NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA.

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Abstract

Nigeria has long been regarded as the "giant of Africa," wielding considerable influence as a distinguished leader in regional diplomacy, peacekeeping, and Pan-African initiatives. However, in recent decades, the country's international standing has visibly declined, raising questions about its capacity to sustain continental leadership in an era of shifting geopolitical dynamics. This article interrogates Nigeria's dwindling influence in Africa through a political economy discourse, emphasizing how structural economic dependence, governance crises, and persistent insecurity have constrained its foreign policy projection. By situating Nigeria's decline within broader debates on dependency and hegemonic stability, the paper highlights how domestic weaknesses intersect with global transformations to reshape power relations in Africa. Comparative insights also demonstrate how emerging regional players such as South Africa, Kenya, and Rwanda increasingly occupy roles once dominated by Nigeria. The study concludes that reversing this decline requires Nigeria to undertake structural reforms, diversify its economy, and recalibrate its diplomatic engagements to align with the demands of contemporary African integration and global competition.

Keywords: Foreign policy, Nigeria, Political Economy, International Influence, Africa

Introduction

Nigeria has long occupied a central position in African diplomacy, shaping its foreign policy around the principle that Africa constitutes its primary sphere of responsibility. From the early post-independence period, the country invested heavily in supporting liberation struggles, promoting regional cooperation, and contributing troops and resources to peacekeeping missions across West and Central Africa. These efforts helped establish Nigeria as a prominent continental actor and earned it widespread recognition as Africa's "giant" (Adebajo, 2010). Through its leadership in institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its active role in multilateral diplomacy, Nigeria projected both material power and moral authority within African affairs.

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Over time, Nigeria's foreign policy influence became closely tied to its domestic economic strength and political stability. Periods of economic growth, particularly during the oil boom years, enabled the country to pursue ambitious diplomatic initiatives and regional interventions. However, as domestic challenges deepened in the post-Cold War era, Nigeria's capacity to sustain this leadership posture began to weaken. Rising insecurity, persistent governance deficits, economic vulnerability, and institutional fragility have increasingly shaped the country's external engagements (Akinyemi, 2017).

Simultaneously, Africa's geopolitical landscape has evolved. A growing number of states now play visible leadership roles within continental institutions, peace processes, and development initiatives. Countries such as South Africa and Ethiopia have expanded their diplomatic reach, while smaller but more institutionally stable states have gained influence in regional decision-making forums (Shaw, 2012). This diffusion of power has reduced the dominance once enjoyed by traditional regional leaders, including Nigeria.

Against this backdrop, Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy raises important questions about leadership sustainability in Africa. This article seeks to explore how Nigeria's historical leadership role has changed, why its influence has declined, and what this transformation means for African political cooperation and stability in the twenty-first century.

Statement of the Problem

Although Nigeria was once widely regarded as Africa's foremost regional power, its ability to function as a credible continental leader has increasingly come under strain. Economic instability, widespread corruption, escalating security threats, and weak state institutions have limited the country's capacity to project influence beyond its borders (Mustapha, 2020). These domestic challenges have not only diverted resources away from diplomacy and regional security commitments but have also weakened Nigeria's moral authority within African political institutions.

Despite Nigeria's continued demographic and resource advantages, its leadership outcomes within forums such as ECOWAS and the African Union have become less decisive. Other African states now shape key peace initiatives, economic agendas, and institutional reforms that Nigeria once dominated (Tieku, 2017). This shift suggests a growing gap between Nigeria's historical leadership image and its present diplomatic effectiveness.

However, much of the existing scholarship on Nigerian foreign policy continues to emphasize past achievements rather than critically examining the contemporary factors driving this decline. There is limited systematic analysis connecting Nigeria's internal governance weaknesses to its reduced regional influence in a rapidly changing African

political environment. As a result, debates on African leadership often rely on outdated assumptions about Nigeria's hegemonic status rather than evidence-based evaluations of its current capabilities.

The problem this study addresses, therefore, is the insufficient understanding of how domestic political and economic constraints, alongside shifting continental power relations, have reshaped Nigeria's foreign policy performance and leadership role in contemporary Africa. The study aims to critically assess Nigeria's present foreign policy capacity and its implications for African political cooperation and security. Specifically, it seeks to examine the foundations of Nigeria's earlier leadership position, identify the internal and external forces responsible for its decline, and evaluate the broader consequences for regional stability and integration.

To guide this analysis, the study asks three key questions: to what extent does Nigeria currently exercise effective leadership within African political and security institutions; how have domestic governance and economic challenges undermined its foreign policy credibility and influence; and what strategic reforms are necessary for Nigeria to reclaim a substantive leadership role in today's multipolar African system.

Conceptual Clarifications

Foreign Policy

This concept refers to an instrument used by states to achieve in broad terms, both their domestic and external goals. A state according to Society for International Relations Awareness (2011) announces its foreign policy principles or goals to the rest of the world to provide a prism through which other states in international system can establish a link with it and read its mind so to speak. The policies so announced when pursued give states their identity within the global polity and link them up with countries that are of consequence in achieving their domestic and foreign interests to the satisfaction of their national interest. Nigeria's identity as a continental power and leader was earned through its pan-African disposition and good neighbour policies as enshrined in its foreign policy.

Leadership Question

Every form of leadership presupposes a goal, target or an objective to be achieved. Leadership entails the ability to mobilize human and material resources towards a purposeful end. Africa has been through a lot and arguments as to why her development outcomes have been at nadir resonates with colonial rule on the continent as well as the character of leadership in Africa. Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. A leader, therefore, is expected to demonstrate qualities, which embrace but not limited to good character, vision, tact, prudence and ability to lead by example (Elijah, 2018). Nigeria has over the years manifested character and buoyance in all aspects of

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continental leadership in Africa until it began to face some internal contradictions and externally structured adjustments that have impacted the foreign policy of the country. This situation brought the political economy realities of the country to the fore and also exposed the once celebrated giant of Africa to fierce competition with the former beneficiaries of its benign foreign policy.

Contemporary Africa

"Contemporary Africa" refers to the current political, economic, and social realities of the African continent in the twenty-first century, marked by rapid demographic growth, economic diversification, technological innovation, and complex security challenges (Branch & Cheeseman, 2018). It also denotes an era where continental integration is advancing through initiatives like the African Union (AU) and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), while Africa's global role is increasingly shaped by multipolar competition involving China, the United States, and the European Union. Within this context, Nigeria's capacity to exert leadership is constantly tested against new actors, shifting alliances, and transformative challenges.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Rentier State Theory and Hegemonic Stability Theory to explain both Nigeria's long-standing ambition to lead Africa and the structural limitations that have weakened this leadership in recent decades. Together, these perspectives offer a balanced understanding of why Nigeria once exercised considerable regional influence and why sustaining that influence has become increasingly difficult. While Hegemonic Stability Theory highlights the conditions under which a dominant state can provide leadership and stability, Rentier State Theory exposes how resource dependence undermines institutional capacity, accountability, and long-term policy effectiveness.

Rentier State Theory

Rentier State Theory emerged from efforts to explain the political consequences of economies heavily dependent on externally generated revenues, particularly from natural resources such as oil (Mahdavy, 1970). Scholars have since demonstrated that when governments rely more on rents than on taxation, they become less accountable to citizens, prioritize patronage over development, and develop weak productive sectors (Beblawi, 1987). Herb (2002) further explains that rentier systems allow states to maintain political control through distribution of benefits and repression rather than institutional performance, often resulting in fragile governance structures.

Nigeria exemplifies many of these rentier dynamics. Heavy dependence on crude oil exports has distorted economic planning, discouraged diversification, and exposed the state to volatile global markets (Omotola, 2016). More critically, oil wealth has shaped a

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political culture where elite competition over rents replaces long-term development planning, weakening public institutions and democratic accountability (Watts, 2004).

These structural weaknesses have direct implications for foreign policy. A state that struggles to mobilize stable domestic revenue and maintain strong institutions finds it difficult to sustain costly diplomatic initiatives, peacekeeping operations, and regional leadership commitments. Rather than acting as an autonomous continental power, Nigeria remains vulnerable to external economic shocks and political pressures, limiting its capacity for consistent leadership.

Hegemonic Stability Theory

Hegemonic Stability Theory argues that regional and global systems are most stable when a dominant power possesses sufficient economic strength, political legitimacy, and willingness to provide collective goods such as security, conflict resolution, and institutional coordination (Kindleberger, 1973). Keohane (2005) later emphasized that leadership is sustained not only by power but by the ability to organize cooperation and maintain institutional trust.

In West Africa, Nigeria historically performed many of these hegemonic functions. It financed ECOWAS institutions, absorbed the bulk of peacekeeping costs during civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and consistently intervened in regional diplomatic crises (Adebajo, 2008). These actions reinforced Nigeria's image as a regional stabilizer and continental leader.

However, Hegemonic Stability Theory also suggests that leadership weakens when domestic economic foundations erode. As Nigeria's economy became more fragile and its internal security challenges intensified, its ability to provide regional public goods declined. Reduced funding for peace operations, diplomatic inconsistency, and domestic political distractions have increasingly limited Nigeria's leadership effectiveness within Africa's multilateral institutions.

Bridging the Theories: Ambition Without Capacity

When combined, Rentier State Theory and Hegemonic Stability Theory reveal the core tension shaping Nigeria's contemporary foreign policy. Hegemonic Stability Theory explains Nigeria's historical leadership aspirations and early successes, while Rentier State Theory exposes the economic and institutional fragility that prevents those ambitions from being sustained.

Nigeria seeks to act as a continental leader, yet its rent-dependent economy undermines the very foundations required for hegemonic stability. Weak institutions, fiscal vulnerability, and elite-driven governance restrict long-term foreign policy planning and

reduce the state's capacity to finance leadership roles. This creates a persistent gap between Nigeria's leadership image and its practical influence.

As domestic constraints intensify, Nigeria's foreign policy becomes increasingly reactive rather than strategic, allowing other African states with stronger institutional coherence to assume leadership roles in peacebuilding, economic coordination, and continental diplomacy (Tieku, 2017; Shaw, 2012).

This theoretical synthesis demonstrates that Nigeria's declining influence is not merely the result of diplomatic failure but reflects deeper political economy structures that weaken hegemonic sustainability. Sustainable African leadership, the framework suggests, requires not only ambition and historical prestige but strong domestic institutions, diversified economic foundations, and accountable governance.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and historical research design to examine Nigeria's foreign policy trajectory and its evolving leadership role in contemporary Africa. The qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring the political, institutional, and economic dynamics that shape state behaviour in regional and continental affairs, while the historical dimension enables the analysis of continuity and change in Nigeria's leadership posture from the post-independence period to the present. Together, these approaches allow for a contextualized understanding of how past foreign policy commitments intersect with current domestic and regional realities.

The study relies primarily on secondary data drawn from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official government publications, foreign policy statements, African Union and ECOWAS policy documents, and speeches by key Nigerian political leaders and diplomats. These sources provide both empirical evidence and interpretive insights into Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, institutional roles, and policy shifts over time.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Relevant texts were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes related to leadership performance, domestic governance constraints, regional influence, and strategic adaptation. This method facilitated the organization of complex qualitative information into coherent analytical categories, enabling the study to trace patterns of decline, continuity, and transformation in Nigeria's foreign policy influence. By triangulating multiple sources and perspectives, the study enhances the reliability and validity of its findings.

History of Nigeria's Influence in Africa

Nigeria's continental leadership has historically rested on its huge demographic size, rich resource endowment, and vigorated military strength which are critical areas of foreign

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policy determinants for any country. From independence in 1960, successive governments pursued a foreign policy anchored on Pan-African solidarity, anti-colonialism, and regional integration (Adebajo, 2008). Nigeria's support for Southern Africa's liberation struggles, particularly against apartheid in South Africa and colonial rule in Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique, established it as a strong advocate of self-determination. The creation of the Southern African Relief Fund in 1976 further institutionalized this commitment (Aluko, 1981).

Regionally, Nigeria was central to the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 and has remained its major financial and political contributor (Asante, 1986). Its leadership of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) during the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts in the 1990s underscored its hegemonic role, as it committed substantial troops and resources to regional peacekeeping (Adebajo, 2002). At the continental level, Nigeria championed the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), reflecting its push for African economic self-reliance (Adedeji, 1993), while its oil wealth gave it leverage in global platforms such as OPEC and the Non-Aligned Movement (Fawole, 2003).

Nigeria also projected soft power through education, media, and cultural diplomacy. Its universities attracted African students during the 1970s and 1980s, while Nollywood later became a cultural export shaping continental perceptions (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These efforts consolidated Nigeria's image as the "giant of Africa," with both material and normative authority. However, this influence depended on economic strength and consistent governance; factors that have weakened over time, leading to the current decline in Nigeria's international standing.

Leadership Question and Foreign Policy Outcomes: The Genesis of Nigeria's Waning Influence in the Continent?

Leadership quality is a critical determinant of a state's foreign policy effectiveness, credibility, and influence. In Nigeria, persistent leadership deficits, manifested in weak governance structures, corruption, limited political legitimacy, and elite fragmentation, have increasingly constrained its capacity to play a decisive role in African diplomacy (Akinyemi, 2017). These domestic shortcomings undermine the coherence of foreign policy, producing reactive decision-making and limiting Nigeria's ability to shape regional security, economic, and political outcomes.

One major way leadership failure translates into weak foreign policy outcomes is through poor governance and institutional decay. Corruption and mismanagement divert resources from diplomacy, peacekeeping, and regional development commitments, weakening Nigeria's capacity to provide collective goods in the subregion (Omotola, 2016). For example, during the 1990s, Nigeria played a central role in financing and deploying

troops for ECOWAS peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Adebajo, 2008). However, in recent years, budgetary constraints, administrative inefficiency, and domestic crises have limited its contributions, reducing its influence in shaping regional security agendas.

Leadership deficits also affect policy consistency and strategic vision. Nigeria's foreign policy has frequently shifted with changing administrations, reflecting domestic political priorities rather than a coherent long-term strategy (Gambari, 2008). Such inconsistency undermines its credibility in African Union initiatives and multilateral negotiations, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (Shaw, 2012), where sustained engagement is essential for leadership legitimacy.

Moreover, domestic leadership failures erode Nigeria's soft power. Insecurity, governance lapses, and electoral controversies diminish its moral authority to champion democracy, human rights, and good governance across Africa (Mustapha, 2020). Consequently, other African states with more stable institutions, such as South Africa, Kenya, and Rwanda, have increasingly assumed leadership roles in regional conflict mediation and institution building (Khadiagala, 2020).

Elite fragmentation further constrains foreign policy effectiveness. Competing political factions and patronage networks influence diplomatic appointments and policy decisions, undermining professionalism and strategic coordination (Suberu, 2021). As a result, Nigeria's ability to sustain long-term continental initiatives, negotiate effectively in multilateral forums, and act as a stabilizing force is compromised.

These leadership challenges explain why Nigeria's historical dominance in African diplomacy has gradually diminished. The deficits do not simply reflect domestic governance issues; they directly impact foreign policy performance, regional credibility, and the sustainability of Nigeria's historical hegemonic role. Nigeria's experience underscores that continental leadership requires not only material capacity and historical prestige but also accountable governance, institutional coherence, and strategic vision (Watts, 2004).

By linking domestic leadership quality to concrete foreign policy outcomes within ECOWAS, peacekeeping operations, and African Union diplomacy, this analysis highlights leadership reform as an essential condition for revitalizing Nigeria's influence and effectiveness in Africa.

Other Sources of Nigeria's Waning Influence in Africa

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Despite its earlier prominence, Nigeria's international influence has declined significantly in recent decades. This erosion stems from structural, political, and economic weaknesses that have undermined its credibility and regional leadership.

One major factor is economic decline. Nigeria's heavy dependence on oil revenues has exposed it to global price fluctuations, leading to recurring fiscal crises, inflation, and debt burdens (Ibrahim, 2021). The inability to diversify the economy has limited Nigeria's capacity to sustain the kind of financial commitments that previously underpinned its leadership in ECOWAS, the African Union, and global institutions (Ogunkola & Bankole, 2005).

Political instability has further weakened Nigeria's influence. Cycles of military rule, governance deficits, electoral malpractices, and entrenched corruption have eroded the legitimacy of its leadership model (Suberu, 2010). Unlike in the 1970s and 1980s when Nigeria's assertive diplomacy was backed by internal stability and oil wealth, contemporary governance failures have cast doubt on its ability to serve as a continental model.

Security challenges also contribute significantly. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, farmer–herder conflicts, secessionist agitations, and banditry have overstretched Nigeria's military and diverted resources inward (Campbell, 2020). This has limited the country's ability to deploy troops abroad as it did during the ECOMOG era, weakening its status as a regional security guarantor.

In addition, the rise of competing powers has diluted Nigeria's relative influence. South Africa's post-apartheid reintegration gave Africa another continental heavyweight, while Egypt, Kenya, and Ethiopia have increasingly projected diplomatic clout within the African Union and global platforms (Tieku, 2019). External actors such as China, the United States, and the European Union also wield growing influence, overshadowing Nigeria's voice in continental decision-making.

Lastly, soft power has also weakened. Once a hub for education and cultural exchange, Nigeria now faces reputational crises tied to corruption, poor infrastructure, and emigration. Nollywood remains influential, but its impact cannot compensate for Nigeria's declining material capacity. Consequently, the gap between Nigeria's self-ascribed role as the "giant of Africa" and its actual performance continues to widen.

Case Studies: Evidence of Nigeria's Waning Continental Leadership

Nigeria's declining influence in Africa is exemplified in several recent case studies, which highlight its reduced capacity to shape regional and continental agendas. A significant illustration is the leadership crisis within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Historically, Nigeria has been the driving force behind

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ECOWAS, providing both financial resources and political leadership. However, recent disagreements among member states over decision-making processes, financial contributions, and strategic priorities have revealed Nigeria's weakened voice. In particular, Nigeria has struggled to assert authority over smaller member states amid increasing influence from external powers such as France and the European Union, which now play larger roles in regional conflict resolution and economic assistance (Adebajo, 2010). The inability to unify ECOWAS behind coherent policies underscores a decline in Nigeria's hegemonic capacity and raises questions about the organization's effectiveness in maintaining regional stability.

Nigeria's inability to lead in regional conflicts further exemplifies its diminishing influence. In the past, Nigeria-led interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) were benchmarks for Africa-led peacekeeping (Onuoha, 2014). In contrast, contemporary crises in the Sahel region, including the insurgency in Mali and political instability following coups in Burkina Faso and Niger, have exposed Nigeria's limitations. Domestic security challenges, such as Boko Haram insurgency and banditry, have constrained Nigeria's ability to deploy forces or provide strategic guidance, leaving the responsibility to other regional actors and external forces, including the United Nations, France, and the African Union (Francis, 2013). This retreat from active intervention marks a stark contrast to its historical role as a guarantor of regional security.

A third case study involves Nigeria's limited influence in shaping the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). While Nigeria was initially seen as a key driver of continental economic integration, recent negotiations and implementation phases have highlighted its inability to assert leadership compared to South Africa and Kenya (Page & Söderbom, 2015). These countries have been more proactive in influencing trade regulations, investment policies, and dispute resolution mechanisms within AfCFTA. Nigeria's internal economic challenges, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inconsistent policy frameworks have hindered its capacity to champion regional industrialization, investment facilitation, and value-chain development (Hartzenberg, 2011). This relative inactivity diminishes Nigeria's credibility as a continental economic leader and allows other African powers to shape the integration agenda.

Collectively, these case studies provide empirical evidence of Nigeria's waning continental leadership. From institutional influence in ECOWAS to regional security and economic integration, Nigeria's diminished capacity to lead underscores a broader structural and political decline. Without concerted reforms in governance, economic resilience, and regional engagement, Nigeria risks ceding its historical role as Africa's hegemonic power, with implications for both regional stability and continental integration.

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Implications of Nigeria's Decline for Africa

Nigeria's diminishing international influence carries significant consequences for Africa's political stability, regional integration, and global representation. As a historically continental anchor, Nigeria's retreat from leadership roles creates a vacuum with far-reaching implications. One major effect is the weakening of regional security mechanisms. During the 1990s, Nigeria's leadership of ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrated the centrality of Nigerian power to conflict resolution in West Africa (Adebajo, 2002). Today, overstretched by domestic insurgencies, Nigeria is less able to assume such roles, leaving conflicts in Mali, Burkina Faso, and the wider Sahel region to external actors, particularly France, Russia and the United Nations (Francis, 2013). This dependence on external intervention undermines African ownership of its security agenda.

Another implication of Nigeria's waning influence is the erosion of regional integration efforts. Nigeria's active role in the founding of ECOWAS and its contributions to the African Union once positioned it as a driver of integration. However, economic crises and protectionist policies have weakened its leadership in AfCFTA negotiations and cross-border trade facilitation (Hartzenberg, 2011). The absence of consistent Nigerian leadership risks slowing the momentum of regional integration, allowing competing economies such as South Africa and Kenya to set the agenda.

Nigeria's decline has also affected Africa's global representation. As the continent's most populous state, Nigeria was once regarded as a credible continental representative in global fora such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, and the United Nations (Fawole, 2003). Its weakened economy and governance crisis now undermine its claim to a permanent African seat on a reformed UN Security Council, shifting attention toward South Africa and Egypt (Murithi, 2009). This reduces the collective bargaining power of Africa at the global level.

Finally, Nigeria's soft power has been significantly diminished by its domestic challenges. Corruption, poverty, and insecurity tarnish its image as a continental model. While Nollywood and Afrobeats sustain some degree of cultural influence, these cannot substitute for Nigeria's diminished political and economic leadership (Obi, 2018). The contradiction between the view of Nigeria's status as "giant of Africa" and its inability to deliver basic governance at home undermines its legitimacy abroad. Thus, while some recognize and applaud Nigeria's swift response that foiled the December 7, 2025 coup in Benin Republic, others still refer to its diminished stature as it failed to enforce democratic norms across West Africa leading to the exit of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from the regional body.

Therefore, it suffices to submit that Nigeria's decline weakens Africa's ability to respond autonomously to security, economic, and diplomatic challenges. The vacuum created by

Nigeria's retreat is increasingly filled by external actors and competing regional powers, fragmenting Africa's voice in global affairs.

Nigeria's Comeback at Continental Leadership in Africa

Reversing Nigeria's declining influence in Africa requires a combination of structural, political, and strategic reforms aimed at restoring its credibility and capacity to lead. Central to this effort is economic diversification. Reducing overreliance on oil revenues by investing in agriculture, manufacturing, and technology-driven industries would enhance Nigeria's economic resilience and provide the fiscal resources needed to support regional initiatives (Omotola, 2016). A more diversified economy would also strengthen Nigeria's bargaining power in continental and global fora, enabling it to participate more effectively in initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and ECOWAS integration programmes.

Governance reform is equally critical. Addressing corruption, strengthening institutions, and promoting transparency would enhance Nigeria's legitimacy as a regional leader (Suberu, 2021). Political stability, credible democratic processes, and consistent foreign policy implementation would reassure African partners that Nigeria can sustain leadership roles without internal distractions. These reforms would allow Nigeria to project both normative and material power, reinforcing its historical image as the continent's anchor.

Security sector reforms are another crucial pathway. Strengthening military and law enforcement capacity to address domestic insurgencies, separatist movements, and cross-border threats would free resources for regional peacekeeping and intervention initiatives (Campbell, 2020). By demonstrating domestic stability, Nigeria could reassert itself as a guarantor of regional security, restoring confidence among West African and continental partners in its ability to lead collective security efforts.

Finally, Nigeria must leverage soft power strategically. Promoting cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and media influence can complement material power and rebuild Nigeria's image as a model for Africa (Obi, 2018). Investments in infrastructure, technology, and human capital will further enhance the country's attractiveness as a regional hub for innovation, culture, and leadership.

Conclusions

It is so far clear that Nigeria's weak foreign policy engagements has created a void yet to be filled in the African continent and within the West African subregion in particular. Beyond Africa, the world now needs Nigeria more than ever before in the country's post-

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independence history. The issues of climate change, international organized crimes, narco-terrorism, the crises of global financial and economic order can only be mitigated or resolved with collective efforts. Nigerian leadership through a robust pragmatic foreign policy options is a desideratum for a coherent and impactful African voice in the effort to resolve these continental and global challenges. By combining economic strength, governance reform, security capability, and soft power, Nigeria can gradually reclaim its position as the "giant of Africa" and effectively contribute to regional and continental integration frameworks, stabilize the polities, and strengthen global representation of Africa as it has done hitherto.

Restoring Nigeria's influence requires a conscious and purposeful multidimensional foreign policy strategy. Economic diversification is paramount, as reducing overreliance on oil and investing in agriculture, technology, and manufacturing will enhance fiscal capacity and strengthen the country's bargaining power in regional and continental initiatives.

Governance reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, rule of law and institutional effectiveness will restore domestic legitimacy and international credibility, reinforcing Nigeria's leadership role in Africa.

Security sector reforms are also critical, enabling the country to manage internal threats while resuming its role as a guarantor of regional stability. Ugwu (2018) underscored the imperative of reforming Nigeria's security sector to promote genderized security structure and operations, instill fiscal discipline, respect for human rights and continental image laundering.

Finally, Nigeria must leverage soft power strategically. Cultural diplomacy, educational exchange programmes, and the promotion of its media and entertainment industry can complement material capabilities to project a positive continental image. Investments in human capital, infrastructure, and technological innovation will further enhance Nigeria's attractiveness as a hub for leadership, culture, and economic opportunity. By adopting this comprehensive approach, Nigeria can gradually reclaim its position as Africa's "giant."

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