Avery Goldstein, with a focus on China's foreign strategy towards countries within the continent of Asia; Richard Bush; M. Taylor Fravel; and Yinan He, within the Southeast Asian environment and the Southeast continent. Note that these theorists essentially indicate that, unlike some theories such as the balance and the bandwagon theory, the foreign policies and means of engagement promoted under the theory of strategic hedge, or the strategic theory, ensures diversification and the minimization of risks and challenges.

The Neo-Non-Alignment and Strategic Hedging Framework is based on several interconnected premises: Sovereignty and Autonomy: States emphasise independent decision-making in foreign affairs, avoiding domination by any single power bloc and safeguarding their political and economic independence. Diverse Engagement: Rather than strict alignment, states form various partnerships with different power centers to maximize gains and reduce reliance risks. Risk mitigation involves using hedging strategies to reduce dependence on any single external actor, whether for security, trade, investment, or technology. Contextual Flexibility: Foreign policy decisions depend on changing global power dynamics, regional security dynamics, and internal priorities. Normative Continuity: While pragmatic, neo-non-alignment still upholds normative commitments to peace, multilateralism, and fair global governance.

Despite its utility, there are a number of challenges to the application of this framework. Some scholars have pointed out, for instance, that the concept of strategic autonomy lacks specificity and therefore cannot be easily measured. Some have pointed out that hedging can result in a position of strategic paralysis because a nation can end up with policies which are inconsistent and which can be easily said to be contradictory in nature (Haftel, 2019). A third criticism has been put forward by some scholars arguing that non-alignment in a neo-version can end up being a justification for existing power inequalities in a system with nations being heavily dependent on any of these powers, rather than trying to correct these imbalances. There has also been a concern about it being used to cover up a situation where a Hegemonic desire causes nations to align themselves with others, such as making "non-alignment" a fashionable concept but not a concept which is useful in analysis.

The Neo-Non-Alignment and Strategic Hedging Framework is especially well-suited for examining Nigeria's current foreign policy for multiple reasons:

- a. **Multipolar Engagement:** Nigeria interacts with a variety of international players, including Western blocs such as the United States and the EU, as well as China, Russia, and multilateral groups like BRICS, all while avoiding formal military alliances an approach that aligns with a hedging strategy.
- b. Nigeria's foreign policy emphasizes strategic autonomy by making independent decisions and managing relations with competing powers based on national interests instead of bloc pressures.
- c. Domestic priorities such as security issues (like Boko Haram), economic development objectives, and regional leadership ambitions shape Nigeria's strategic decisions. This framework can analyse and incorporate these factors effectively.
- d. **Empirical Measurability:** Nigeria's voting patterns in the UN General Assembly, bilateral agreements, and investment portfolios serve as measurable indicators of its hedging behavior and neo-non-aligned stance.
- e. **Foreign Policy Orientation** reflects the degree to which Nigeria maintains independence from bloc dictates, consistent with normative non-alignment.
- f. **Engagement with Global Power Blocs** represents the diversification dimension of hedging, where Nigeria interacts with multiple major actors (U.S., EU, China, Russia, and BRICS).
- g. **Strategic Autonomy** captures Nigeria's ability to make autonomous decisions free of dominance by any single power grounded in national interests and normative commitments.
- h. **Policy Outcomes** (e.g., economic benefits, security cooperation, and multilateral influence) serve as dependent variables influenced by Nigeria's enactment of neo-non-aligned hedging strategies.

5. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this research is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical, with the focus being on investigating the foreign policies of Nigeria within the context of contemporary global political realities, involving multipolarity. The methodology employed involves secondary research, primarily based on official sources, official documents, official speeches by Nigerian officials, UN records, research papers, research books, news papers, etc., all dating back to 2015. The methodology, i.e., the Neo-Non-Alignment and Strategic Hedging Framework, provides the theoretical foundation for investigating Nigeria's foreign policy,

including foreign engagements, autonomy, and engagements with multiple alignments, etc. The analysis, assessment, comparison, thematic, etc., methodology helps in comparing, evaluating, and investigating foreign policies, foreign engagements, foreign relationships, economic foreign engagements, security foreign engagements.

6. NIGERIA BETWEEN COMPETING POWER BLOCS

Nigeria and United States Relations

Between 2017 and 2025, Nigeria and the United States strengthened their bilateral security relationship with joint efforts to fight violent extremism through the improvement of military capability. In 2017, the U.S. approved the sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft valued at approximately \$593 million to Nigeria for counter-terrorism against Boko Haram in the northeast. This was followed by other military sales in 2023, an additional \$1 billion worth of weapons to further improve Nigeria's defense capacity. By 2025, this partnership further evolved into direct operational cooperation when, for the first time, the U.S. conducted airstrikes against Islamic State-affiliated militants in northwest Nigeria in coordination with the Nigerian government on December 2025, marking a new level of security collaboration. In the same period, the U.S. committed to delivery military equipment, including drones, helicopters, and support systems purchased over the last five years after high-level talks with Nigerian security officials amid diplomatic tensions that stressed the sustained hardware and intelligence support.

Nigeria and China Relations

Since the early 2000s, Nigeria-China relations have recorded improved developments in terms of infrastructure growth. The relations acquired a new dimension in development when China became a significant Nigeria development partner. In 2006, China committed about US\$4 billion to Nigeria's oil or infrastructure sectors. This pledge included a loan of US\$1 billion dedicated mainly to Nigeria's rail development modernization. This marked the first indication of improved Nigeria-China relations (China–Nigeria Relations, 2026). During the subsequent ten years or more, various industries from China, including the renowned China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), invested more than US\$7 billion in various crucial sectors like rail transport development, road development, airport development, and

bridge development. Significantly, in 2022 alone, the collective efforts of the two parties resulted in the development of about 717 km railroads and the modernization of Nigeria's top four international airports, signaling the extensive scope and technology applied in Nigeria-China relations in the context of development (China–Nigeria Relations, 2026; Nigeria-China Cooperation, 2024).

Under President Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria sought the FOCAC platform to secure funding for some development projects. In 2018, at the FOCAC summit, Buhari boasted that, over a period of three years, Nigeria received over US \$5 billion in Chinese-supported projects. Such projects were the US \$500 million Abuja–Kaduna rail line and Nigeria's first urban rail system. Then there was the rehabilitation of airport terminals, the Lagos–Kano rail line, the Zungeru hydroelectric project, and the ICT infrastructure, including fibre-optic cables. A loan deal for rolling stock valued at US \$1 billion and also road rehabilitation sealed a wide-ranging engagement of infrastructure, technology transfer, and financial support.

China's Development Finance, however, remains active even in the 2020s, with especial focus on infrastructure development and technological growth. From 2000 to 2023, about US \$9.5 billion was extended as loans to Nigeria, of which about 65%, or US \$6.2 billion, was invested in infrastructure, particularly transportation, leading to remarkable advancements in the ICT industry and the energy sector. Moreover, in 2025, the Nigerian government approved US \$652 million from China's Exim bank to develop a road that strategically connects the Lekki Deep Sea Port to all other major economic zones within the country (Grokopedia, 2026). All the while, Nigerian trade with China also rose to US \$25.68 billion by the end of 2021, recording 33.3% growth compared to the previous year, while Chinese investments exceeded US \$20 billion, particularly in infrastructure, free trade zones, oil, etc.

Nigeria and Russia Relations

Nigeria and Russia have a bilateral energy relationship of over a decade, centered on partnering to utilise Nigeria's hydrocarbons and Russia's energy expertise. There has also been a June 2009 agreement between Gazprom, Russia's energy powerhouse, and Nigeria's National Oil Corporation to establish a \$2.5 billion venture, Nigaz, focusing on refineries, pipelines, and gas infrastructure to exploit Nigeria's hydrocarbon reserves (Enweremadu, 2016). Although this has been hampered by various economic and legal challenges, it represents Russia's vision of

expanding beyond traditional European energy markets and partnering Nigeria in its energy development and growth journey (Enweremadu, 2016).

Besides the hydrocarbons, the countries have also worked together on nuclear energy, aiming to enhance energy diversity in Nigeria. For instance, the country and the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation (ROSATOM) signed an intergovernmental agreement on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in 2019, which includes planning, designing, and operating nuclear power plants to support the generation of electricity (Okon, 2020). Further, the country's engagement on nuclear energy was enhanced in July 2021, by establishing the Russian Nigerian Joint Coordination Committee on Atomic Energy, which is expected to oversee the implementation and transfer of the nuclear energy project (Okon, 2020). Although the nuclear plants are not online, the persistent engagement shows the significance of Russia's contribution to the country's energy diversity.

Nigeria's military relationship with Russia has significantly improved over the recent past, especially since the end of the 2010s. For instance, on August 23, 2021, Nigeria's military relationship with the Russian Federation was formalized by the Military-Technical Cooperation Agreement, which covers the scope, requirements, and principles that govern the military-technical cooperation between the military forces of the Russian Federation and the military forces of Nigeria, specifically on the supplies, support, training, and exchange of technology, among others (Defence Headquarters Nigeria, 2021). Based on the discussions between the Russian Federation defense forces and Nigeria's defense forces planned for 2026, Nigeria aims to enhance its military capacity, especially regarding training and military equipment, with the aim of strengthening its military forces against insurgency threats, indicating that Nigeria's foreign policy, despite the current international political dynamics, can be described as pragmatic.

Nigeria and BRICS Diplomacy

Nigeria's involvement in the 16th BRICS Summit, in Kazan, in October 2024, as a partner country, together with 12 other countries, marked a major milestone in Nigeria's relations with some of the most emerging economies in the world and provided Nigeria with the strategic opportunity of elevating relations with some of the most important countries in terms of energy and economic relations, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, according to S&P Global in 2025. Nigeria accepted its status as a BRICS partner in January 2025, allowing

it to access the platform that represents more than 40 % of the world's total GDP, according to the Times of India in 2025. As a leading OPEC and OPEC+ producer, with an average of about 1.48 million barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil in December 2024, Nigeria's role in global energy markets is significant, especially in discussions on diversifying trade mechanisms to lessen dependence on Western-led systems (S&P Global, 2025).

There has also been military engagement between Nigeria and Russia, such as the provision of Mi-35 helicopters, indicating deeper military ties with the founding member state within the BRICS alliance. Although the military ties between Nigeria and the BRICS states remain low, the expanded military cooperation within the BRICS state, such as the January 2026 exercise on the stability of the international waters, the military ties attest to Nigeria's bid at strategic hedging with the neo-non-alignment principle (Reddit, 2026).

Strategic Balancing Patterns

Nigeria's external policy, on the one hand, reveals the strategic balancing act that Nigeria seeks, carefully engaging major international blocs to avoid full entanglement and safeguard its full rights. Nigeria, since 2015, has enjoyed ties with the Western countries like the US, the EU, and the NATO countries. Nigeria has also courted the emerging powers like the Chinese, Russians, and the countries making up the BRICS bloc. There are evidences that Nigeria has actively worked within the US coalition against Boko Haram insurgency, having provided military support against the terrorist organizations. There are indications that Nigeria has strengthened ties with the Chinese, like the \$20 billion infrastructure finance received between 2015 and 2022. Therefore, Nigeria's engagement with both the US, the Chinese, the Russians, the countries within the BRICS bloc can be accounted for within the category of engaging multiple international blocs, implying that Nigeria has enjoyed the best out of the engagement.

Recent Global Developments and their Impact on Nigeria's Foreign Policy

These recent developments include the Russia-Ukraine war, US-China strategic competition, BRICS expansion, global energy politics, African geopolitical repositioning and Shet insecurity and regional instability. These are discussed subsequently.

In 2022, the surprise full-scale invasion by Russia into Ukraine was a global shock to Africa economically, politically, and from a security point of view, particularly for a country like Nigeria. It created a dilemma for Africa, where Ukraine and Russia were the source of

approximately 44% of wheat imports. Additionally, Nigeria used fertilizers from Russia, which were important for farming (Odhiambo, 2023). Africa experienced a shortage and fewer crops in 2023 due to the invasion, which caused a more than 50% hike in staple foods, based on a report by the World Bank (2023).

Similarly, Nigeria was affected in terms of its diplomacy in connection with its relationships with countries affected in Ukraine. Nigeria, like other African countries, was affected due to supply chain disruptions, especially in connection with fertilizers, which impacted Nigeria. As a result, there were increases in maize, sorghum, and other staple foods, which impacted household income (FAO, 2023). Moreover, there was a shift in focus globally with respect to African wars, and this impacted Nigeria and its attempt to address peace and stability in its region.

Socioeconomic Consequences: Socioeconomic consequences were also numerous. For instance, terrorist activities perpetrated in Zamfara State in January 2026 had a bearing on agricultural activities, relocation of populations, and impacted socioeconomic activities. This, in a way, showed that there was a nexus between security challenges and socioeconomic challenges, especially in Nigeria (AP News, 2026). However, it is evident that Nigeria learned a number of lessons regarding its economy, security, and foreign policy from what happened between 2022 and 2026, including the global effects of developments such as BRICS, energy, politics in Africa, and Guelmim. Nigeria learned to strategically balance and develop diverse relationships, thereby becoming a neo-non-aligned state.

7. DOMESTIC DETERMINANTS OF NIGERIA'S EXTERNAL ALIGNMENT

Political Leadership and Elite Interests

Nigerian leaders' foreign policy goals have been tailored to suit the expectations of each of Nigeria's political leaders. Each political leader has used foreign policy to gain popularity locally, attract development assistance, and improve Nigeria's status regionally. Take, for example, Nigeria's foreign policy under President Muhammadu Buhari, which was described as being dualistic. It was both Western and Eastern. It was Western for Nigeria's developmental needs in counter-terrorism, and Eastern for development needs in the energy and infrastructure sectors with Russia and China. This strategy was mainly predicated on the grounds of economic and national security. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has sought to strengthen strategic partnerships through Nigerian foreign policy. Nigeria's membership in BRICS in January 2025

is intended to cut financial dependence on the West and change Nigeria's sources of financing. These examples show that Nigeria's political leadership has used foreign policy's changing alignments as a means for domestic control, resource acquisition, and the actualization of specific objectives.

Economic Dependency and Debt Diplomacy

Nigeria's foreign policy is significantly influenced by its economic reliance on international markets, foreign investment, and economic aid. Nigeria is a major oil-producing country in Africa; it earns about 80% of its foreign exchange and around 40% of its total government revenues from petroleum exports (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2025). Nigeria's economic reliance on international markets and its focus on petroleum products make it sensitive to economic market and price fluctuations; therefore, it maintains economic ties with many world powers to strengthen its national economic stability. For example, after oil price fluctuations resulting from the Russia-Ukraine War of 2022-2023, Nigeria sought to strengthen economic ties with various international partners in energy production, including Western countries, China, India, and the BRICS (Adeyemo, 2021). Nigeria's economic reliance on international markets promotes a pragmatic approach to its foreign policy, leading it to be ready to make economic and foreign policy shifts to increase its foreign exchange earnings.

Security Challenges and Military Cooperation

Nigeria's foreign policy seems to mirror the country's internal security challenges, which have continued to deteriorate over the past decade. The activities of the insurgency in Nigeria's North-East by the likes of Boko Haram and Islamic States of West Africa Province (ISWAP), banditry in the North-West region, and transboundary attacks from the Sahel region continue to result in huge losses in terms of human lives lost and destroyed infrastructure. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2025), Nigeria recorded more than 5,200 deaths from terror attacks in the year 2024 compared to 4,900 in 2023. Over 1.8 million internally displaced people were reported in Nigeria in 2024, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2024). The internal security challenges in Nigeria prompted the nation to solicit military assistance from world powers such as the US, UK, and France, including arms supplies and intelligence sharing (Adeyemo, 2021). The current state of insecurity in Nigeria, characterised by more losses in terms of human lives lost and attacks on crucial infrastructural targets, shapes Nigeria's relations with world powers that can give military assistance.

Institutional Capacity and Diplomatic Infrastructure

The role of institutional capacity has become a core factor in shaping Nigeria's external alignment and foreign policy decisions. It must be fully elaborated, strategically designed, and carried out with the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Council, and the President's Office, should concern the unified strategies pertaining to their respective countries. Traditionally, the deficits of other arms of the government and inadequate funding have been the bound of Nigeria's losing diplomacy. For example, in the last five years from 2015 to 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received, at most, 0.4% of the national budget, and therefore, very little, if at all, was available to cater for staff, overseas missions, and research (Benjamin, & Amuche, 2023). Such inadequacies issues Nigeria's pluralistic foreign policy and diplomacy, in that, diplomacy is more ad-hoc and reactive.

Take, for instance, Nigeria's response to the escalation of Sahel insecurity or the Russia–Ukraine conflict-the country had to engage in rapid strategic negotiations with major powers under duress and without full institutional support (Obi, 2020).

Public Opinion and National Identity

Domestic factors, including public opinion, play a pivotal role in Nigeria's external alignment, particularly with major global powers. The claim that shows far interest in exclusive alignments, and prefers far more caution, is supported among Nigerians who most often choose foreign policies that defend the country's national sovereignty. In the most recent April 2023 NORC and African Polling Institute surveys, over 68% of respondents support multialignment and strategic independence in regard to trade, security, and energy. An example is sharing some sections of the Liberia report, which corroborates public sentiments on the diplomacy of sanctions against Russia and UN voting. Leaders, it is suggested, disregard priorities domestically and instead offer international leeway. Obi (2020) captures this phenomenon by documenting the expectations of the public sentiment as a constraint, and advocating for Nigeria to have a more active and expansive foreign policy. The national public identity of the state, is another domestic constituency variable pertaining to Nigeria's international orientation.

In particular, Nigeria's postcolonial foreign policy was shaped by its self-image as an African leader committed to Pan-African goals and principles of regional stability, as well as adherence to the non-aligned status in international conflicts. Such national identity leads to the

establishment of a multi-vector diplomacy, which can enable Nigeria "to reach out to the West, the emerging economies, and multilateral organisations without apparently being reduced to a vassal or subordinate entity of any one bloc" (Adeyemo, 2021).

Implications for National Security, Development and Sovereignty

Recent global developments have greatly impacted Nigeria's national security, altering the threat levels in the country. The activities ongoing in the northeastern states, spearheaded currently by Boko Haram and ISWAP, have been made worse by the security situation in the surrounding regions in the Sahel belt. Analysts identified the rise in violence in the countryside in the northern states in 2025, noting how weak border security in Nigeria creates unsafe states, thereby undermining the state's power. (Financial Times, 2025) In order to combat international security challenges, the Defence Chief suggested fencing the border between Nigeria and its surrounding countries, namely Niger, Cameroon, Benin, and Chad, in order to curb the activities of armed terrorist groups in the country, thus safeguarding its integrity. (Reuters, 2025) Foreign aid to the country, namely the United States, is required to respect the country's sovereignty, including its borders. (Reuters, 2025) These current global challenges demonstrate the security system in Nigeria, thereby highlighting the limits of the country's power to secure the regions amid the ongoing insurgency.

Beyond security, global trends have significantly affected the socioeconomic development of countries, including Nigeria. The country, as the biggest oil producer in Africa, remains crucial to global geopolitics, where oil price volatility resulting from the Russia-Ukraine war is largely responsible for movements in revenues (The Nation Newspaper, 2024). The oil production level in Nigeria, upon which the national budget relies, remains unpredictable due to oil market operations alongside internal operational challenges. The involvement of Chinese enterprises in the oil and gas industry plays a vital role, offering opportunities for infrastructure investments while posing various risks, including environmental, content, and bargaining risks (The Nation Newspaper, 2024). Thus, the broader challenge for Nigeria, as foreign investors seek to assert their dominance, is the notably tricky balance of attracting investments while growing and benefiting the local populace, especially given the longstanding challenges which have impeded inclusive economic growth, such as corruption and poor regulatory environments.

Some policymakers and scholars also heralded Nigeria's admission as a BRICS partner in January 2025 as a strategy for accessing alternative development funding, diversifying economic partnerships, and increasing diplomatic influence. This wider engagement with the global community presents Nigeria with the potential to begin financing major infrastructure projects in ports, railways, and power grids through entities like the New Development Bank, thereby reducing its reliance on traditional Western institutions that often attach more stringent conditions. However, stakeholders caution that Nigeria's ability to translate these emerging opportunities into actual developmental gains is constrained by factors such as the low competitiveness of local products, a weak industrial base, and difficulties in fully utilising trade agreements, thereby undermining some of the advantages of BRICS integration (Punch Nigeria, 2025). As the world is divided into various blocks vying for power, the country's developmental strategy should, apart from seeking investment capital, also aim to build internal capacity in harnessing technology, transferring skills, and creating jobs, which is essential to leveraging geopolitical positioning for developmental benefits.

Policy Pathways: Reconstructing Non-Alignment for the 21st Century

Rebuilding Nigeria's posture of non-alignment for the 21st century requires a framework of strategic balancing that will weigh engagement with diverse global powers without compromising national sovereignty and freedom of decision-making. Expanding BRICS, the relationships between the United States and China, and events across the Sahel region all point toward a multipolar world. As a result, Nigeria needs to move away from unilateral dependency in foreign policies and embrace relative unilateralism while diversifying bilateral engagements. This self-reliant, result-oriented, critical 's' focus policy needs to operate from a multilateral framework restricted to the region alongside self-imposed political, economic, and military means and self-determined defining identities and domestic areas of strategic interests, in relative compliance, to the equilibrium of regional stability and development. Given this, Nigeria's non-alignment is a sophisticated position of neutrality. It is, however, a deliberate and active improvisation of flexible diplomatic engagements and strategic alternatives designed to empower Nigeria to mitigate the negative impacts of geopolitical shifts, maximize development within Nigeria, and defend Nigeria's status as an independent nation in a world characterized by a high degree of interdependence.

Some comprehensive and impactful institutional changes would greatly enhance the capabilities and efficiency of the country's foreign institutions and foreign policy. Some

significant changes and enhancements proposed to the most impactful foreign institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Council, and the country's Diplomatic Missions, would significantly enhance the coordination and foreign interactions within both national and international environments, hence bringing foreign policies more in line with both local and global agendas and interests. These would range from something as impactful as digitalising foreign planning and intelligence, to training foreign diplomats, and to establishing the National Foreign Policy Coordination Secretariat, which would act as the entity bringing all foreign ideas and efforts together toward achieving a non-aligned foreign policy within the country. All these changes would be more impactful, especially considering the non-aligned foreign strategy and the need for the country to be more dynamic and responsive to the rapidly changing geopolitics of the planet.

8. CONCLUSION

The elements of the study indicate that Nigeria's foreign policy after independence has oscillated between ideals grounded in ideology and decisions based on expediency. The study suggest that, during the period when Nigeria remained non-aligned in the context of the Cold War, in reality, elements of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions were strategically driven. The key insights provided suggest that Nigeria's non-aligned position in foreign policy illustrated ideals supporting stronger nation-state leadership in Africa and seeking alliances in economic and military relations. Significantly, in Nigeria's alignment during the Cold War, the decision to align was always aimed at securing aid for development and security support from other players in the context of foreign policy.

This paper enhances the debate around non-alignment politics by examining how mid-power states manage dual interests at the global level while responding to internal demands. This paper provides further insights into Nigeria's foreign policy from a hybrid perspective, shaped by non-alignment tenets in light of shifting international politics. This paper presents a more in-depth look at non-alignment politics beyond ideology and demonstrates how non-aligned politics in Africa evince political pragmatism in engaging challenges from systemic effects at the global level. It illustrates the relationship between subregional leadership sensitivities and objectives in economic and security terms, compared with theories in international relations.

Policy insights show that Nigeria should be cautiously aligned, with a focus on its national interests and hedging against overdependence on any single bloc of power. These will include

setting up robust foreign policy machinery, the art of diplomatic good behaviour, and diversification of economic and security arrangements, all of which can only guarantee strategic independence for Nigeria. Future research should focus on the non-alignment strategy during the post-Cold War period and integrate the evolving patterns of global dominance, digital diplomacy, and multilateral multilayered diplomacy. Policy formulation on the implementation of non-alignment balanced with global interdependencies can be made through the study of comparative methods of non-alignment practiced in the 21st century by Nigeria and other African countries recognized as middle powers.

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