

**MILITARY RULE IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW OF MURTALA  
MOHAMMED FOREIGN POLICY THRUST (1975-1979)**

**BY**

**GREGORY OSASENAGA OSAYUWA  
ART2004671**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND  
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**CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by **GREGORY OSASENAGA OSAYUWA** in the Department of History and International Studies University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**Miss. Osarenoma Omoruyi**  
**Project Supervisor**

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**Dr. Frank Ikponmwonsa**  
**Head of Department**

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**DATE**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His infinite mercy and grace, who is the Alpha and Omega, to Him be glory both now and forever.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

Military rule in Nigeria between 1975 and 1979 marked a significant chapter in the nation's history, particularly under the leadership of General Murtala Mohammed, the regime was invested into a series of reforms that not only reshaped Nigeria's domestic landscape but also profoundly influenced its foreign policy objectives. This project provides a comprehensive overview of Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy thrust during his brief tenure, analyzing the motivations behind his decisions, the geopolitical context of the time, and the implications for Nigeria's international relations.

Murtala Mohammed's administration was characterized by a commitment to assert Nigeria's role on the global stage, particularly in Africa. His policies were driven by a vision of Pan-Africanism, aiming to enhance Nigeria's influence within the continent while addressing issues such as colonialism, apartheid, and regional conflicts. This work will explore how Mohammed's foreign policy initiatives sought to promote Nigeria as a leader in the African liberation movement and how his confrontational stance towards Western powers reflected a desire for greater autonomy and self-determination.

Mohammed's regime was notable for its revolutionary rhetoric and a commitment to a transition to civilian rule. He aimed to restore public confidence in governance and address the socio-economic challenges facing Nigeria. His administration focused on several key areas<sup>1</sup> such as Anti-Corruption Measures, Economic Policies and Foreign

Policies Under which Mohammed adopted a more assertive foreign policy, particularly in Africa, emphasizing support for liberation movements in Southern Africa and recognition of new governments in countries like Angola. The setting up of a committee made of individuals of reputable status in their professional callings to review the whole essence of Nigeria's foreign policy and to formulate new guidelines<sup>1</sup> was a signal to the seriousness of the regime to be more assertive in its relations with other countries. The regime did not play with words when it openly declared that Africa would occupy the central position in its foreign policy without necessarily affecting the national interest negatively<sup>2</sup>

In the comity of nations, Nigeria is unarguably a low-level state in terms of industrialisation, economic activities and technological abilities. This situation, inevitably, hampers her influence and rubs adversely on her relations with states, especially when the use of force and diplomacy are necessary. Therefore, Nigeria's foreign policy suffers existential and philosophical restrictions unknown to the foreign policy of states like Russia, or the US. However, Murtala Muhammad was the true personification of a knight of shining amour, boldly and courageously pursuing policies that seemed anti-West. He reappraised foreign policy, stressing a "Nigeria first" orientation in line with OPEC price guidelines that was to the disadvantage of other African countries. Nigeria became "neutral" rather than "nonaligned" in international affairs<sup>3</sup>. By examining key events and policy decisions, this work will highlight the legacy of Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy and its lasting impact on Nigeria's diplomatic relations and national identity.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine Murtala Mohammed foreign policy thrust between 1975 and 1979 and the specific objectives are;

1. to examine the Nigeria state political history
2. to analyse the conceptual meaning of foreign policy
3. to examine the foreign policies thrust of Murtala Mohammed administration.
4. to examine the Nigeria's role in liberation of Angola and Namibia as a foreign policy thrust
5. to discuss the impact of murtala Mohammed foreign policy objectives on the development of Nigeria at that time .

## **Scope of the Study**

It is the scope of this work is the military administrations of Nigeria from 1975 to 1979 even after the death of murtala Mohammed to contribute to the growing academic literature on the dynamism of Nigeria's foreign policy under the Murtala Mohammed administration. The study will explore the political, social, economic, and historical factors that contributed to the successes and failures of these policies. It will also discuss how the mindset Gen Murtala Mohammed distinguished his government from other military and civilian governments.

## **Methodology**

For the development of this work and its relevance or contribution to existing works, Articles, text books will be consulted. Data which contributes to the development of this research will also be gathered.

To achieve the study's objectives, a combination of qualitative and historical research methods will be employed. Primary sources, including official documents, speeches, and interviews, will be analyzed alongside secondary sources such as government publications, documentaries, newspapers and scholarly articles and books on Nigeria politics, Nigeria military administrations, and Nigeria's foreign policies during Nigeria's military administrations and brief biography of Gen Murtala Mohammed. Furthermore, this research work depends largely on archival materials both online and offline. Official publications cited on the websites will also be used. Books, journal articles, conference proceedings, seminar papers and finally other related publications will be used in gathering secondary information for this research.

## **Literature Review**

Dele Jerimade, "Transformation in Nigeria's foreign policy from Balewa to Obasanjo".<sup>7</sup> The aim of this review article was to re-examine and reassess the transformations in Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomacy during the administration of Mohammed and Obasanjo. This review article discovers that Nigeria's foreign policy truly transformed from reactionary, conservative, static, and lacklustre nature to inspiring, progressive, radical, and dynamic during the administration of Generals Murtala

Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo. The article concluded that the Mohammed-Obasanjo's foreign policy was the best in Nigeria from independence in 1960 to 1979 when Obasanjo handed power to President Shehu Shagari. However, this article did not carefully analyse the rise of Murtala Mohammed to power and the structure of his military cabinet.

Uwem Jonah Akpan, "Nigeria's Diplomatic Initiatives and the Liberation of Angola: 1960-1978".<sup>8</sup> This paper assesses Nigeria's diplomatic engagements toward Angola's liberation and suggests that Nigeria should mainstream economic dimension in her diplomatic relations with Angola on the basis of national interest while still focusing on her Afrocentric foreign policy posture for the good of the continent. The paper adopts a historical descriptive methodology.

David Aworawo, "National Interest and Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Nigerian-British Relations, 1960-1999"<sup>9</sup>. This article interrogates the seeming contradiction and challenges the notion that the values defended by liberal democracies like Britain automatically make relations between them and military regimes adversarial. It maintains that there are instances where this general pattern is not followed depending on other factors. This is clearly revealed by the fact that the first half of the 1970s marked one of the best experiences of Anglo-Nigerian relations even though Nigeria was under a military government during the period. The relations between Britain and Nigeria however turned sour under another military government in Nigeria from 1976-1979. A similar pattern of cheered relations is discernible from 1984-1998. The article contends

that economic considerations, the approach of Nigerian leaders to governance at different times, whether civilian or military, and the prevailing condition of the international system were prominent factors that shaped the Anglo-Nigerian relations. However this article did not centre much on the domestic policies of Murtala Mohammed and Gen Obasanjo's administration.

Abarigwe, Anayo and Ojo, Oluranti, "Nigeria Foreign Policy during Murtala Mohammed: A Historical Perspective"<sup>10</sup>. The study examines the foreign policies of Murtala and how workable and how the policies were implemented. This study reveals that the administration of M. Mohammed was the only military administration whose foreign policy was robust, credible and wholly workable. Murtala Mohammed initiated and supervised the implementation of the policies to the last. The study claims it was partly responsible for the unabashed and willful deference to the Western bloc by the majority of Nigerian leaders during the Cold War, in obvious contradiction to the spirits and letters of Nigeria's foreign policy thrust. This article adopts historical method of narration, description, and analysis; the sources of data were secondary materials.

Gabriel Ogechi, "Inconsistency and Lopsidedness in Nigeria's Foreign Policy Thrust under Military Regimes: Lessons to Learn,"<sup>11</sup>. This paper is an attempt to highlight the roles played by different military regimes towards foreign policy formulation and implementation. The paper placed strong emphasis on the inconsistent nature of the foreign policy thrust of different military heads of state in Nigeria and most importantly the gross neglect of the office of the Ministry of External Affairs by the

military juntas. The paper examined the role and nature of foreign policy and actions of military heads of state such as General Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Muhammed, Olusegun Obasanjo, Muhamadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdusalami Abubakah. The paper adopted historical approach, and relied on secondary sources including journals, books, newspapers and policy documents. Interesting issues such as a comparison of the regime's foreign policies and appraisal of the capacity of Foreign Affairs Ministers were also explored. Finally, it was generally observed that, the rigidness and over-concentration of power in the hands of military heads of state and the lack of successor's follow-up of their predecessors' policy is the major setback and the lesson to learn in this contemporary time. The paper contends that, the attainment of national development orchestrated on the platform of sound foreign policy should be guided by follow-up, i.e., successive regimes should not entirely discard the foreign policy thrust of their predecessors.

Aliyu Suleiman, Abdulrazak Yuguda Madu, and Goni Ibrahim, "Trends in the Nigerian Foreign Policy from 1960 to 2015: An Overview".<sup>12</sup> This paper overviews the trends and historical antecedence of the Nigerian foreign policy from independence to date. Foreign policy is inextricably linked to domestic policy. Nigeria's foreign policy cannot be considered in isolation from its domestic issues such as the state of the economy and other social factors within the country. However, from independence the Nigeria's foreign policy has witness changes in circumstances, situations, styles of

leadership, character of the leadership and experiences over time. However, the basic principles guiding Nigeria's foreign policy have been consistent.

## **CHAPTERIZATION**

### **CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This chapter consists of the introduction, aims and objectives, the scope of study, methodology, literature review, chapterization and endnote.

### **CHAPTER TWO: FOREIGN POLICY**

This chapter will discuss the meaning of foreign policy, the determinants and instruments of a state foreign policy.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE NIGERIA POLITICAL STATE AND THE FOREIGN POLICY THRUST OF MURTALA MOHAMMED ON ANGOLA AND NAMIBIA**

This chapter will discuss the state of the Nigerian political system with the circumstances surrounding the rise of Murtala Muhammad to power and his administration's foreign policy thrust towards the liberation of Angola and Namibia.

### **CHAPTER FOUR: IMPACT OF MURTALA MOHAMMED FOREIGN POLICY THRUST ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA**

This chapter will discuss the impact of Murtala Mohammed's administration foreign policy thrust on the development of Nigeria, taking into consideration both the domestic and the external impacts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

This is the concluding chapter of this work, it is a summary of all issues raised in the preceding chapters.

## Endnotes

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **FOREIGN POLICY**

#### **What is foreign policy?**

Foreign policy refers to the decisions and actions taken by a state to achieve its national interests, which can include economic growth, national security, diplomatic relations, and cultural exchange<sup>1</sup>. It encompasses principles that guide a state's interactions with foreign entities, including other governments, international organizations, and non-state actors. Foreign policy aims to protect national interests, ensure security, promote economic development, and uphold a country's values on the global stage<sup>2</sup>. Interaction amongst states in the international system have been built on the fact that no state can exist on its own, leading to the interdependencies of states. This have prompted the need for all states to adopt a foreign policy in their interactions with other states.

This definition can be attempted from several perspective; from the diplomatic perspective, foreign policy is defined as the means by which a state conducts its relations with other states to achieve its national objectives. This includes negotiations, treaties, and alliances that serve the country's interests<sup>3</sup>. In terms of national security, security perspective, foreign policy is often viewed as a framework for ensuring the safety and sovereignty of a nation. This involves military strategies, intelligence operations, and defense alliances that protect a country from external threats<sup>4</sup>. Economically, foreign policy can be understood as the strategies employed by a government to manage its

international economic relations. This includes trade agreements, economic sanctions, and foreign aid, all aimed at boosting a nation's economic interests and influence<sup>5</sup>. Culturally, foreign policy also encompasses the promotion of a nation's cultural values and interests abroad. This aspect includes cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and efforts to foster mutual understanding between nations<sup>6</sup>.

According to Ernest Satow, a notable scholar in international relations, he defines foreign policy as the use of tact and intelligence in conducting the affairs of a nation with other nations."<sup>7</sup> He further defines it as the formulation of a nation's strategy for dealing with other nations, involving the management of relations with foreign states and the pursuit of national interests.<sup>8</sup> According to Hans Morgenthau, foreign policy is the art of adapting the means of a state to the ends of its national interests<sup>9</sup>. Morgenthau emphasizes that foreign policy involves strategically using a state's resources to achieve its national goals, highlighting the centrality of power in international relations.

While according to Kenneth Waltz, foreign policy is The behavior of states in the international system<sup>10</sup>. Waltz focuses on how the structure of the international system influences state behavior, arguing that the distribution of power among states shapes their foreign policy decisions.

### **Determinants of Foreign Policy**

Foreign policy refers to the strategies and decisions that a country employs to manage its interactions with other states, international organizations, and non-state actors. Several factors or determinants influence a country's foreign policy. These determinants include

both domestic and international influences that shape how states behave in the global arena. Below are the key determinants of foreign policy:

### **Geopolitical Factors**

Geography plays a significant role in shaping foreign policy. A country's location, climate, and natural resources can influence its strategic interests and alliances. For instance, countries with coastlines might prioritize naval power and maritime security, while landlocked nations might focus on building strong relations with neighboring countries to ensure access to trade routes<sup>11</sup>. The geographical factor may consist of; Location: A nation's geographic position affects its security, trade routes, and relations with neighboring countries. For example, landlocked countries may prioritize access to trade routes through neighboring states<sup>12</sup>; Natural Resources: The availability or scarcity of resources like oil, minerals, and water often motivates alliances, trade agreements, or conflicts<sup>13</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been largely shaped by geopolitical factors, including its geographical location, economic resources, regional leadership ambitions, historical experiences, and global political dynamics. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has sought to assert itself as a key player in African and global politics, leveraging its population size, economic strength, and strategic position to influence international relations. Her Strategic Position in West Africa has been a major influence in her foreign policy. Nigeria is located in West Africa, sharing borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, as well as the Gulf of Guinea. This location has influenced its foreign policy,

leading it to engage in regional peacekeeping (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), promote economic integration through ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States).and prevent instability in neighboring countries to avoid spillover effects.

### **National Interests**

National interests are central to foreign policy decision-making. These interests may include securing territorial integrity, promoting economic growth, ensuring security, and protecting cultural or ideological values. A nation often aligns its foreign policy with these interests to ensure survival and prosperity. For example, the United States has historically focused on the promotion of democracy and the protection of its economic interests abroad<sup>14</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been primarily shaped by its national interests, which include territorial integrity, economic prosperity, regional leadership, security, and global influence. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved through different political administrations, but it has always been guided by the country's core national interests. Nigeria's national interests can be categorized into: Security Interests – Protecting territorial integrity and national sovereignty, Economic Interests – Promoting trade, investment, and economic development, Political Interests – Establishing Nigeria as a regional and global leader, Cultural and,Humanitarian Interests – Protecting Nigerians abroad and promoting African unity. These factors have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy decisions, from its early Pan-African stance to its more recent economic diplomacy and global partnerships. In the area of Regional

Leadership and Peacekeeping, Nigeria has always pursued a leadership role in Africa, guided by its national interest of regional stability. Examples of Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts include: In Liberia and Sierra Leone (1990s–2000s), Nigeria Led ECOMOG military interventions to restore peace; In Sudan (Darfur crisis, 2003–2010), Nigeria contributed troops under the African Union and; In Mali (2013), Nigeria Sent troops to combat Islamist insurgents.

Also in Nigeria's relations with major powers, Nigeria has maintained a balanced relationship with the U.S., China, and Russia to maximize economic and political benefits. While Nigeria engages in trade with China, it also seeks security and investment partnerships with the U.S..

### **Political System and Government**

The political system and the type of government in power significantly shape foreign policy. In democracies, foreign policy is often influenced by public opinion, the legislative process, and political party platforms. Conversely, authoritarian regimes may have a more centralized decision-making process with less public scrutiny. Democracies may prioritize human rights and alliances with other democracies, while authoritarian regimes might focus on consolidating power and suppressing dissent<sup>15</sup>.

Leadership style also plays a crucial role; leaders with aggressive or isolationist tendencies can influence the direction of foreign policy. The personal values, ideologies, and decision-making styles of political leaders significantly influence foreign policy strategies<sup>16</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by its political system, government structure, and leadership style. As a sovereign nation, its foreign relations are influenced by its governing institutions, political ideologies, and leadership transitions. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has undergone multiple political transformations, including periods of civilian democracy, military rule, and democratic consolidation. Each era has had distinct impacts on Nigeria's foreign policy, reflecting the priorities of different governments and the structure of political power. For example, Civilian governments have generally prioritized diplomacy, economic cooperation, and regional integration in foreign policy. While, Military regimes used foreign policy to assert national strength, often favoring radical or interventionist approaches.

### **Economic Factors**

Economic strength and resources are essential determinants of foreign policy. Economic considerations include access to markets, the need for energy resources, investment, partnerships and trade relations agreements. For instance, countries with large economies tend to have more leverage in international negotiations. While a country dependent on exports will seek favorable trade agreements<sup>17</sup>. Economic crises or booms influence foreign policy stances, with countries often seeking new markets or financial aid to stabilize their economies<sup>18</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been significantly shaped by economic factors, including trade, investment, oil revenue, industrialization, debt management, and economic partnerships. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has used diplomacy to secure

foreign investment, expand trade relations, attract development aid, and protect its economic interests. Oil remains Nigeria's biggest foreign policy tool. Nigeria has used oil to, Negotiate favorable trade agreements, Exert influence within OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), and even Attract foreign investment in the petroleum sector. In Economic Regionalism and ECOWAS, Nigeria has played a leading role in ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). The goal has been to expand Nigeria's economic influence in West Africa. Nigeria has used ECOWAS to Promote free trade within the region and Stabilize neighboring economies through peacekeeping efforts.

### **Military power**

The military capabilities of a state influence its foreign policy, especially when it comes to defense and security. Countries with strong military forces may adopt more assertive foreign policies, while those with weaker military capabilities might focus on diplomacy and alliances. Military power also plays a role in deterrence and the ability to project power abroad<sup>19</sup>.

Military power has been a crucial factor in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy, especially since its independence in 1960. As the most populous country in Africa with one of the continent's largest militaries, Nigeria has often used its armed forces to project influence, maintain regional stability, and assert its leadership in African affairs.

Nigeria's foreign policy, particularly under military regimes (1966–1979, 1983–1999), was heavily influenced by its military strength. Even in democratic administrations, the

Nigerian Armed Forces have played a significant role in shaping peacekeeping missions, regional security initiatives, and counterterrorism efforts.

Nigeria's military strength has allowed it to assume a leadership role in West Africa and Africa as a whole. This is evident in ECOMOG Peacekeeping Operations. Nigeria's military has been central to ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group), the regional peacekeeping force. Examples of these Peacekeeping Operations include: Liberia (1990–1997) – Nigeria led ECOMOG's military intervention to restore peace during the Liberian Civil War, Sierra Leone (1997–1999) – Nigerian forces overthrew the military junta and reinstated the civilian government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, Guinea-Bissau (1999) – Nigeria provided military support to stabilize the government amid political unrest and Côte d'Ivoire (2003) – Nigerian troops helped prevent the country's civil war from escalating.

Through these military interventions, Nigeria has asserted its influence in West Africa, reinforcing its foreign policy objective of regional peace and stability.

### **Cultural and Ideological Factors**

Cultural and ideological factors often guide a nation's foreign policy. For instance, countries with a history of colonization or religious influence may emphasize cultural diplomacy or human rights in their foreign interactions. Nations with a history of colonization often adopt foreign policies that address issues of sovereignty, reparations, or anti-imperialism<sup>20</sup>. This was the case if African states in the 1960s and 70s. Ideological alignments with other states can determine alliances and international

cooperation. The United States' foreign policy, especially during the Cold War, was shaped by the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism. cooperation and alliances during this period was also shaped by ideologies. Many African states joined the Non-alignment Movement to keep themselves from the ideological conflict.

Though, Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by several factors, including economic interests, security concerns, and regional leadership ambitions. However, cultural and ideological factors have also played a crucial role in determining Nigeria's foreign relations. These factors influence how Nigeria interacts with other nations, particularly in Africa and the global arena.

Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, Pan-African ideals, and non-aligned ideological stance have contributed to the country's diplomatic engagements. From its early post-independence years to the present, Nigeria has used cultural diplomacy, ideological commitments to African unity, and religious considerations to establish itself as a major force in global affairs. During the Cold War (1947–1991), Nigeria avoided aligning with either the United States (capitalist bloc) or the Soviet Union (communist bloc). This ideological stance was rooted in Nigeria's belief in national sovereignty and economic self-determination. Nigeria became a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and pursued policies that reflected its commitment to independent decision-making. Also, Nigeria's ideological opposition to colonialism and apartheid shaped its diplomatic and economic policies. Nigeria Boycotted the Commonwealth Games in 1978 to protest British support for apartheid South Africa, Cut diplomatic ties with Portugal in

the 1970s due to its colonial rule over Angola and Mozambique and Provided financial and military aid to anti-apartheid groups, such as the African National Congress (ANC).

This ideological commitment to African freedom and self-rule earned Nigeria global respect but also led to economic and diplomatic tensions with Western countries.

### **Historical and Cultural Legacy**

The history of a country, its past interactions with other nations, and its cultural values all shape its foreign policy. Former colonial powers like the United Kingdom and France maintain foreign policies that reflect their colonial history and relationships with former colonies. While, Nations with a history of colonization often adopt foreign policies that address issues of sovereignty, reparations, or anti-imperialism<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, historical experiences, such as war or alliances, often shape national foreign policy strategies<sup>22</sup>. Historical rivalries, wars, or treaties can shape trust and cooperation levels. For instance, post-World War II alliances like NATO demonstrate how history influences policy<sup>23</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by a combination of historical experiences and cultural influences. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's leaders have drawn from the country's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial experiences, as well as its ethnic diversity, traditional values, and regional affiliations, to guide its interactions with other nations.

Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups and two major religions (Islam and Christianity). These cultural factors have shaped Nigeria's diplomatic relations: The

influence of Islam in Northern Nigeria has strengthened Nigeria's ties with Muslim-majority countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan. Nigeria is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), balancing its Islamic identity with its secular constitution. The predominantly Christian South has influenced Nigeria's close relations with Western nations, including the U.S. and European countries. Nigerian Christian leaders have also played roles in diplomatic mediation and peace building efforts in Africa.

### **International Environment**

The global system and international norms also play a crucial role in foreign policy. Multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, and international law can guide a country's foreign policy decisions. Membership in organizations like the United Nations or NATO influences a nation's foreign policy through collective agreements and obligations<sup>24</sup>. The international balance of power, regional security dynamics, and global issues like climate change and terrorism can also influence how states interact with each other. The distribution of power (unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar systems) shapes alliances, conflicts, and negotiations.

Nigeria's foreign policy is not shaped solely by internal national interests but is also influenced by external factors in the international environment. These include global political dynamics, economic trends, regional conflicts, international organizations, and the actions of major world powers.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has had to adapt its foreign policy to changing international realities, from the Cold War era to the post-Cold War global order and the rise of globalization and economic diplomacy. During the Cold War, the world was divided into two ideological blocs: The United States and Western Allies (Capitalist Bloc) and The Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc (Communist Bloc). Nigeria adopted a non-aligned foreign policy, meaning it did not formally take sides in the Cold War. However, it maintained relations with both blocs based on economic and political benefits. Nigeria received economic assistance from Western nations while also accepting technical and military aid from the Soviet Union.

### **Public Opinion**

Public opinion and social movements within a country can influence foreign policy decisions. A government that seeks public support may consider the views and sentiments of the electorate, especially in democratic societies. Public opinion can affect the willingness of governments to engage in war, enter trade agreements, or establish diplomatic relations<sup>25</sup>. Citizens' attitudes toward specific countries or policies can pressure governments to align with public sentiment or risk losing legitimacy

Public opinion plays a crucial role in shaping a country's foreign policy, influencing government decisions, diplomatic relations, and international engagements. In Nigeria, citizen perspectives, media influence, civil society activism, and elite opinions have historically impacted how the government formulates and executes foreign policy. Although national interests remain the primary driver of Nigeria's external relations,

public sentiment often acts as a check on government actions, especially in democratic settings. An example is the public demonstration led by Nigerians, who were majorly Nigerian university students against the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact in 1962 that resulted in the termination of the defense pact.

### **Technological Factors**

Technological Advancements: Innovations in technology, such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and military technology, influence a nation's military and economic competitiveness, shaping its foreign policy priorities<sup>26</sup>.

Technology has become a critical factor in shaping foreign policy worldwide, influencing diplomatic relations, trade, security, and international cooperation. In Nigeria, technological advancements have impacted foreign policy by shaping the country's economic diplomacy, cybersecurity strategies, defense cooperation, and international partnerships. In the area Digital Diplomacy and Nigeria's Foreign Policy, Nigerian diplomats and government agencies use digital platforms to shape international narratives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigerian embassies, and key government officials use Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms to engage with foreign leaders and the Nigerian diaspora. Nigeria has leveraged digital diplomacy to respond to international crises, promote investment, and address global issues like migration and security.

### **Instrument of a State's Foreign Policy**

A state's foreign policy is shaped by a variety of instruments that it employs to achieve its international objectives. These instruments are tools used by governments to

influence, engage, and manage their relationships with other states and international actors.

## **Diplomacy**

Diplomacy is one of the most important and direct instruments of foreign policy. It involves negotiations, dialogue, and communication between states to resolve disputes, strengthen alliances, or promote cooperation. Diplomats represent their countries abroad and work through embassies, consulates, and international organizations. The goal is to manage international relations in a peaceful manner<sup>27</sup>. Diplomacy serves as a tool for achieving national interests through peaceful means, including bilateral and multilateral engagements, economic diplomacy, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country and largest economy, has used diplomacy to advance its political, economic, and security interests while maintaining its role as a regional leader.

In Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution, Nigeria has used diplomacy to mediate conflicts and restore peace. For example led mediation efforts in Liberia (1990s) and Gambia (2017), Hosted peace talks for Sudan and South Sudan and Supported anti-terrorism diplomacy through regional military cooperation. Nigeria has also pursued economic diplomacy to attract investment and expand trade for example Signed trade agreements with China, the U.S., and the EU., Advocated for African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to boost intra-African trade and Hosting of international economic summits to attract foreign investors.

## **Military Power**

Military power is one of the most important tools in a state's foreign policy. It serves as an instrument for defense, deterrence, peacekeeping, intervention, and projection of national interests. For Nigeria, military power has played a significant role in shaping its regional influence, diplomatic engagements, and security partnerships.

In Peacekeeping Operations in Africa, Nigeria has been one of the largest troop contributors to peacekeeping missions, using its military to project influence and promote regional stability especially ECOMOG Interventions (1990s). Nigeria have led military operations in Liberia (1990–1997) where she deployed troops to restore order during the Liberian Civil War, and in Sierra Leone (1997–2000) where she used military force to reinstate a democratic government. Even in the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, Nigeria has contributed troops to peacekeeping missions in Sudan (Darfur Crisis), Mali (Counterterrorism efforts) and Democratic Republic of Congo (Stabilization mission). This peacekeeping efforts have enhanced Nigeria's regional leadership and diplomatic credibility.

## **Economy**

Economic instruments include trade agreements, sanctions, foreign aid, and investment policies. States use these tools to influence the economic behavior of other states, either by offering incentives for cooperation or imposing costs for non-compliance with their demands. Foreign aid, for example, can be used to foster good relations or to achieve strategic objectives.<sup>28</sup>

Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, has consistently used economic strategies to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Nigeria is Africa's largest crude oil producer and has used oil as a diplomatic tool in foreign relations. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has partnerships with countries like China, the U.S., India, and European nations, shaping Nigeria's diplomatic ties. Nigeria is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which influences its relations with other oil-producing nations. Nigeria has signed multiple bilateral trade agreements to enhance economic ties with global partners. The Nigeria-China economic relationship has expanded through investments in infrastructure, technology, and energy. Nigeria is also a major player in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), promoting economic integration within Africa. This work will further examines how Nigeria has used its economy as a tool of foreign policy, highlighting key areas such as trade relations, foreign aid, regional economic leadership, and economic diplomacy under the Murtala Mohammed administration.

## **Propaganda**

Propaganda is a strategic communication tool used by states to influence public perception, shape international opinion, and achieve foreign policy objectives. It involves the selective dissemination of information—sometimes truthful, misleading, or exaggerated—to serve a country's diplomatic, economic, or security interests. For Nigeria, propaganda has been used in regional leadership, economic diplomacy, anti-terrorism efforts, and global image-building.

During the Nigerian Civil War, the secessionist state of Biafra launched a global propaganda campaign, depicting itself as a victim of genocide by the Nigerian government. The Biafran leadership, supported by Western media and humanitarian organizations, used emotional images of starving children to win international sympathy. In response, the Nigerian government under General Yakubu Gowon used state media and diplomatic channels to discredit Biafra, portraying it as a rebellious movement threatening Nigeria's unity. Nigeria's successful counter-propaganda efforts helped prevent foreign recognition of Biafra, ensuring that major powers did not support secession.

Nigeria' has also engaged Anti-Apartheid Propaganda (1970s–1990s). Nigeria positioned itself as a leader in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, using propaganda to mobilize African solidarity and pressure Western countries to isolate Pretoria. The government funded radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, and international conferences that condemned apartheid. Nigerian leaders like Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo used strong anti-West rhetoric to portray Western support for apartheid as neo-colonial oppression. This propaganda campaign helped Nigeria establish itself as a Pan-African leader, influencing foreign policy in the region.

Under military rule, Successive military governments in Nigeria (Buhari, Babangida, and Abacha) used propaganda to justify their regimes internationally. General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) promoted the concept of “guided democracy” to portray his military rule as a transition to civilian governance. General Sani Abacha (1993–1998)

engaged in international propaganda to counter criticism of his dictatorship, hiring foreign lobbyists to improve Nigeria's image despite human rights abuses. State-controlled media portrayed pro-democracy activists as foreign agents trying to destabilize Nigeria. However, these propaganda efforts failed, leading to Nigeria's diplomatic isolation, sanctions, and suspension from the Commonwealth.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE NIGERIA POLITICAL STATE AND THE FOREIGN POLICY THRUST OF MURTALA MOHAMMED ON ANGOLA AND NAMIBIA**

Before Murtala Mohammed's ascension to power in 1975, Nigeria experienced significant political turmoil characterized by instability, corruption, and military coups. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, transitioning to a parliamentary democracy with Alhaji Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister and the British Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, served as head of state of Nigeria but represented by an Indigenous Governor General (IGG), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. It was not until October, 1963 that Nigeria became a republic that Nnamdi Azikiwe assumed full responsibility as Head of State of Nigeria and became Nigeria's first ceremonial President. His responsibility as president were ceremonial. But the newly established government struggled with ethnic rivalries and regional disparities. The first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was unable to unify the country effectively, leading to tensions among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> The major political parties in the first republic include Northern People's Congress (NPC)– Dominated by northern elites, led by Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa, the Action Group (AG) – Primarily Yoruba-led, with Obafemi Awolowo as its key figure, and the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroons (NCNC) – Igbo-dominated, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Despite constitutional democracy, ethnic and regional rivalries fueled political instability. The 1964 federal elections were marred by allegations of fraud and violence,

with the NPC and NCNC forming a coalition government. The Western Region crisis of 1965 further deepened tensions, as electoral fraud and violence escalated between the AG factions.<sup>2</sup> The political instability culminated in a military coup on January 15, 1966, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and other young officers. The coup, which assassinated key political leaders including Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Premier Ahmadu Bello, and Western Premier Ladoke Akintola, was perceived as favoring the Igbo ethnic group due to the survival of President Azikiwe and the appointment of Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo officer, as head of state.<sup>3</sup>

Aguiyi-Ironsi's government attempted to centralize power by abolishing the federal system through the Unification Decree No. 34, sparking resentment, particularly in the north<sup>4</sup>. The perception of Igbo dominance led to another coup on July 29, 1966, executed mainly by northern officers. Ironsi was assassinated, and Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon emerged as Nigeria's new leader.

Gowon's government sought to restore federalism but faced increasing ethnic tensions, especially after widespread anti-Igbo pogroms in the north. In 1967, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Eastern Region's governor, declared the Republic of Biafra, leading to the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970)<sup>5</sup>. The war resulted in massive casualties, economic devastation, and humanitarian crises. Gowon's government pursued a policy of "No Victor, No Vanquished" post-war, emphasizing Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation. However, despite economic growth fueled by oil revenues, corruption, inefficiency, and an unfulfilled transition to civilian rule eroded Gowon's credibility.<sup>6</sup> On

July 29, 1975, Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup led by Brigadier Murtala Mohammed, marking another phase in Nigeria's political history.

### **Economical state of Nigeria**

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited an economy dominated by agriculture, which contributed about 70% of GDP and employed nearly 80% of the workforce.<sup>7</sup> The new government pursued economic policies focused on Regional Economic Policies for example; The Western Region, under Obafemi Awolowo, invested in education and industrialization, leading to the establishment of industries like the Odua Group. The Northern Region, under Ahmadu Bello, continued focusing on groundnut exports and large-scale agricultural production. The Eastern Region, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe and later Michael Okpara, promoted palm oil production and industrial projects like the Port Harcourt refinery.<sup>8</sup>

The government initiated a \$2.2 billion plan focused on infrastructure, education, and industrialization.<sup>9</sup> The government also invested in iron and steel, power, and manufacturing sectors aimed at reducing Nigeria's dependence on raw materials. However, corruption, political instability, and regional tensions hampered effective implementation. Despite moderate economic growth, political instability—culminating in the 1966 military coup—disrupted economic progress.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) devastated the economy, particularly in the Eastern Region (Biafra), which suffered a blockade that led to severe famine and economic collapse.<sup>10</sup> The war affected groundnut, palm oil, and cocoa exports, leading to

foreign exchange losses. Factories and businesses in war-affected areas shut down, causing unemployment and a decline in manufacturing output. Military expenditures rose sharply, leading to budget deficits and inflation<sup>11</sup>. The war forced Nigeria to seek new revenue sources, leading to increased dependence on crude oil.

After the civil war, Nigeria experienced rapid economic transformation due to the oil boom of the 1970s. Under General Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975), oil revenues skyrocketed, and the government implemented ambitious economic programs. Crude oil became the main revenue source, accounting for over 80% of government earnings by 1974<sup>12</sup>. Nigeria joined OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in 1971, gaining global influence. The government embarked on massive infrastructural development, including roads, bridges, and new industrial projects. Policies aimed at diversification were introduced but largely failed due to over-reliance on oil.

There are also Structural Economic Problems. For example the Neglect of Agriculture; as oil revenues increased, the government reduced investment in agriculture, leading to food shortages and rising imports. There was also Corruption and Mismanagement due to Massive oil wealth that led to rampant corruption, with government officials mismanaging funds<sup>13</sup>. There was also increased public spending and poor planning which led to inflation, making basic goods expensive for ordinary Nigerians.

Despite government investments in steel, textiles, and cement production, most industries lacked local expertise and were poorly managed.<sup>14</sup> Dependence on foreign

imports persisted, increasing Nigeria's trade deficit. By 1975, while Nigeria had significant oil wealth, the economy remained fragile due to corruption, poor governance, and over-reliance on crude oil exports.

### **The Rise of Murtala Mohammed to Power**

Murtala Ramat Mohammed emerged as Nigeria's Head of State on July 30, 1975, following a bloodless coup that ousted General Yakubu Gowon. His rise to power was shaped by Nigeria's post-civil war political instability, dissatisfaction with Gowon's government, and the influence of military factions seeking reform. This work examines the factors that led to Murtala's ascension, the coup that brought him to power, and the early actions of his administration.

General Yakubu Gowon had ruled Nigeria since 1966, leading the country through the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). Although he successfully reunited Nigeria after the war, his post-war governance faced several challenges including Failure to Return Nigeria to Civilian Rule. Gowon had promised a transition to civilian democracy but repeatedly postponed elections. In 1974, he announced that Nigeria was "not ready" for democracy, angering politicians and military officers.<sup>15</sup>

There was also Corruption and Economic Mismanagement; the oil boom (1970–1974) brought massive wealth to Nigeria, but corruption became rampant. Public officials mismanaged funds, with cases like the 1974 Cement Scandal, where excess cement imports clogged Nigerian ports.<sup>16</sup> The administration also witnessed Inefficiency in Government; the bureaucracy expanded excessively, leading to slow decision-making

and lack of accountability. Key infrastructural projects were abandoned or poorly executed. There was also Rising Military Discontent. Many younger officers felt sidelined as senior officers remained in power. There was ethnic tension within the military, especially among officers from the north and mid-western regions.<sup>17</sup> There was also the Growing Calls for Reform. By 1974–1975, various groups within the military sought reforms to Eliminate corruption, remove ineffective leadership and Speed up the transition to democracy.

On July 29, 1975, while Gowon was attending an OAU (Organization of African Unity) summit in Uganda, the coup was launched. Military units took control of government institutions, airports, and radio stations. The coup was bloodless, with no recorded deaths. Colonel Joseph Garba announced the coup on national radio, declaring Gowon's government overthrown due to corruption and inefficiency. On July 30, 1975, Murtala Mohammed officially became Nigeria's Head of State and Commander-in-Chief. Brigadier Olusegun Obasanjo was named Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters (effectively Deputy Head of State). Major General Theophilus Danjuma became Chief of Army Staff. This new government focused on radical reforms to clean up corruption, improve governance, and prepare for civilian rule.

Murtala Mohammed Was Chosen as Leader due to several reasons: Murtala had proven himself during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) as a fearless and strategic commander. His leadership in the 2nd Division of the Nigerian Army during the war earned him respect among military officers.<sup>18</sup> He was known for his no-nonsense attitude

and discipline. Many military officers believed he would clean up corruption and restore efficiency to government. There was also a northern influence. Murtala was a northern officer (from Kano), which gave him support from key military factions in the north. At the same time, he was not seen as an ethnic nationalist, making him acceptable to officers from other regions. Another was due to Popular Support among Soldiers and Civilians. The Nigerian public had grown frustrated with Gowon's government, making Murtala's takeover widely accepted. His first speeches as Head of State emphasized accountability, justice, and economic reform, boosting his popularity.

Upon taking to power, Murtala Mohammed moved swiftly to implement radical changes. There was Mass Purge of the Civil Service. Over 10,000 public officials were dismissed to eliminate corruption and inefficiency.<sup>19</sup> There was also a Decentralization of Government. He created seven new states to reduce regional dominance and enhance governance. He also expelled Corrupt Officials. High-ranking officials who had enriched themselves during Gowon's government were investigated and removed. Due his determination to return Nigeria to civilian rule, Murtala announced a plan to return Nigeria to democracy by 1979.

### **Murtala Mohammed's Foreign Policy Thrust in Angola**

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy was bold, assertive, and Pan-Africanist, with a strong emphasis on anti-colonialism, non-alignment, and African solidarity. One of the most defining moments of his short-lived administration was Nigeria's diplomatic intervention in Angola's independence struggle. His government played a pivotal role in

recognizing and supporting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) against Western-backed factions, particularly the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). This work examines Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy approach, the Angolan crisis, Nigeria's strategic intervention, and the impact of his decision on African geopolitics.

Murtala Mohammed's Foreign Policy Philosophy was majorly centered on Pan-Africanism and Anti-Colonialism. Murtala strongly believed that Africa must control its own destiny and resist foreign interference, particularly from the United States, Britain, and apartheid South Africa. He viewed Western-backed African leaders as neo-colonial puppets and sought to strengthen African independence movements.<sup>20</sup>

He was committed to Non-Alignment and Opposition to Imperialism. Nigeria was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which resisted alignment with either the Western or Soviet blocs during the Cold War. However, Murtala saw U.S. and South African interference in Angola as neocolonial aggression and took a firm stance against them<sup>21</sup>.

Also committed to the Promotion of African Unity and Liberation Struggles, Murtala prioritized supporting African countries still under colonial rule, such as Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Nigeria increased financial, military, and diplomatic support for anti-colonial movements<sup>22</sup>.

## **The Angolan Crisis and the Role of External Powers**

After nearly 500 years of Portuguese rule, Angola finally gained independence in November 1975. However, the country descended into civil war as three rival factions fought for control: MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) Led by Agostinho Neto, was a socialist-oriented movement supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba and it had strongholds in urban areas, including the capital, Luanda; UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) Led by Jonas Savimbi, was backed by the U.S., South Africa, and China. It had strongholds in the rural areas of central and southern Angola<sup>23</sup>; FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola) Led by Holden Roberto. FNLA was supported by the U.S., Zaire (now DR Congo), and France. It was mostly based in the north of Angola.

As Angola approached independence, the U.S. and apartheid South Africa intervened militarily to prevent the MPLA from taking power. The CIA funneled funds and weapons to UNITA and FNLA, while South African troops invaded Angola in October 1975.<sup>24</sup> This situation posed a serious threat to African self-determination, and Murtala Mohammed saw it as a test of Nigeria's role in leading the continent's decolonization efforts.

### **Murtala Mohammed's Efforts towards Angola's Independence**

Despite pressure from Western nations, Nigeria became the first African country to officially recognize the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola on November 11, 1975<sup>25</sup>. This recognition gave the MPLA critical diplomatic credibility within Africa,

pressured other African nations to follow Nigeria's lead in legitimizing the MPLA and provided moral and political encouragement to MPLA leaders fighting against foreign-backed rebels. This decision was a direct rejection of U.S. and South African influence in Angola, showing that Nigeria would not allow external powers to dictate African affairs.

Also to support the independence of Angola was the Landmark Speech at the OAU Summit on January 11, 1976. At the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Addis Ababa, Murtala Mohammed delivered one of the most powerful speeches in African diplomatic history. He condemned foreign interference in Angola, declaring:

*"Africa has come of age. It is no longer under the orbit of any extra-continental power. It should no longer take orders from any country, however powerful."*<sup>26</sup>

In this speech, he publicly denounced the U.S. and South African intervention in Angola, Criticized African leaders who supported pro-Western forces (such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko) and urged the OAU to recognize the MPLA as Angola's legitimate government.

The recognition of the MPLA was not without Financial and Material Support for the MPLA. Nigeria backed its diplomatic stance with direct financial and logistical support for the MPLA.<sup>27</sup> The Nigerian government provided millions of dollars in financial aid to the MPLA government. Nigeria sent logistics and intelligence support, including supplies for MPLA fighters. Though Nigeria did not send troops, it played a key role in facilitating Cuban military support by allowing Cuban supply routes through

West Africa. This assistance helped the MPLA withstand South African attacks and consolidate power in Angola.

There was also Economic Pressure on Pro-Western African States. Murtala Mohammed took a hard stance against African countries that sided with the U.S. and South Africa in the Angolan crisis. Nigeria cut diplomatic ties with Zaire (which was backing UNITA and FNLA). Nigeria refused to recognize the government of Ivory Coast under Félix Houphouët-Boigny, a supporter of U.S. policy. Nigerian oil revenues were used as a diplomatic tool to pressure other African countries to support the MPLA. By leveraging Nigeria's economic strength, Murtala Mohammed was able to isolate anti-MPLA forces in Africa.

The Impact of Murtala Mohammed's Efforts in Angola resulted in MPLA Victory and Consolidation of Power, Nigeria's Rise as Africa's Diplomatic Leader, Weakening of U.S. and South African Influence and the Strengthening of OAU's Anti-Colonial Policy. With backing from Nigeria, the Soviet Union, and Cuba, the MPLA successfully repelled South African forces and U.S.-backed rebels. By early 1976, the MPLA had firmly established control over Angola. Murtala's leadership solidified Nigeria's position as a leader in African liberation movements. Nigeria became the strongest African voice against Western imperialism. The failure of the U.S.-backed UNITA and FNLA weakened America's ability to manipulate African politics. South Africa suffered a humiliating military defeat, slowing its expansionist policies. Nigeria's stance

encouraged more African nations to support the MPLA, forcing the OAU to eventually recognize MPLA as Angola's legitimate government, ensuring Angola's sovereignty.<sup>28</sup>

### **Murtala Mohammed Foreign Policy Thrust in Namibia**

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy was shaped by his firm anti-colonial and Pan-African ideology, which prioritized the liberation of African nations under colonial rule or apartheid control. While much attention has been given to his support for Angola's independence, his relentless efforts towards Namibia's independence were equally significant. At the time, Namibia—then known as South West Africa—was illegally occupied by apartheid South Africa, despite multiple United Nations resolutions calling for its independence. Murtala Mohammed saw South Africa's continued control over Namibia as an extension of colonialism, and he worked aggressively to mobilize African nations, the UN, and liberation movements to end the occupation. This work explores the series of efforts taken by Murtala Mohammed towards Namibia's independence, highlighting his diplomatic, economic, and strategic actions in confronting South Africa's illegal rule and supporting the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in their fight for self-rule.

Namibia was originally a German colony until 1915, when South African forces seized control during World War I. After the war, the League of Nations gave South Africa a mandate to govern Namibia. However, after World War II, the United Nations revoked this mandate and declared that Namibia should become an independent state<sup>29</sup>.

South Africa refused to comply, instead imposing apartheid laws in Namibia and treating it as a fifth province.

In 1966, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), led by Sam Nujoma, launched an armed struggle for independence. SWAPO gained support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other African nations, but South Africa's military superiority made progress difficult. The United Nations officially recognized SWAPO as the legitimate representative of the Namibian people in 1973.<sup>30</sup> The United States, Britain, and other Western powers were reluctant to pressure South Africa because of its strategic importance during the Cold War<sup>31</sup>. The UN passed multiple resolutions demanding Namibia's independence, but these were largely ignored due to Western inaction. It was in this frustrating global context that Murtala Mohammed emerged as one of the most outspoken leaders against South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia.

### **Murtala Mohammed's Efforts towards Namibia's Independence**

Nigeria under Murtala Mohammed became one of the first African nations to grant SWAPO full diplomatic recognition. SWAPO was allowed to open an official office in Lagos, giving it a platform for diplomatic activities. Nigeria officially recognized SWAPO as the sole legitimate representative of Namibia and encouraged other African states to do the same. By legitimizing SWAPO on the African and global stage, Murtala Mohammed helped strengthen its diplomatic and military position in the independence struggle.

Murtala Mohammed was involved in Mobilizing the Organization of African Unity (OAU). At the January 11, 1976 OAU summit in Addis Ababa, Murtala Mohammed delivered one of the most powerful anti-apartheid speeches in African history, where he declared:

*"Africa has come of age. It should no longer take orders from any country, however powerful."*<sup>32</sup>

He condemned South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia and called for Total African unity in opposing apartheid South Africa, An immediate end to all diplomatic and economic ties with South Africa and, Military and financial support for SWAPO to escalate the fight for independence. His speech pressured hesitant African nations to take a stronger stance against apartheid and colonialism.

Murtala Mohammed backed his diplomatic stance with material support for SWAPO. Nigeria provided financial assistance to help SWAPO sustain its operations.<sup>33</sup> Nigerian military officers provided training and intelligence support to SWAPO fighters. Nigeria facilitated logistical channels for arms shipments to SWAPO from other allies, such as the Soviet Union and Cuba. These efforts boosted SWAPO's capacity to fight against South Africa's military forces. There was also Economic Pressure on Western-Supported South Africa. Recognizing that South Africa's economy depended on trade with Nigeria and other African nations, Murtala Mohammed Cut all diplomatic and economic ties with South Africa, Urged other OAU member states to impose full trade embargoes on South Africa and, Restricted Nigerian oil sales to Western countries that

supported apartheid, particularly Britain and the U.S. This economic pressure made apartheid more costly for South Africa and its Western backers.

There was an Advocacy at the United Nations and Global Stage. Murtala Mohammed demanded that the UN enforce its resolutions on Namibia's independence.<sup>34</sup> He called for mandatory sanctions against South Africa to force them out of Namibia. Nigeria used its diplomatic influence to rally the Non-Aligned Movement and socialist bloc nations to increase pressure on South Africa. His outspoken defiance of Western inaction helped bring more international attention to Namibia's independence struggle.

### **The Impact of Murtala Mohammed's Namibia Policy**

One of the impact the foreign policy of Murtala Mohammed towards Namibia was the strengthening of SWAPO's International Standing. Nigeria's recognition and financial support boosted SWAPO's legitimacy on the global stage. Many other African nations followed Nigeria's lead, providing more aid and political support to SWAPO. It also Increased Diplomatic Pressure on South Africa. Murtala Mohammed's efforts forced South Africa into greater diplomatic isolation. The OAU and the UN became more aggressive in condemning South Africa's occupation. It also solidified Nigeria's Role as a Pan-African Leader. Nigeria emerged as one of the strongest voices for African liberation. His policies set the foundation for Nigeria's continued anti-apartheid activism, influencing future Nigerian leaders like Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari. His efforts put Namibia's on the road to Independence (1990). Though Murtala Mohammed was assassinated in 1976, his foreign policy on Namibia continued under

Olusegun Obasanjo and later Nigerian leaders. Namibia finally gained independence in 1990, after decades of struggle and international pressure.

Murtala Mohammed's efforts towards Namibia's independence were a defining part of his foreign policy. Through his strong diplomatic recognition of SWAPO, mobilization of the OAU, financial and military assistance, economic pressure on South Africa, and advocacy at the UN, he accelerated the push for Namibia's liberation. Though he was assassinated before Namibia's independence was achieved, his legacy of Pan-African activism continued to shape Nigeria's role in the anti-apartheid struggle for decades. His bold and fearless opposition to South African apartheid remains a landmark in Nigeria's foreign policy history.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### IMPACT OF MURTALA MOHAMMED FOREIGN POLICY THRUST ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

General Murtala Ramat Mohammed, who served as Nigeria's Head of State from July 1975 to February 1976, implemented a bold and dynamic foreign policy that significantly shaped Nigeria's development. His administration pursued decolonization, pan-Africanism, economic self-reliance, and non-alignment, positioning Nigeria as a leader in African and global affairs<sup>1</sup>.

This work examines the domestic and external impacts of Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy on Nigeria's development, assessing its influence on governance, economic policies, diplomatic relations, and national identity.

Murtala Mohammed's bold and independent foreign policy enhanced Nigeria's national identity and strengthened domestic unity. His administration's strong anti-imperialist stance, especially his rejection of external interference in Africa, fostered a sense of national pride and patriotism among Nigerians<sup>2</sup>. One of the most significant moments that shaped Nigeria's self-image was Mohammed's speech at the 1976 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit, where he declared that "*Africa has come of age*" and rejected continued Western influence on the continent<sup>3</sup>. This speech cemented Nigeria's position as a leading voice for Africa and inspired confidence in the country's diplomatic abilities.

Furthermore, his stance on African liberation movements—including his strong support for Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe—increased national unity by aligning Nigeria’s foreign policy with the people’s aspirations for self-determination and justice. His administration projected Nigeria as a champion of African freedom, giving citizens a sense of purpose and pride in their country’s leadership<sup>4</sup>.

The Murtala Mohammed administration had two major impact on the Nigerian economy. Murtala Mohammed’s foreign policy had a direct impact on Nigeria’s economic structure, particularly through the nationalization of key foreign businesses. His administration nationalized British Petroleum (BP) and other multinational companies that were perceived to have supported apartheid regimes in Southern Africa<sup>5</sup>. This policy aimed at reducing foreign economic dominance and increasing Nigerian control over critical industries. While this move was popular among nationalists and strengthened the government’s position on African solidarity, it also created economic challenges. The nationalization policy led to a decline in foreign direct investment, as Western businesses viewed Nigeria as increasingly unpredictable. Additionally, the lack of local expertise to manage newly nationalized enterprises resulted in inefficiencies and corruption, affecting economic productivity<sup>6</sup>. Again as part of his foreign policy objectives, Murtala Mohammed sought to use Nigeria’s oil wealth as a tool for economic independence and diplomatic leverage. His administration emphasized greater control over oil revenues, leading to increased state involvement in the petroleum sector. The nationalization of key oil companies strengthened the Nigerian National Petroleum

Corporation (NNPC), giving the government more power in resource management<sup>7</sup>. However, this policy also had domestic repercussions. While the government generated significant revenue from oil exports, overreliance on petroleum contributed to economic distortions, weakening other sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. This overdependence on oil would later contribute to economic instability, particularly when global oil prices fluctuated<sup>8</sup>.

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy stance also influenced domestic governance, particularly in terms of administrative efficiency and anti-corruption measures. Inspired by his assertive and nationalist foreign policy, he launched a domestic purge of corrupt government officials, dismissing over 10,000 civil servants and military officers accused of inefficiency and corruption<sup>9</sup>. His administration sought to align domestic governance with his foreign policy vision of a strong and self-reliant Nigeria. This anti-corruption drive was widely popular among ordinary Nigerians, as it reinforced a sense of accountability and discipline in public service. However, the abrupt dismissals also created instability within the bureaucracy, leading to administrative bottlenecks and resentment among affected officials<sup>10</sup>.

Under Security and Military Implications, there was Increased Military Prestige and Influence. Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy strengthened the role of the military in national affairs. His strong stance on African liberation and regional security elevated Nigeria's military prestige, leading to increased recruitment and expansion of defense capabilities. His government's active support for liberation movements in Angola and

Southern Africa positioned the Nigerian military as a regional force<sup>11</sup>. Domestically, this emboldened military officers and reinforced the perception that the armed forces were the primary defenders of national interests. However, the increased power of the military also contributed to political instability. Murtala's assertiveness and radical policies generated internal dissent, particularly among military factions that disagreed with his approach. This discontent played a role in his assassination in February 1976<sup>12</sup>.

There was also administrative Reorganization and Creation of States. Murtala Mohammed's government took bold steps to decentralize governance in Nigeria. His administration created 7 new states, increasing the number of states from 12 to 19. This was aimed at promoting greater regional representation, reducing ethnic tensions, and addressing the political demands of various groups. The new states were created to strengthen national unity by giving more political power to previously marginalized regions.

The Murtala Mohammed administration also engaged Economic Nationalism and Import Substitution. Murtala Mohammed adopted a policy of economic nationalism and import substitution, encouraging domestic production and reducing reliance on imported goods. This included the establishment of local industries, such as the promotion of food processing and manufacturing, to create jobs and boost Nigeria's self-sufficiency. His government also emphasized the need to diversify Nigeria's economy, which had been heavily reliant on oil exports.

Educational Reform was also prioritized by the administration. Murtala Mohammed's government placed emphasis on educational reform with a focus on increasing literacy rates and providing more opportunities for education at all levels. His administration sought to improve educational infrastructure, making education more accessible to the masses, particularly in rural areas. This included the establishment of more schools and technical institutions designed to foster skills and employment opportunities for Nigerians.

### **The External Impact of the Murtala Mohammed Administration on Nigeria**

General Murtala Ramat Mohammed's administration significantly influenced Nigeria's global standing. His foreign policy that was defined by a bold and assertive stance on African liberation, non-alignment, and economic independence, positioned Nigeria as a leader in Africa and a vocal critic of neocolonialism, apartheid, and Western interference in African affairs. These policies influenced Nigeria's relationships with other African nations, Western powers, and international organizations, shaping the country's diplomatic posture for years to come.

One of the most significant external impacts of Murtala Mohammed's administration was Nigeria's emergence as a leading voice in African affairs. His government prioritized decolonization and actively supported liberation movements in Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Murtala Mohammed's decision to recognize and support the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) had a major impact on Nigeria's international relations. At a time when the United States,

Britain, and South Africa supported rival factions in Angola, Nigeria's endorsement of the MPLA signaled a rejection of Western influence in Africa<sup>13</sup>. This move earned Nigeria significant respect among African nations and reinforced its leadership within the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It also strengthened diplomatic ties with socialist and non-aligned countries, particularly the Soviet Union and Cuba, which also backed the MPLA<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, Murtala Mohammed played a critical role in advocating for Namibia's independence from South African rule. At the time, Namibia was illegally occupied by apartheid South Africa, which refused to comply with United Nations resolutions calling for its independence. Nigeria, under Mohammed, strongly condemned South Africa's control of Namibia and provided diplomatic and financial support to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the main liberation movement fighting for Namibian independence<sup>15</sup>.

Nigeria's actions put further pressure on the international community to take a stronger stance against South Africa's illegal occupation. Mohammed's government used Nigeria's influence in the United Nations and the OAU to call for economic and diplomatic sanctions against South Africa, urging Western powers to withdraw their support for the apartheid regime<sup>16</sup>. This aggressive stance made Nigeria one of the strongest allies of the Namibian independence movement and laid the foundation for the country's eventual independence in 1990.

Murtala Mohammed was one of the most vocal African leaders against apartheid in South Africa and white minority rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). His government

cut diplomatic ties with South Africa and pledged financial and military support to the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), both fighting for Zimbabwe's independence<sup>17</sup>. This anti-apartheid stance solidified Nigeria's role as a major force in Africa's struggle for liberation. Nigeria's opposition to apartheid also led to tensions with Western nations, particularly Britain, which had economic and political interests in South Africa and Rhodesia. Mohammed openly criticized Britain's policy on African decolonization, further straining diplomatic relations<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy created significant friction between Nigeria and Western countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. His government's refusal to align with Western interests, especially in Southern Africa, marked a shift in Nigeria's international relations. Nigeria's open criticism of Britain's handling of Rhodesian independence and its recognition of the MPLA put it at odds with British and American foreign policy in Africa. Murtala Mohammed condemned Western nations for their perceived hypocrisy in supporting human rights while backing white minority regimes in Africa<sup>19</sup>. This stance led to diplomatic tensions, reducing Nigeria's engagement with Western powers during his tenure. However, despite these tensions, Western countries still recognized Nigeria's economic and strategic importance, particularly as an oil-rich nation. While relations were strained, they did not lead to outright hostility or economic sanctions<sup>20</sup>.

The Murtala Mohammed administration also strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and Non-Aligned Nations. As relations with Western countries weakened, Murtala Mohammed's administration sought closer ties with socialist and non-aligned nations. His support for the MPLA and SWAPO aligned Nigeria with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other socialist states that were also backing liberation movements in Africa<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, Nigeria became more active in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which sought to maintain independence from both the Western and Soviet blocs during the Cold War. By positioning Nigeria as a neutral but assertive power, Murtala Mohammed expanded the country's global influence beyond traditional Western alliances<sup>22</sup>.

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy also significantly influenced Nigeria's role in international organizations, particularly the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN). Nigeria's leadership in supporting African liberation strengthened its position within the OAU. At the 1976 OAU Summit in Addis Ababa, Murtala Mohammed delivered a powerful speech condemning Western interference in Africa and advocating for the continent's total independence. His speech reinforced Nigeria's influence in African diplomacy and encouraged other African nations to adopt a more assertive stance against colonial powers. Nigeria's activism under Murtala Mohammed extended to the United Nations, where his government pushed for stronger international action against apartheid and colonial rule. Nigeria supported resolutions condemning South Africa and worked to strengthen UN initiatives aimed at assisting liberation movements<sup>23</sup>.

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy expanded Nigeria's military role in regional security. His administration provided financial and military assistance to African liberation movements, strengthening Nigeria's reputation as a defender of African independence<sup>24</sup>. Nigeria's growing military influence meant that it became a key player in African security affairs. The country's willingness to challenge Western-backed regimes in Africa set a precedent for future Nigerian interventions in regional conflicts, such as its involvement in peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone decades later.

Murtala Mohammed's radical foreign policy also made Nigeria a target of foreign interests that opposed his stance. His strong anti-Western rhetoric and active support for liberation movements led to speculation that foreign intelligence agencies might have viewed his administration as a threat<sup>25</sup>. Some historians suggest that his assassination in February 1976 may have been indirectly influenced by external forces unhappy with his policies, though there is no direct evidence to confirm this claim<sup>26</sup>. Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy had a profound and lasting impact on both Nigeria's external relations and domestic landscape. His administration positioned Nigeria as a leader in African affairs, championing liberation movements and challenging Western dominance on the continent. This assertiveness earned Nigeria respect among African nations and non-aligned states while also straining relations with Western powers. Domestically, his policies fostered national pride and solidified Nigeria's role as a leading African power. However, his radical approach led to economic challenges,

bureaucratic instability, and increased military influence in governance. The nationalization of foreign enterprises and the expansion of the oil sector reshaped Nigeria's economy but also made it vulnerable to external shocks.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive conclusion to this work, summarizing the key findings and drawing critical insights on the foreign policy thrust of General Murtala Mohammed's administration. The work has thoroughly examined the motivations, implementation, and consequences of his foreign policy, with a specific focus on Nigeria's role in African liberation movements, economic nationalism, regional diplomacy, and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the time. This chapter also highlights the challenges encountered by his administration and the enduring impact of his foreign policy on Nigeria's development and international standing.

Murtala Mohammed's administration was marked by an assertive and Pan-Africanist foreign policy that sought to redefine Nigeria's role in Africa and the global stage. His approach was characterized by an unwavering commitment to the liberation of African nations, particularly Angola and Namibia, from colonial rule. His administration's decision to recognize and support liberation movements, such as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), signified Nigeria's resolve to challenge Western influence and assert its independence in foreign affairs. This policy stance not only strengthened Nigeria's diplomatic standing within Africa but also drew criticism from Western powers, leading to diplomatic tensions with countries like the United States and Britain.

Beyond the political and diplomatic sphere, Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy had significant implications for Nigeria's economic landscape. His administration pursued nationalization policies, particularly in the oil sector, as a means of reducing foreign economic dominance and increasing national control over key industries. While this policy fostered economic self-reliance, it also discouraged foreign investment, leading to economic challenges that persisted beyond his administration. Moreover, his anti-corruption campaign resulted in mass dismissals within the civil service, restructuring of governance frameworks, and renewed efforts to promote accountability within government institutions. While these measures were applauded by many Nigerians, they also generated resistance from some quarters within the military and bureaucracy, contributing to political instability.

The foreign policy of Murtala Mohammed significantly elevated Nigeria's international profile, particularly in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN). His famous 1976 OAU Summit speech underscored Nigeria's determination to chart its own course, free from external influence, and solidified its position as a leader in African affairs. However, despite these successes, his administration faced both internal and external challenges. Western powers viewed his radical approach with suspicion, while his rapid domestic reforms created divisions within the military, culminating in his assassination in February 1976. This tragic event abruptly halted the full realization of his ambitious foreign policy vision.

Despite the brevity of his tenure, Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy left a lasting legacy in Nigeria's diplomatic history. His administration's bold stance on African liberation, anti-imperialism, and economic self-determination set the foundation for Nigeria's subsequent diplomatic engagements. His policies influenced successive governments and contributed to shaping Nigeria's national identity as a strong advocate for African unity and self-reliance. However, his approach also highlighted the need for a more balanced and strategic foreign policy that considers economic stability, diplomatic engagement, and long-term national interests.

Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy not only impacted Nigeria's international relations but also had profound domestic consequences. His administration emphasized self-reliance and economic nationalism, pushing for greater control of national resources and reducing dependence on foreign actors. This approach, while ambitious, faced several structural challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited technical expertise, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As a result, while some of his policies laid the groundwork for future economic policies, others exposed the country to economic difficulties due to inadequate planning and sudden shifts in administrative focus.

Additionally, his stance on African liberation movements influenced Nigeria's subsequent peacekeeping roles in Africa. Nigeria continued to play a leading role in regional conflict resolution, military interventions, and peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). His government's efforts helped establish Nigeria as a major

diplomatic force on the continent, with successive administrations leveraging this influence to mediate regional conflicts and maintain stability within West Africa.

The ideological foundations of Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy also played a role in shaping Nigeria's engagement with global superpowers. His administration sought to maintain Nigeria's non-aligned status during the Cold War, refusing to be drawn into the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. This independent foreign policy stance allowed Nigeria to foster diplomatic relations with both Western and Eastern bloc countries while maintaining its primary focus on African unity and self-determination. However, this position also meant that Nigeria faced both diplomatic support and opposition from various global actors depending on the circumstances.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are put forward to guide Nigeria's future foreign policy direction. First, Nigeria should maintain its commitment to African leadership by actively participating in regional and continental affairs, promoting stability, economic integration, and peacekeeping efforts. Second, economic policy implementation should be approached with caution, balancing nationalization strategies with policies that encourage foreign investment and economic diversification. Third, the fight against corruption should be institutionalized, ensuring that governance structures are strengthened to promote transparency and accountability. Fourth, Nigeria should adopt a more balanced diplomatic approach, fostering cooperation with both African and Western nations to enhance economic and strategic benefits. Lastly, Nigeria

should leverage its military strength to maintain regional security and continue playing a significant role in peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, Murtala Mohammed's foreign policy was a defining chapter in Nigeria's diplomatic history, shaping the country's approach to international relations and its role within Africa. His bold and assertive leadership demonstrated Nigeria's potential as a regional power, yet it also underscored the challenges that come with radical policy shifts. By learning from his administration's successes and challenges, Nigeria can develop a foreign policy framework that effectively balances national interests, economic growth, and international cooperation, ensuring its continued relevance in global affairs.

Furthermore, it is essential for future Nigerian governments to draw valuable lessons from Murtala Mohammed's administration in order to strengthen diplomatic engagements, economic policies, and governance structures. His short but impactful tenure serves as a reminder of the importance of visionary leadership and a well-structured foreign policy in shaping a nation's trajectory. Nigeria's position as a key player in African and global politics can be further enhanced by adopting pragmatic and sustainable foreign policies that align with both national and regional interests. The legacy of Murtala Mohammed remains an enduring influence on Nigeria's foreign relations, and his contributions continue to serve as a benchmark for evaluating the country's role in global diplomacy.

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