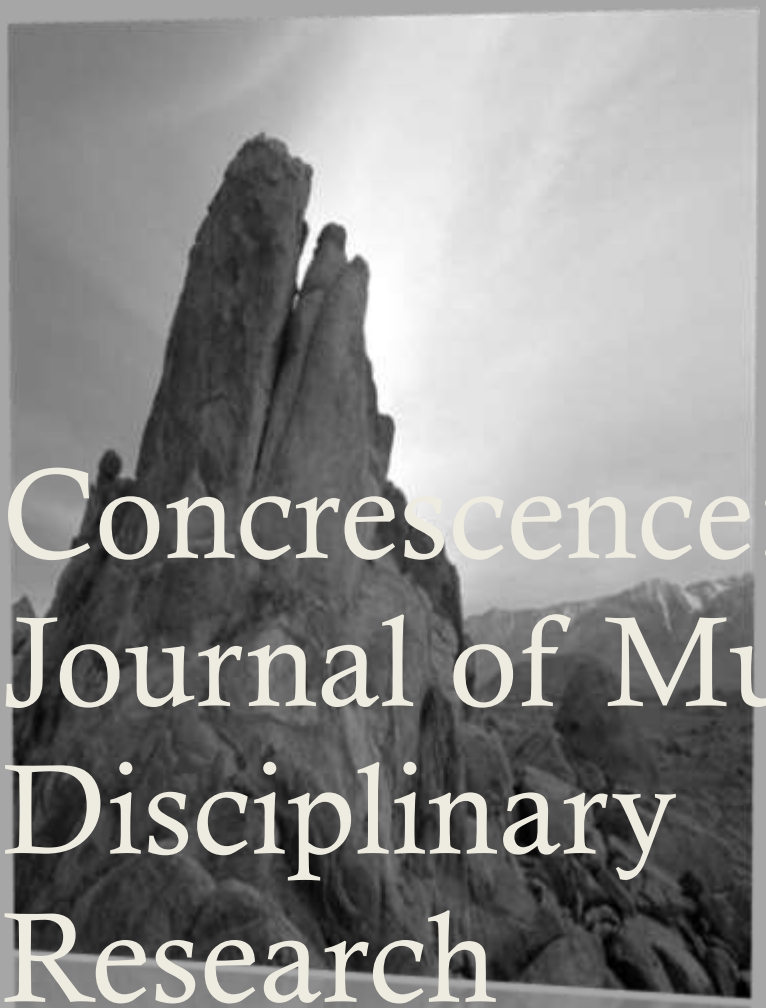

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Historical Appraisal of Military's Impact on Nigeria's Foreign Policy, 1966-1999

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Abstract
This study examines the impact of military regimes on Nigeria's foreign policy from 1966 to 1999, a period marked by multiple coups and military governance. It analyzes how successive military administrations, from General Aguiyi-Ironsi to General Abdulsalami Abubakar, shaped Nigeria's international relations, focusing on their adherence to or deviation from the foreign policy principles established at independence in 1960. The paper highlights the dynamic approaches of military leaders, particularly in promoting African unity, decolonization, and regional stability through initiatives like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and support for liberation movements in Southern Africa. It contrasts the assertive and sometimes radical policies of military regimes with the more conciliatory civilian approaches, emphasizing the role of oil wealth in enabling bold diplomatic strides. Despite challenges, such as Nigeria's pariah status under General Sani Abacha, the military's contributions to anti-colonialism and regional peacekeeping were significant. The study concludes that military regimes, while often dictatorial, played a pivotal role in enhancing Nigeria's international influence, particularly in African affairs.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Military Government, National Interest

Introduction

Nigeria's foreign policy has been a critical instrument for navigating its role in the global arena since gaining independence on October 1, 1960. The country became a Republic on 1st October 1963. The First Republic in Nigeria was between 1963 and 1966 and was governed by the first republican constitution.[1] The principles laid out by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, emphasizing Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, set the foundation for the country's international relations. The period from 1966 to 1999, dominated by military rule following the first coup d'état, introduced significant shifts in the execution of these principles. Military regimes, starting with Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi and culminating with General Abdulsalami Abubakar, governed Nigeria for over three decades, each leaving a distinct mark on the country's foreign policy.

On 15 January 1966, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and a host of other soldiers of the Nigerian Army executed a bloody takeover of all institutions of government and assassinated key government officials such as Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa; the premier of Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello; Premier of the West, Samuel Akintola; and the Finance Minister, Festus Okotie-Eboh.[2]The coup led to the end of the First Republic, and Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi took control as the first Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. A counter coup took place in July 1966, followed by other coups until the Second Republic, which started in 1979 and ended in 1983. The Second Republic was under the regime of President Shehu Shagari. He was again ousted from power by a coup, leading to Muhammadu Buhari taking over power as the military president.[3]

While a lot of studies have been dedicated to foreign policy in Nigeria,[4] adequate attention has not been paid to the military impact of Nigeria foreign policy between 1966 and 1999.This paper explores the historical impact of these military administrations on Nigeria's foreign policy, assessing their successes and failures in advancing national interests and shaping Nigeria's image in international affairs. By examining key regimes, including those of Generals Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, and Abdulsalami Abubakar, this study evaluates how military governance influenced Nigeria's diplomatic strategies, particularly in promoting African unity, combating colonialism, and fostering regional stability. This study is an addition to this body of literature.

Overview of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 1960-1999

Foreign policy refers to the strategy governments adopt to guide their actions in the international arena, outlining the objectives leaders pursue in managing relations with other states.[5] Bello defines it as a country's response to the world beyond its borders, whether friendly or hostile, casual or intense, simple or complex, encompassing diplomatic, military, trade, economic, social, cultural, educational, and sporting dimensions, which vary according to prevailing circumstances.[6]

The key responsibility of foreign policy makers is to clearly articulate national interests and relate them to those of other nations within the international system, grounded on credible and widely accepted principles.[7] At independence, Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa established that Africa would be the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Since then, successive governments have upheld these guiding principles.

Core principles include: protection of Nigeria's sovereignty and territorial integrity; promotion of socio-economic well-being; enhancement of national image; respect for the sovereignty of other states; non-interference in internal affairs; unity and solidarity of African states; political, economic, social, and cultural emancipation of Africa; and unwavering support for decolonization. Nigeria's priorities in Africa have centred on promoting peace, prosperity, stability, and development; fostering goodwill and understanding among African countries despite colonial-era divisions; discouraging foreign intervention; advancing regional economic integration; strengthening sub-regional institutions; reducing dependence on extra-continental powers; and using cultural cooperation to reinforce political ties, alongside championing self-determination for all African nations.[8]

The administration of General Aguiyi-Ironsi was too brief to establish clear foreign policy objectives. In contrast, General Yakubu Gowon's regime offers a more comprehensive example of military involvement in foreign policy implementation. While Gowon's approach differed from that of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, he retained some core principles of the

Balewa era. He maintained a moderate outlook but strongly believed in personal diplomacy—direct involvement in resolving diplomatic issues. With the support of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma of Togo, Gowon mobilized other West African leaders to establish the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975.[9]

Gowon's administration introduced elements of radicalism, notably during the Nigerian Civil War, when diplomatic relations with four African countries were temporarily severed. Britain, Nigeria's main arms supplier, refused to provide weapons on humanitarian grounds, prompting France, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and the United States to follow suit.[10] As a result, Nigeria turned to the Soviet Union and its allies for arms, marking a shift in foreign policy orientation. This led to closer Nigeria–Soviet ties, expanded trade, and a rise in pro-Soviet cultural exchange through literature and films. However, Gowon's government also criticized the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and questioned U.S. actions in Vietnam and Cambodia, reflecting a nuanced, non-aligned posture.[11]

Towards the end of Gowon's rule, Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union cooled, and ties with the West were renewed. Scholars attribute Nigeria's robust foreign policy performance in the 1970s to post-war economic prosperity and political stability under military rule.[12] The hierarchical military structure and Gowon's division of Nigeria into twelve states strengthened central control over foreign policy. According to Saliu, Gowon broadened Nigeria's international contacts, elevating the country from a "lame duck" status to an active and visible member of the global community.[13]

Over his nine-year tenure, Gowon leveraged Nigeria's wealth and goodwill to pursue a dynamic foreign policy. He increased support for liberation movements such as SWAPO in Namibia, the ANC and PAC in South Africa, and nationalist groups in Zimbabwe and Angola. His commitment to anti-apartheid struggles, African unity, decolonization, ECOWAS, and the OAU was evident. At the 1975 OAU Summit in Kampala, Uganda, Gowon proposed the creation of an African Task Force to address military challenges on the continent.[14]

Brigadier Murtala Ramat Mohammed assumed the leadership of Nigeria on 29 July 1975 through a bloodless coup, having previously served as Minister of Communications under General Gowon. Known for his bold and decisive character, Mohammed's administration was marked by dramatic and energetic reforms from its inception. As a precursor to a more assertive foreign policy, his government initiated a domestic "clean-up" campaign aimed at purging inefficiency and corruption from the civil service.[15]

The Angolan crisis, inherited from Gowon's administration, dominated the early months of Mohammed's foreign policy. Initially, the government pursued Gowon's strategy of reconciling Angola's three nationalist movements into a coalition government. However, pressure came from two directions: the United States urged Nigeria to maintain neutrality and support a national government, while domestic voices both inside and outside government called for outright recognition of the MPLA.[16] Ultimately, Nigeria sided with the MPLA, providing ₦13.5 million in financial aid, military supplies, and mobilizing African diplomatic support in its favour. [17]

This stance marked a radical departure from previous practice, where aid to liberation movements had been modest and discreet. Nigeria's bold move placed it on a collision course with the United States, culminating in two separate refusals to grant entry to U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The decision also signaled an escalation in Nigeria's confrontational engagement in Southern Africa. In 1975, Lagos barred the annual meeting of the international press because it included white delegates from apartheid South Africa.

Mohammed's radical foreign policy extended to other liberation struggles. Nigeria actively supported the Zimbabwean nationalist cause, granting recognition to the Patriotic Front and allowing it to open an office in Lagos. SWAPO was also permitted to establish an office in the city, and Tsei Machimini, leader of the Soweto Students Representative Council, took up permanent residence in Nigeria. [18]

The cumulative effect of these policies was that Nigeria became a *Mecca* for African liberation fighters. Although Murtala Mohammed was assassinated during an abortive coup on 13 February 1976, his death did not alter the direction of Nigeria's foreign policy. His successor, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, had pledged in his maiden address to maintain the status quo—and he kept his word. When it was discovered that British Petroleum (BP), under the government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was selling oil to apartheid South Africa, Nigeria nationalized the company and renamed it African Petroleum. Barclays Bank was also renamed Union Bank. These moves were consistent with Nigeria's opposition to Britain's stance on the Rhodesian question, where London resisted genuine steps toward Rhodesia's independence.

This period marked Nigeria's emergence as a leading opponent of apartheid South Africa. In 1976, Nigeria led the boycott of the Montreal Olympics, withdrawing alongside other African nations to protest New Zealand's participation due to its sporting links with South Africa. Nigeria also hosted the first International Conference on Action Against Apartheid in Lagos in 1977, underscoring its leadership role in continental anti-apartheid efforts.[19]

The Mohammed era represented a progressive shift in the implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy, with Africa as its clear centrepiece. This was reflected in substantial financial and material support for liberation movements across the continent. Ojieh notes that the oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s provided regimes with unprecedented resources, making oil a strategic weapon in Nigeria's diplomatic arsenal.[20] Murtala Mohammed pursued a focused and dynamic foreign policy, leveraging these resources to back liberation struggles in Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, while supporting the ANC, PAC, and SWAPO.

Following Mohammed's assassination, Obasanjo not only sustained this activism but also initiated a formal review of Nigeria's foreign policy. In 1976, he directed the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) to draft new guidelines, leading to the formation of a committee tasked with overhauling the country's foreign policy system, substance, and apparatus.[21] The committee's final report, submitted in May 1976, outlined Nigeria's permanent interests, which became the foundation for subsequent policy directions. These were:

i. The defence of Nigeria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial Integrity.
ii. Creating the necessary political and economic conditions in Africa and in the rest of the world, which will facilitate the defence of the independence and territorial integrity of all African countries, while at the same time fostering natural self-reliance and rapid economic development.
iii. Promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the world
iv. The promotion and defence of social justice and respect for human dignity, especially the dignity of Black man.
v. The defence and promotion of world peace.

The period of Nigeria's foreign policy between 1975 and 1979 is often regarded by scholars as the "golden era" of Nigerian diplomacy. The Murtala–Obasanjo administration accepted and implemented the recommendations of the 1976 NIIA committee, thereby strengthening Nigeria's engagement with key international and regional bodies such as the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Commonwealth, and the United Nations (UN).

However, the ascension of Major General Muhammadu Buhari in December 1983 marked a significant departure in tone and approach. While reiterating that Africa remained the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, Buhari articulated a new framework based on a series of *concentric circles* of national interest. The innermost circle encompassed Nigeria's own security, territorial integrity, and political independence, as well as those of its immediate neighbours. The second circle centred on the ECOWAS sub-region, where Nigeria sought deeper socio-economic and political engagement. The third circle involved broader African issues, including support for self-determination movements.[22]

Buhari abandoned the "big brother" posture of previous administrations, insisting that relations with neighbours would be determined strictly by calculations of gains and losses. The first major policy move under this doctrine was the closure of Nigeria's land borders. According to Foreign Minister Ibrahim Gambari, the closure was motivated by security concerns and the need to protect Nigeria's economic interests. Initially, neighbouring countries downplayed the impact, but soon, no fewer than eight governments sent delegations to Abuja requesting the reopening of the borders. The Buhari government remained resolute, stating that the borders would only reopen once identified anomalies were rectified, a stance maintained until Buhari's overthrow in 1985.

Economically, Buhari rejected the IMF-driven structural adjustment measures initiated under the Shagari administration, which called for currency devaluation, subsidy removal, privatisation, and trade liberalisation. As Ofoagbu argues, given Nigeria's mono-product economy and the pricing of its main export—oil—in foreign currency under producer organisations, devaluation was unlikely to significantly increase foreign exchange earnings. Instead, it would raise the naira cost of debt servicing and fuel inflation, prompting wage demands to protect real incomes.[23]

In place of IMF loans, the government sought alternative financing, including a proposed $1.6 billion loan from Saudi Arabia.[24] However, under pressure from the IMF and the U.S. government, Riyadh declined the request. Buhari's administration instead turned to counter-trade arrangements, signing deals worth over $2.5 billion, with Brazil accounting for about 40% of the agreements.[25] Several EEC countries—particularly France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—welcomed the initiative, while Britain opposed it, fearing reduced trade volumes with Nigeria.

Relations with Britain deteriorated sharply following the "Umaru Dikko Affair." Dikko, a former Transport Minister under Shagari, had fled to Britain after the coup and obtained political asylum. He became a vocal critic of Buhari's regime, threatening to "wage jihad" against it. On 5 July 1984, four men, one Nigerian and three Israelis, attempted to kidnap Dikko in London and airlift him to Nigeria.[26] British security services foiled the plan, and the incident escalated into a diplomatic crisis. On the same day, a British Caledonian aircraft flying from Lagos to London was recalled to Lagos and detained. Tensions led to the mutual withdrawal of diplomatic personnel.

Domestic civil society groups in Nigeria called for stricter measures against Britain, accusing it of harbouring economic saboteurs. Under this domestic pressure, the Buhari administration formally recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) with full

ambassadorial status—a decision that further signalled Nigeria's readiness to pursue foreign policy on its own terms, irrespective of Western disapproval.[27]
With the Dikko affair in his mind, Major-General Muhammed Buhari lamented *inter alia* that:

> Britain which has been for a long regarded by Nigerians as traditional friend has caused us once again in recent times to doubt the genuineness of this friendship. Just as we did in the 1960 when our young nation faced the greatest threat to its national unity and in the period immediately following the senseless assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in the abortive bid to replace the Federal Military Government in February, 1976. Today, as Nigeria faces the test of economic survival and the maintenance of its national unity and stability, Britain is once again sitting on the fence over the question of returning to this country all those unpatriotic Nigerians, who have contributed to bring our country close to economic and social ruin and are hiding there. Yet Britain protests its friendly intentions towards Nigeria Loudly.[28]

Nevertheless, despite all these problems, Nigeria continued to rely on Britain in Military matters and still maintained Britain as the major trading partner. On 27th August 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida toppled the Buhari administration. Babangida, when he took over power, stated that:

> Nigeria's foreign policy in the last 20 months has been characterized by inconsistency and incoherence. It has lacked the clarity to make us know where we stood on matters of international concern to enable other countries relate to us with seriousness. Our role as Africa's spokesman had diminished because we have been unable to maintain the respect of African countries. The ousted Military government conducted our external relations by a policy of retaliatory reactions. Nigeria became a country that reacted to given situations rather than taking initiatives as it should and had always done.[29]

General Ibrahim Babangida articulated his administration's foreign policy objectives on the premise that African problems, and their solutions, should form the foundation of Nigeria's external engagement. At the same time, he appealed to industrialised nations to acknowledge the debt challenges facing developing countries and to assist in mitigating these risks. Like his predecessor, Buhari, Babangida prioritised ECOWAS in Nigeria's foreign relations; however, unlike Buhari, he did not insist on the projection of national interest as a prerequisite for such cooperation.[30] Whereas Buhari had closed Nigeria's land borders to safeguard economic and security interests, Babangida immediately reopened them upon assuming office, signaling a departure from the concentric-circle approach and a return to the "big brother" posture that had characterised the 1970s.

This stance was most clearly demonstrated in Nigeria's leadership role in the establishment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) during the Liberian civil war.[31] By the end of the intervention, Nigerian taxpayers had borne costs estimated at $13 billion. Babangida's administration also expanded the scope of Africa-centred diplomacy by introducing the Technical Aid Corps Scheme, which seconded Nigerian professionals at the expense of the Nigerian government to African countries in need, for periods of up to three years.

Economically, Babangida's embrace of "economic diplomacy" marked another departure from previous military regimes. In contrast to Shagari's reluctance and Buhari's outright

rejection, Babangida fully implemented the IMF's stringent conditionalities such as currency devaluation, privatisation, commercialisation, and cuts in social spending. Rather than stimulating growth, these measures deepened the economic downturn. The administration appeared to underestimate the fact that foreign investments from industrialised nations were often oriented towards profit repatriation rather than genuine development in host countries.[32] Asobie and Ibeanu argue that although Nigeria's foreign policy has historically faced periodic complexities, the Babangida era was particularly marked by inconsistency and a back-and-forth agenda.[33]Initially promising, the regime's foreign policy was eventually overshadowed by political crises and a continuation of the "munificent" or "Santa Claus" diplomacy, which prioritised costly external commitments over pressing domestic needs. This downward trajectory was further intensified under General Sani Abacha, whose regime's human rights abuses and repressive governance rendered Nigeria a pariah state in the international arena. By contrast, General Abdulsalami Abubakar's short transitional administration (1998–1999) sought to reverse this diplomatic isolation. His "restoration campaign" focused on rehabilitating Nigeria's external image, normalising relations with key international partners, and repositioning the country's foreign policy towards reintegration into the global community.[34]

General Sani Abacha's regime (1993–1998) marked a sharp departure from Nigeria's previous foreign policy trajectory. Following the Nigerian Civil War, the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election plunged the country into political turmoil. In response, the Abacha administration reoriented Nigeria's foreign policy focus toward the East, making this shift a central feature of its agenda. Some scholars have argued that this pivot was consistent with the regime's commitment to safeguarding Nigeria's external sovereignty and rejecting what it perceived as undue interference in domestic affairs, particularly from its traditional Western allies. As Oche observed, this stance was largely a reaction to mounting political and economic pressures from the West. In Abacha's own words:

> The overriding aim of Nigeria's foreign policy must be to protect and safeguard our national interest at all times. Against the background of our experiences, the main thrust of our foreign policy has been a struggle for self-determination, the alleviation of poverty and the pursuit of self-reliant development. In response to the challenges of the emerging globalization of the international system and in expressing our right to self-determination, we have, in relevant times, been looking beyond our traditional allies to diversify and cultivate new ties with countries that we consider not only friendly but display an honest desire to cooperate with us in the pursuit of our development objectives. We should always welcome genuine and friendly relations based on mutual trust, respect and equality.[35]

The policy shift under Abacha was most visible in Nigeria's deepening ties with the People's Republic of China. Although Nigeria and China had maintained diplomatic relations for decades, the deliberate move away from the West brought a renewed intensity to the partnership. Russia, too, was courted and responded favourably by appointing a young radical of ministerial rank, General Sergei Shoigu, to head a newly created commission in Nigeria. As Eze observed, Western hostility toward Nigeria encouraged the regime to focus more on South–South cooperation, particularly with emerging groupings such as the Developing-8 (D-8), once criticized as an "Islamic body." New diplomatic partners included India, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, Turkey, and Syria.

However, many scholars questioned the viability of these new alliances, noting that most of these states had fragile economies and were themselves competing with Nigeria for

technical and financial assistance. This criticism is debatable, given that the West had never "spoon-fed" Nigeria. The country's true vulnerability lay in its mono-economy, that is, its over-reliance on oil exports, which left it exposed to a master–servant dynamic with its major oil customers. Over time, Nigeria grew increasingly wary that a withdrawal of foreign direct investment by a key partner, such as the United States, could devastate its economy.[36] Relations among nations, Abacha maintained, must be anchored on mutual respect. Thus, beyond economic considerations, factors of prestige and self-determination influenced his pivot to the East. However, the sudden death of General Sani Abacha in July 1998 ushered in General Abdulsalami Abubakar as Head of State. Abubakar was committed to returning power to civilian rule—a task he pursued with notable diligence. Learning from the near-total isolation of Nigeria under Abacha, Abubakar acted swiftly to mend relations with the international community. To win over the West, he revoked all draconian decrees, released political detainees and prisoners, and dropped charges against exiled Nigerians, thereby facilitating their return.[37]

Recognizing that Nigeria's destiny was closely bound to the stability of its immediate environment, the Abubakar administration re-engaged with leaders in the West African sub-region. It also redirected resources toward peace, security, and stability across Africa.[38] Beyond the continent, Nigeria made conscious efforts to rebuild ties with traditional Western allies and to reassert active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations, the African Union, and other multilateral forums. These steps yielded immediate dividends: the G-7, G-22, the Commonwealth, the European Union, ASEAN, Latin America, Canada, and others restored diplomatic relations and lifted sanctions.[39]

Determined to ensure a swift transition, Abubakar saw international hostility as an obstacle and thus reversed his predecessor's foreign policy direction to create a conducive environment for his primary goal, returning Nigeria to civilian governance. With the handover in 1999, civilians resumed control, and the scope of their foreign policy performance lies beyond the present academic focus.

Assessment of Military Impact on Nigeria's Foreign Policy

An assessment of military involvement in Nigeria's foreign policy reveals that, although both military and civilian administrations employed a mix of soft and hard power to pursue foreign policy objectives, the difference lay in the extent, severity, and style of application. Civilian governments in the first period were neither radical nor revolutionary, but rather firm and conciliatory. Hard power was minimally applied, limited to participation in UN peacekeeping operations and leadership in boycotting international events, while policy actions were generally backed and guided by public sentiment.[40]

By contrast, the military governments of the second period leveraged Nigeria's economic strength and oil revenues to drive an assertive Southern African policy. Whereas first-period civilian administrations preferred a peaceful approach to African independence, military governments often adopted a revolutionary posture, articulating the same soft power tools in a far more assertive manner.[41] Gowon's government (1966–1975) blended war diplomacy with a willingness to confront Western powers, expanded Nigeria's international contacts, and extended grants as far as the Caribbean and Pacific black nations. However, a centralised and personalised style of governance limited participation in foreign policy formulation, unlike under Balewa (1960–1966) and Murtala/Obasanjo (1975–1979).[42]

The Murtala regime, in particular, stood out for its uncompromising Southern African policy marked by strong rhetoric, open calls for sanctions, and outright rejection of Western

interference. Its lobbying and campaigning were forceful, and Nigeria's leadership in boycotts of international events elevated its standing internationally. The Murtala/Obasanjo administration also took steps to institutionalise foreign policy by establishing a committee of experts from academia, the media, and the military to reassess Nigeria's foreign policy system. While the review did not alter the core principles laid down by Balewa, it revitalised policy dynamics.[43]

In contrast, the Shagari civilian administration's foreign policy was widely seen as compromised, often aligning with Western interests in ways that weakened African solidarity. Oil played a decisive role across all administrations: military regimes in the second period benefited from the oil boom, while those in the fourth period (alongside civilian governments) faced oil shocks and economic crises. To cope, two of the three military regimes in the fourth period adopted retaliatory and reactive policies, which strained international relations and isolated Nigeria. From 1985 to 1993, military economic diplomacy became less aggressive, prioritising debt relief, rescheduling, and foreign investment.[44]

Despite the authoritarian nature of military rule, their commitment to Africa as the centrepiece of Nigerian foreign policy was evident. Military administrations played a central role in decolonising much of Southern Africa and promoting transitional justice, particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone, through ECOMOG. In comparative terms, while today's civilian governments have shown limited engagement in African conflicts—in places like Burundi, Somalia, and Sudan—the military's interventions in South Africa, Liberia, and North Africa from the 1970s to the 1990s remain significant milestones. Although they did not always adhere strictly to Balewa's ideals, the military's foreign policy achievements often served Africa's broader interests in international affairs.

Conclusion

The military's influence on Nigeria's foreign policy from 1966 to 1999 was profound, characterized by both continuity and divergence from the foundational principles established at independence. While adhering to the core ideal of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, military regimes introduced dynamic and often assertive approaches, leveraging oil wealth to support decolonization efforts and regional integration through initiatives like ECOWAS and ECOMOG. The administrations of Generals Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, and Obasanjo were particularly notable for their contributions to African liberation movements and anti-apartheid efforts, enhancing Nigeria's stature as a regional leader. However, periods of economic mismanagement and diplomatic isolation, particularly under General Abacha, highlight the challenges of military-led foreign policy. In contrast, General Abubakar's restoration campaign successfully reintegrated Nigeria into the international community. Despite their authoritarian nature, military regimes demonstrated a commitment to advancing Nigeria's influence in African and global affairs, leaving a legacy of significant diplomatic achievements that continue to shape Nigeria's foreign policy discourse.

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