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**Nigeria's Foreign Policy:  
An Inquiry into Sources and Prospects**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In stark contrast to long-dominant viewpoints which framed the continent almost exclusively in terms of outsiders' condescending preoccupation over the humanitarian consequences of poverty, war, and natural disaster theatre, these first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have witnessed Africa emerging once again as a region of enormous strategic importance and, indeed, a theatre of intense geopolitical competition among the world's Great Powers.<sup>1</sup> Especially illustrative is the case of the United States of America which has not only come to be dependent upon Africa for approximately one-fifth of its hydrocarbon needs—a figure which is estimated to rise to one-quarter by 2015—but which, since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the American homeland, has increasingly raised Africa's profile within the "Global War on Terror," recognizing the potential of the poorly governed spaces of the continent to provide facilitating environments, recruits, and eventual targets for Islamist extremists who threaten Western interests in general and those of the United States in particular.<sup>2</sup> Thus the 6 February 2007 decision by President George W. Bush to establish a U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which achieved its "initial operating capacity" on 1 October 2007 and which is expected to be a fully-operational "unified combatant command" within one year.<sup>3</sup>

However, the new "scramble for Africa"—to recall the 19<sup>th</sup> century term which Thomas Pakenham reprised as the title for his monumental historical study of the period of African history between 1872 and 1912<sup>4</sup>—that is afoot differs from its predecessor in a number of fundamental characteristics, chief among which is the existence of African states which are not only relative regional powers but which also have, in their own right, the potential to play even more significant roles on the international political stage. Thus understanding the theoretical and practical aspects of the foreign policies of these pivotal African states and the influences which shape them is critical to not only understanding the contemporary political dynamics of continent, but also to facilitating peace, stability, good governance, and development in Africa and beyond.

Among these African regional powers, the one with potentially the most significant strategic heft as well as the greatest geopolitical importance is the Federal Republic of Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Its 140 million people make the country by far the most populous African state, with a demographic weight equal to second-ranked Egypt and third-ranked Democratic Republic of Congo combined. Moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "U.S. National Interests and Africa's Strategic Significance," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27, no. 1 (January/February 2005): 19-29; idem, "China's African Strategy and Its Implications for U.S. Interests," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 28, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 239-253; and idem, "India's Expanding Relations with Africa and Their Implications for U.S. Interests," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 29, no. 5 (forthcoming, September/October 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "Next Front? Evolving U.S.-African Strategic Relations in the 'War on Terrorism' and Beyond," *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 1 (March 2007): 39-54.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "Securing Africa," *Journal of International Security Affairs* 13 (Fall 2007): 15-24.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (New York: Random House, 1991), xxv.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "The Battle for Nigeria," *The National Interest* 88 (March/April 2007): 97-100.

population includes, in both relative and absolute terms, a large number of well-educated citizens who represent a wealth of human capital. Its vast oil reserves, estimated to total some 35 billion barrels, export some 2,146,000 barrels a day, making Nigeria the 8<sup>th</sup> largest exporter in the world and, during the first seven months of this year, America's fourth largest source for imported petroleum. With the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council either stretched by other force commitments, Nigeria is also Africa's largest contributor to multilateral stability operations with, as of the end of September, 2,486 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, in addition to the some 680 troops, including the force commander, serving with the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in the conflicted Darfur region. Nigeria has also been at the forefront of regional and international diplomatic initiatives, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Africa's most effective subregional grouping; the African Union (AU) and its African Peace and Security Council; and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) with its potentially revolutionary peer-review mechanism.

Thus it is not surprising that throughout the country's forty-seven years of independence, Nigerians of widely different backgrounds and persuasions have viewed their country as the continent's "natural leader," if not it's peace-enforcing "gendarme."<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite the great resources and consequent potential which characterize it as well as the lofty ambitions which its leaders have entertained, Nigeria has not forged the vibrant and effective foreign policy that one would have expected from a country with its endowments. An historical examination of why successive Nigerian governments, both civilian and military, have failed in this endeavor will highlight the contours of the complex dynamics of Nigerian politics and draw out the specific factors which determine the country's foreign policy interests and, ultimately, help to illuminate the prospects ahead for Nigeria itself as well as its relations not only with its neighbors in both the immediate West African subregion and across African continent, but also with partners farther afield and the international system at large.

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### **HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

A classic textbook of foreign policy studies once defined the object of this inquiry in the following manner:

[R]educed to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national *objectives* to be achieved and the *means* for achieving them. The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft. In its ingredients the foreign policy of all nations, great and small, is the same.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Adekeye Adebajo, "Nigeria: Africa's New Gendarme?" *Security Dialogue* 31, no. 2 (June 200): 185-199.

<sup>7</sup> Cecil V. Crabb Jr., *American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1.

In short, the shaping of foreign policy is a dynamic process involving the interaction between a country's internal and external environments. Thus Nigeria's foreign policy cannot be considered in isolation from the country's domestic political context which, in turn, cannot be appraised without reference to the "congenital" identity crisis of the Nigerian state itself which some have argued have made it a "crippled giant" from birth.<sup>8</sup> Like most modern African states, Nigeria's post-independence politics are rooted in the conscious choices and simple accidents of its colonial history. In Nigeria's case, it was the 1914 decision by British colonial authorities to amalgamate the indirectly-ruled and relatively underdeveloped Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the directly-administered and developmentally more-advanced Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria into a single polity without actually integrating the institutional structures of two regions whose various groups had little in common. Even a century later, looking at the colonial entity carved out by Lord Lugard over the loud objections of the political class and media in Lagos (who were the only sector of the local population to be really apprised of the change), it is hard to evince much evidence of Nigeria satisfying many of the conventional criteria for "nationhood." Ethnically, the country's people, split roughly evenly between the north and the south, are subdivided into at least 250 ethnic groups, with the largest being the Hausa and Fulani in the north (currently approximately 29 percent), the Yoruba in the southwest (21 percent), and the Igbo and the Ijaw in the southeast (respectively, 18 and 10 percent). Religiously, the country is divided, roughly, between a predominantly Muslim north and a largely Christian south. Economically, the south's hydrocarbon sector account for 95 percent of the Nigeria's exports and 70 percent of the total national economy.

No wonder that the country's own founders were skeptical about its prospects. The northern leader, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was destined to be Nigeria's first federal prime minister, observed in 1948: "Since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any signs of willingness to unite...Nigerian unity is only a British invention."<sup>9</sup> Similar harsh was the judgment of the revered Yoruba statesman Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who wrote in a 1947 book: "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense there are 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the borders of Nigeria and those who do not."<sup>10</sup>

What Great Britain held together by dint of military force, occasional accommodation, and cynical divide-and-rule tactics quickly became unglued once the euphoria of political independence from colonial rule, achieved on 1 October 1960, wore off. Politics, heavily divided along regional and ethnic lines,

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<sup>8</sup> See Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: From Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair—A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 5.

deteriorated rapidly. Following the 1964 elections, which were boycotted by a number of groups, including the eastern Igbo, the veteran Africanist Harold D. Nelson observed that “charges of widespread electoral irregularities and unorthodox practices led to public outcries and resulted in a marked decline in the people’s respect for local authority. Acts of violence became rife; soldiers in armored cars patrolled the streets; armed riot police were employed to disperse angry crowds of people with tear gas. Popular disillusionment with the federal government...became even more widespread.”<sup>11</sup>

A military *coup d'état* on 15 January 1966 left the federal prime minister as well as the premiers of the Northern and Western regions dead and brought to power Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo. When a countercoup seven months later killed Aguiyi-Ironsi and brought to power a northerner, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, anti-Igbo riots led to the massacre of some 30,000 Igbos who had previously settled in the north and the desperate flight of 600,000 others back to their traditional lands in the southeast. After another 5,000 Igbos were murdered before the end of the year, the military governor of the Eastern region appointed by the Aguiyi-Ironsi announced the secession of the region as the “Republic of Biafra” on 30 May 1967. The ensuing conflict, which would last until 1970, would exact a heavy price with at least two million dead on both sides, many of them Biafrans who starved to death during the blockade imposed by the federal forces.

The conflict briefly placed Nigeria at the center of the world stage and drew in participants from around the globe in sometimes unexpected alliances as each sought to advance its own interests. Britain, the former colonial power, although it was slow in arming its creation, unofficially seconded Royal Navy officers directing the blockade.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union, seeking to gain a foothold in West Africa, supplied military equipment to the federal government. As a result, the People’s Republic of China, following by the “logic” of the Sino-Soviet split as it was played out in Africa, supported the Biafran secessionists.<sup>13</sup> South Africa, then under apartheid rule, eyeing the opportunity to divide black Africa, likewise aided the Biafrans as did Portugal, which was then resisting national liberation struggles in its African colonies. France, wary of Nigeria’s potential threat to its hegemony in francophone Africa as well as smarting from a five-year break in diplomatic relations with Nigeria (only restored under Aguiyi-Ironsi) over nuclear testing in the Sahara, similarly aided the Biafrans (the current foreign minister of France, Bernard Kouchner, got his start as volunteer doctor during the conflict).<sup>14</sup> Francophone Côte d’Ivoire and Gabon followed France’s lead and recognized the secessionist regime, as did Tanzania and Zambia, whose leaders cited humanitarian considerations as their primary motivation. In general, however, “adhering to the principle of the retention of colonial borders” and “fearful of a cascading precedent that could affect all of Africa,” the Organization of African Unity (OAU) opposed the Biafran secession

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<sup>11</sup> Harold D. Nelson et al., *Area Handbook for Nigeria*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (Washington: American University Foreign Area Studies, 1972), 76.

<sup>12</sup> See Frederick Forsyth, *The Biafra Story* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “China’s African Strategy and Its Implications for U.S. Interests,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 28, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 239-253.

<sup>14</sup> See Daniel C. Bach, “Dynamique et contradictions dans la politique africaine de la France: Les rapports avec le Nigeria (1960-1981),” *Politique africaine* 2, no. 7 (1982): 47-73.

and called for the recognition of the unity and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state.<sup>15</sup>

Although evidence is scarce that the conflict over Biafra influenced internal political reform within Nigeria in any significant way, it did hold out several major foreign policy lessons which successive Nigerian regimes have taken to heart. First, the state's survival as a unitary entity was not to be taken for granted and had to be the primary objective of any foreign policy. Second, in order to achieve that first objective, Nigeria had to have a secure neighborhood which the influence of any outside power—such as the sway that Biafra-backing France held among the francophone states of West Africa—had to be limited insofar as possible. Third, strong pan-African institutions were a vital instrument in support of the country's national security. Fourth, Nigeria needed to cultivate extensive ties with all major international power blocs.

While the Nigerian body politic has shown overall a remarkable resilience and, with the exception of the Biafran crisis, has managed to dance along the precipice of disintegration while still pulling back from the brink, the lack of national cohesion has not been without its effect on the formulation of the country's foreign policy. Specifically, an examination of the foreign policy process over all periods of the country's constitutional history—the First Republic (1960-1966), the first period of military rule (1966-1979), the Second Republic (1979-1983), the second period of military rule (1983-1998), and the Fourth<sup>16</sup> Republic or current phase of what might be termed “democratic transition” (since 1999)—shows that it reflects an elite-driven, strongly-centralized, and, often enough, personality-influenced agenda, which is not unsurprising in the absence of a broad consensus on nationhood, much less enduring national interests other than preserving the country itself as a sovereign state over which the contesting ethnic, regional, and religious groups could compete for control. This fierce competition permeated from the elites down to the members of the groups they led, fueling a phenomenon the late Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake called the “politics of anxiety”:

Contending groups struggle on grimly, polarizing their differences and convinced that their ability to protect their interests and to obtain justice is coextensive with their power. In this type of politics, there is deep alienation and distrust among political competitors. Consequently, they are profoundly afraid of being in the power of their opponents. This fear in turn breeds a huge appetite for power which is sought with restraint and used without restraint.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Schwab, *Designing West Africa: Prelude to 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Calamity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 93.

<sup>16</sup> In 1989, a constitution for a Third Republic was completed and political activity begun with a view to restoring civilian rule by 1993. The experiment was aborted after the results of historic June 1992 elections, deemed by many observers to be Nigeria's fairest poll, were annulled, ushering the rule of General Sani Abacha.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Ake, “The State in Contemporary Africa,” in *Political Economy of Nigeria*, ed. Claude Ake (New York: Longman, 1985), 10.

Amid this struggle, which has involved institutional groups—including civil servants, academics, businessmen, and civilian political operatives—as well as demographic groups, the Nigerian armed forces often emerged with triumphant due to inherent decisive advantages it possessed. First, quite simply, it enjoyed a near monopoly on overwhelming force. Second, by exposing the corruption and other deficiencies of the political classes, the military has repeatedly managed to present itself as the savior of the nation. Thus “the military used these advantages to dominate the political process and to build a comprador elite from the other elite segments” each time it has intervened, ostensibly as an emergency “fire brigade” of last resort.<sup>18</sup>

The 2007 elections were supposed to mark a transformative moment in Nigeria’s political evolution, the first time an elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo, would hand over power to an elected successor. Unfortunately, the consensus of international and domestic observers is that the 21 April presidential and legislative polls, as well as the elections for state governors and legislators on 14 April, were seriously flawed. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who led the election monitoring group from the National Democratic Institute, declared that the electoral process had “failed the Nigerian people.” A Dutch member of the European Parliament, Max van den Berg, who led the European Union’s election observers, was even more scathing in his comments: “The 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections and the process cannot be considered to be credible.” These sentiments were echoed by Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, who headed the International Republican Institute (IRI) election monitoring delegation. At a press conference in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, Prosper read a statement on behalf of his delegation which characterized the elections as falling “below the standard set by previous Nigerian elections and international standards” and cited a long list of abuses included widespread “underage voting, voter registration list errors, stuffed ballot boxes, group voting, party observers and police instructing individuals on who to vote for, lack of privacy for voting, lack of results sheets and other materials, falsified results sheets, and early closings” of the polls. The IRI delegates issued an official statement lamenting that “neither the spirit of Nigerians who went to the polls to cast their ballots nor the dedication of the thousands of poll workers struggling to execute their responsibilities in polling stations throughout the country were matched by their leaders.”<sup>19</sup>

Observing the voting in southeastern Benue State, the agricultural breadbasket just north of the oil-rich Niger Delta region, I personally witnessed police and other officials openly “helping” voters to mark their ballot papers for the ruling People’s Democratic Party. I also found entire areas whose residents professed support for the All Nigeria People’s Party, the Action Congress, or other opposition groups, where the polls never even opened, including a township outside of Makurdi that should have had six polling stations to accommodate some 5,000 registered voters. Instead, while no polling officials or materials ever arrived, a truckload of police in riot gear did show up to

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<sup>18</sup> Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> International Republican Institute, “Preliminary Findings of IRI’s International Election Observation Mission” (April 22, 2007), <http://www.iri.org/africa/nigeria/2007-04-22-Nigeria.asp>.

disperse the angry would-be electors. Towards the end of the election day, at a polling station just two blocks from where a Polish parliamentarian and I were observing the vote tally, armed gunmen shot an election official and made off with the ballot box (nationally, some 200 people lost their lives to similar poll-related violence). All in all, I cannot help but concur with the judgment offered by the EU's van den Berg when he was asked if the irregularities represented an orchestrated attempt to rig the result: "In several places, yes, and in others, very magic results."

Unfortunately, the last thing Nigeria needs at this historical moment is this type of "magic." The truly incredible nature of the results announced—including vote tallies which are reminiscent of the old Soviet bloc (for example, electoral commission claimed that the ruling party won 96 percent of the vote in Delta State, 95 percent in Ebonyi State, 90 percent in Edo State, and 94 percent in Imo State)—will certainly further undermine public confidence the already fragile institutions of the Nigerian federation, leaving the government of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (a sickly northern governor who is viewed by many—whether justly or unjustly—as outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo's puppet because he was picked by his predecessor in part because his older brother served as Obasanjo's deputy when the latter was military ruler in the 1970s), in an extremely weakened position after its 29 May inauguration, especially in the absence of the requisite conditions for fostering a deeply-rooted sense of national identity and the consequent legitimization of the political order, to say nothing of the will to dramatically overhaul an political system characterized by "deep-seated problems of poor governance and state capture that have, if anything, grown steadily worse."<sup>20</sup>

In addition to its less-than-perfect sense of nationhood and its troubled democratic transition, another major factor from Nigeria's internal historical experience which influences its foreign policy the country's unfortunately well-deserved reputation for corruption. Corruption in Nigeria encompasses not only the abuse of political office for private gain, but also "a whole range of social behaviors in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power, or prestige as well as much more mundane ambitions"—Nigerian notions of corruption including "everything from government bribery and graft, rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals, to the diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school, and even deceiving a lover."<sup>21</sup> Over the course of former President Obasanjo's recently-concluded second term, the federal Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established in 2004 to investigate, prosecute, and punish economic and financial offenses and other related corruption, had in its sights the sitting vice-president as well as all but a literal handful of the country's thirty-six governors. While some have criticized the EFCC's enforcement as arbitrary and politically motivated, the fact that it had that many subject to investigation alone speaks volumes. Currently, the speaker of the federal House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh, has been forced to step aside as legislators

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<sup>20</sup> Ben Rawlence and Chris Albin-Lackey, "Briefing: Nigeria's 2007 General Elections: Democracy in Retreat," *African Affairs* 106, no. 424 (July 2007): 505.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5.

probe her expenditure of some \$5 million of government funds on the purchase of twelve automobiles and the refurbishing of two homes. And these are just two of the more recent examples during civilian governance, which do not even enter into what occurred under rapacious military rulers like the notorious General Sani Abacha, from whose accounts hidden abroad the state recovered \$500 million last year alone.

The effects of corruption on such a scale cannot but be deleterious. It not only affects the country's international image, but also its economic and political development. In terms of the economy, the failure to attract foreign investment, especially in areas other than the hydrocarbon sector, when coupled with the flight of domestic capital, necessarily hampers Nigeria's growth. One need not belabor the political implications of this. In *The Trouble with Nigeria*, the celebrated Nigerian author Chinua Achebe put it succinctly: "Whenever two Nigerians meet, their conversation will sooner or later slide into a litany of our national deficiencies."<sup>22</sup> The inability to make economic and political progress is, of course, a constraint on any country's "hard power" as well as its "soft power" and, thus, limits Nigeria's diplomatic reach regionally and internationally.

Notwithstanding the complicated domestic situation which they inherited, successive Nigerian leaders nonetheless sought an active role in world affairs commensurate with their country's aspirations for itself, its interests, and its perceived stature vis-à-vis the three concentric circles that Nigeria's foreign policy can be said to operate: the West African subregion, the African continent, and the larger international system.

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### **The Domestic Context**

While it is dangerous to try to reduce any country's foreign policy to a single determinant, it is also difficult to underestimate the role that oil plays in Nigeria's foreign relations. The hydrocarbon sector accounts for about 95 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange and, all things considered, is a heavy factor in how other countries evaluate its importance to their own strategic calculus. Likewise petroleum dominates how multinational corporations, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and even Nigeria's own ethnic groups relate to the state. To cite just one poignant example, the case of the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta which culminated in the 1995 "judicial" murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight fellow activists, the nexus of the commercial operations of Royal Dutch Shell, the environmental and political marginalization of the Ogonis, the pecuniary interests the ruling Nigerian elite, the not-necessarily-neutral concerns of international NGOs, and the diplomatic pressures exerted by foreign governments together show how the unresolved "domestic" challenges of the Nigerian state, especially when filtered through the prism of the energy sector, directly impact its global position and, at least for a while in the 1990s, turned it into an international pariah.

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<sup>22</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1983) 2.

Nigerian oil production has risen steadily since it began in 1957. From 20,000 barrels per day in 1960, the year of the country's independence, it jumped to over 2 million barrels per day in 1973, the year of the Arab oil embargo.<sup>23</sup> In 2006, production averaged 2.456 million barrels per day,<sup>24</sup> a benchmark that is all the more remarkable when one considers that the campaign of bombings and kidnappings carried out over the course of the last two to three years by the relatively small Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a militant group fighting the Nigerian government over the oil-rich Delta region's underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and political marginalization, has had the cumulative affect of cutting Nigeria's total oil production by up to one-third at times.

Consider the following events which took place within just one ten-day period in early 2007. On 1 May, members of MEND kidnapped six oil workers—four Italians, an American, and a Croat—off a Chevron offshore loading terminal on the Penington River in southeastern Bayelsa State, whose governor, Goodluck Jonathan, had just been declared vice president-elect of Nigeria. At least one Nigerian naval officer was killed in the attack, which forced Chevron to shut down the affect oilfield, which produces 15,000 barrels per day. On 3 May, after a forty-minute gun battle between the attackers and security guards which reportedly left scores of people killed or wounded, the militants kidnapped eleven more foreigners—three South Koreans and eight Filipinos—from a power plant construction site near Port Harcourt, the hub of Nigeria's oil-rich Delta region. On 8 May, MEND bombed three oil pipelines in Bayelsa State in its most spectacular attack to date. The attack, which a communiqué from the militants described as “parting gift” to outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo, had the cumulative affect of cutting Nigeria's total oil production by almost one-third. On 9 May, four more Americans were kidnapped from a barge off the southern coast of Nigeria. The Americans were part of a team of contractors laying pipelines for Chevron's Okan oilfield. The kidnappers, traveling in two speed boats, were armed with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades. Not surprisingly when, on 11 May, the Nigerian government put up forty-five oil exploration licenses for auction, it managed to sell only about half of them. Despite offering priority bidding rights for certain fields to major international oil companies, the buyers ended up being little-known investors. The long-term economic and ultimately, political impact on Nigeria of a sustained failure to develop new fields on an ongoing basis would staggering.

Ultimately, however, Nigeria needs pay serious attention towards building democratic institutions, good governance, and respect for human rights at home, not only to ensure that the leadership it aspires to abroad is credible, but also to shore up the legitimacy—and, thus, strength—of the state at home among its own citizens. One Nigerian scholar recently summarized the issues that need to be addressed:

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<sup>23</sup> Jędrzej George Frynas and Manuel Paulo, “A New Scramble for African Oil? Historical, Political, and Business Perspectives,” *African Affairs* 106, no. 423 (April 2007): 229-251.

<sup>24</sup> “Country Analysis Brief: Nigeria,” *Energy Information Administration* (April 2007), <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Nigeria/Profile.html>.

First, the problems include the lack of real democracy...Second, there are no concrete negotiated guarantees of group and collective rights. Third, there is no adequate mechanism for tackling both the subtle and violent ethnic and religious problems. Fourth, prevailing is the failure to establish a true multiparty system based on pluralism, which forms the bedrock of class and ideological politics. Fifth, there is the near absence of genuine and representative democratic structures and institutions—both in the spheres of the state and civil society. Sixth, there are the crucial issues of the ownership, control and distribution of resources. Seventh, more than ever before Nigerians must debate the thorniest question of citizenship, which is constitutionally and fundamentally defined within a primordial and confused clause of indigenoussness. Embarking on a path of genuine reforms in all aspects of national life may lead to beating the swords into ploughshares and pave the way to making the state more relevant for Nigerians and Africans.<sup>25</sup>

While President Obasanjo made it a priority to reconnect Nigeria with the international community after its long isolation under the Abacha regime, as Professor John Paden, probably the dean of America's Nigeria observers, has argued, "It is imperative to strengthen the indigenous foundations of democratic civic culture and not wait until macro issues...are sorted out."<sup>26</sup>

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### **The West African Subregion**

Nigeria's immediate neighborhood, the West African subregion, is vital to it economically, politically, and strategically. As the Biafran conflict showed, while existential threats to the Nigerian state are just as likely—if not more likely—emerge from within, neighbors can certainly threaten the country's stability and undermine its territorial integrity. In fact, it was in the aftermath of the civil war that, assisted by the windfall of the 1970s oil boom, that General Gowon led the creation of ECOWAS in 1975, in part to reduce French influence in West Africa as represented by the then-Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO). Over the years, Nigeria has been the chief patron of ECOWAS, paying more than a third of the subregional organization's budget as well as providing various forms of assistance to its neighbors. While ECOWAS was "undoubtedly considered by some of its instigators as a means for promoting collective self-reliance in West Africa...these economic aims [were] largely overruled by the geopolitical considerations which decisively shaped the Community's treaty."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Toure Kazah-Toure, "Nigeria: Challenge to the State and Ways of Breaking through the Quagmire," in *Beyond State Failure and Collapse: Making the State Relevant in Africa*, ed. George Klay Kieh Jr. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007), 171.

<sup>26</sup> John N. Paden, *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel C. Bach, "The Politics of West African Economic Co-operation: C.E.A.O. and E.C.O.W.A.S.," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 21, no. 4 (December 1983): 605.

At least to date, ECOWAS has not had much success as an engine for economic integration. The current fifteen members<sup>28</sup> have between themselves eight currencies with only the eight francophone members sharing a convertible one, the West African CFA franc. Needless to say, this state of affairs makes intracommunitarian trade an investment difficult—even before one even considers the lack of transportation and communications infrastructure as well as the continuing influence of trading patterns established during the colonial period. Nonetheless, as a political forum which attempts to forge a subregional consensus, ECOWAS is perhaps the most successful institution of its kind on the African continent. This mandate to strengthen political ties was strengthened in the 1993 Treaty of Cotonou<sup>29</sup> which updated the subregional body's structure and operations in order to accelerate the process of economic integration and strengthen political ties. The commitment to political coordination was preceded by the adoption of two defense-related protocols, the "Protocol on Non-Aggression" of 1978 and the "Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defense" of 1981, as well as by the "Declaration of Political Principles"<sup>30</sup> by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in 1991. The defense protocols envisioned the organization's member states intervening militarily, even within the borders of another member, in cases of armed conflict threatening the peace and security of the region. Alongside the right of "humanitarian intervention," the principle of collective regional security was first invoked to justify ECOWAS's 1990-1997 intervention in the Liberian civil war.<sup>31</sup> The Liberian intervention led directly to operations in Sierra Leone (1997-2000),<sup>32</sup> which included acting on the request of the then-Organization of African Unity to employ force to reverse a coup against President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah—an event that "marked the first time a regional organization requested intervention in a member state to end human suffering and promote democracy," thus "authoriz[ing] another regional organization to employ force on its behalf."<sup>33</sup> In the wake of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean interventions, the decision was made through another protocol to create a permanent structure for military cooperation through the establishment of the "Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security" in 1999.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, the regional body has been involved in peacekeeping operations in Guinea-Bissau (1999) and Côte d'Ivoire (since 2003), albeit with less success than the two earlier missions. The relatively robust nature of the political side of ECOWAS as well as the differing fates of the four mission to date undertaken by the organization underscore that "Nigeria appears to be an

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<sup>28</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.

<sup>29</sup> Economic Community of West African States Treaty (signed 24 July 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Declaration A/DCL.1/7/91 of Political Principles of the Economic Community of West African States (adopted 6 June 1991).

<sup>31</sup> See J. Peter Pham, *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State* (New York: Reed Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "Democracy by Force? Lessons from the Restoration of the State in Sierra Leone," *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 6, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2005): 129-147; and idem, *The Sierra Leonean Tragedy: History and Global Dimensions* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy I. Levitt, "Illegal Peace? An Inquiry into the Legality of Power-Sharing with Warlords and Rebels in Africa," *Michigan Journal of International Law* (2006): 516.

<sup>34</sup> Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (signed 10 December 1999).

indispensable presence to the success of any future subregional peacekeeping initiatives.”<sup>35</sup>

While it is indisputable that Nigeria had a self-interested motive in stabilizing West Africa in order to promote its political and economic goals for its subregional home, it is also true that its own internal challenges will likely consume an increasingly greater proportion of its attention, especially that it has now made a democratic transition, however imperfect. It should be recalled that the Liberian and Sierra Leonean interventions were undertaken by military regimes, while the transitional government of General Abdulsalam Abubakar declined to contribute troops to the ECOWAS mission in Guinea-Bissau and began the significant withdrawal of troops from Sierra Leone which was continued under the elected administration of President Obasanjo. In future crises, it is unlikely that a civilian Nigerian government would be able to sustain the casualties and costs which its military predecessors absorbed without cultivating a broad base of popular political support for the action at home. Conversely, ECOWAS will need to develop a way of availing itself of Nigeria’s political, economic, and military heft, without being entirely dependent upon the local giant.

In addition to the subregional security concerns on land, the importance to Nigeria and its neighbors of maintaining security in the maritime environment of the Gulf of Guinea will only increase. While the security of the natural resources production facilities, both onshore and offshore, and their transport to market are perhaps of paramount concern, there are other vulnerabilities in this body of water. Earlier this year, the International Maritime Bureau’s *Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Report*, covering the first quarter of 2007, noted that while the number of reported attacks declined significantly compared to just one year before, the figure for incidents off the coast of Nigeria doubled. A review of data going back to 2000 shows that over the period attacks in the Gulf of Guinea region exceeded those for all of the rest of Africa combined.<sup>36</sup> There is also an increasing drug trade through the subregion: Nigeria is the transshipment point for approximately one-third of the heroin seized by authorities in the United States and more than half of the cocaine seized by South African officials, while European law enforcement officials report that poorly-scrutinized West Africa has become the major conduit for drugs shipped to their countries by Latin American cartels.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in addition to their vast hydrocarbon reserves, the waters of the Gulf of Guinea contain some of the richest fisheries in the world. Yet, according to a major 2005 report for the British Department for International Development (DFID) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Marine Resources Assessment Group found that illegal, unreported, or unlicensed (IUU) fishing—often by large foreign commercial trawlers—cost countries in the Gulf of Guinea more than \$375 million annually. In addition to the obvious economic impact of the loss of the value of the catches to the countries affected, IUU fishing also carries indirect costs in terms

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<sup>35</sup> Adekeye Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 139.

<sup>36</sup> International Chamber of Commerce, “IMB Piracy Report Notes Decline in Piracy (25 April 2007), <http://www.icc-ccs.org/main/news.php?newsid=83>.

<sup>37</sup> See Eric Pape, “West Africa: The New ‘Drug Triangle,’” *Newsweek* (29 August 2005): 25.

of losses to industries upstream and downstream from fishing itself—to say nothing of damage to the ecosystem.<sup>38</sup> While Nigeria’s Obasanjo, along with Gabon’s President Omar Bongo, took the lead in establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission in 1999 as a forum for dialogue, cooperation, and development among its member states, it has yet to achieve anything near the operational capacity as an intergovernmental organization—and utility for protecting the strategic interests of members, including Nigeria—that ECOWAS has. Undoubtedly, this will be something Abuja will have to make a higher priority, sooner or later.

Nigeria will also have to take the lead if ECOWAS is to live up to its promise as an engine for the subregional economic integration to “avoid unnecessary duplication in the name of nationalism and unrealistic self-sufficiency” as well as heavy economic dependence on extra-African powers.<sup>39</sup> A great deal needs to be done towards currency convergence if the plan for a common currency, the “eco,” is to have any hope of realization (the official deadline, 2008, is likely to be a missed target). A common currency would facilitate trade as well as macroeconomic stability which would, in turn, contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction across the subregion.

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### **Nigeria and Africa**

Since independence, Nigeria has aspired to pan-African political, economic, and military leadership, so much so that some have described the object of its ambition as the *Pax Nigeriana*. A few years ago, the Nigerian political scientist and security analyst Adekeye Adebajo summarized the practical implications of this policy goal as follows:

Politically, Nigeria has attempted to act as Africa’s spokesman at the United Nations, the OAU, and other international fora; militarily, it has sent peacekeepers to the Congo, Chad, Liberia, Somalia, and Sierra Leone, provided military training to armies from Gambia to Tanzania, and supplied military assistance to liberation movements in southern Africa; economically, it has promoted subregional integration through ECOWAS and provided bilateral aid and technical assistance to African countries.<sup>40</sup>

In recent years, however, Nigeria has seen its role as regional power and global champion for Africa eclipsed by the rise of post-apartheid South Africa. With a larger and better diversified economy, South Africa would understandably have attracted more attention from foreign investors in any case, but it certainly did not help that, during the economic boom of the 1990s,

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<sup>38</sup> Marine Resources Assessment Group, *Review of Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing on Developing Countries* (July 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Olajide Aluko, “Nigeria’s Initiative in the Economic Community of West African States,” in *Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy* (London: George, Allen & Unwyn, 1981), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Adekeye Adebajo, *Liberia’s Civil War: Nigeria, ECOMOG, and Regional Security in West Africa* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 43-44.

the charismatic Nelson Mandela was president in Pretoria while the universally despised Sani Abacha held court in Abuja. More recently the South Africa-led Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) have proven to be more successful economic integrators than the Nigerian-led ECOWAS. Put bluntly, multiracial, democratic South Africa, with its strong infrastructure and vibrant economy, appears to many to advance a better claim to the mantle of African leadership than conflict-plagued, corruption-ridden Nigeria.

Despite not little discomfiture among Nigerian political, commercial, and academic leaders over this slippage, one must also acknowledge what the two African giants have managed to do together. The creation of the both the AU and NEPAD would have been exceedingly difficult—if not altogether impossible—without the combined diplomatic and political efforts of Abuja and Pretoria. Although the institutional linkages between the two initiatives remain juridically unclear (the AU's decision in 2002 to adopt NEPAD as a development program would seem to subordinate the latter to the former) and both remain hampered by a general lack of resources, leading to weak institutions and insufficient capacities (Nigeria and South Africa, together with Algeria and Libya, currently pay for nearly half of the AU's budget), they nonetheless represent “unprecedented developments in Africa,” being “continent-wide, indigenous initiatives with a vision for Africa in the twenty-first century.”<sup>41</sup>

The AU's Peace and Security Protocol of 2002<sup>42</sup> established a “Peace and Security Council” as the AU's standing decision making body for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts and “a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.” To assist the Council in its work, especially in conflict prevention, a “Panel of the Wise” was constituted made up of “five highly respected African personalities from various segments of society who have made an outstanding contribution to the cause of peace, security and development on the continent.” The members of this body are nominated by the chairperson of the Commission after consulting the AU member states and their appointments, for three year terms, are made by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. While, once again, the Panel has yet to have the occasion to prove its mettle—its first members were only selected in January of this year—its very existence represents a considerable shift from the jealous sovereignty of the Africa's immediate post-independence period to a paradigm in which the promotion and maintenance of peace, security, and stability are responsibilities which transcend political boundaries.

Similarly, in March 2002, NEPAD's Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee adopted the “African Peer Review Mechanism” (APRM) “as an instrument voluntarily acceded to by African members of the African Union for the purpose of self-monitoring” which “will foster the

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<sup>41</sup> Keith Gottschalk and Siegmund Schmidt, “The African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development: Strong Institutions for Weak States?” *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 11, no. 4(2004), 139.

<sup>42</sup> Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (9 July 2002).

adoption of policies, standards and practices that will lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated regional integration of the African continent.” The APRM is a voluntary mechanism open to all member states of the AU who deposit a memorandum of understanding with the NEPAD Secretariat, based in Midrand, South Africa, pledging adherence to the NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance<sup>43</sup> and undertaking to submit to and facilitate periodic peer reviews. Currently, twenty-five countries—almost half of the membership of the African Union—have signed on to the APRM.<sup>44</sup> Although there have been a number of technical and political difficulties with fully implementing the mechanism, the APRM stipulates that eighteen months after accession, a state party must submit to a “base review” with subsequent “periodic reviews” taking place every two to three years. States may also ask for a ‘requested review’ for their own reasons as well as be subjected to a ‘crisis review’ if signs of impending political or economic difficulties warrant.<sup>45</sup> In general, the review process begins with a “self-assessment” covering democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development. The questions were formally adopted in February 2004 by the first meeting of the African Peer Review Forum of states who are party to the APRM.<sup>46</sup> The entire process is consultative, rather than punitive in nature and, like the Peace and Security Council’s Panel of the Wise, it has yet to be fully tested.

In any event, Nigerian leadership will remain essential if these and other pan-African initiatives are to succeed. But, given the realities of current balances of power, Nigeria’s leadership must be a concert with other economic and political regional powers on the continent, including South Africa and Ethiopia.

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### **Global Relations**

President Obasanjo’s tenure was marked by a number of international policy successes, not least of which was a historic debt relief concession from the Paris Club that wiped out some \$30 billion of Nigeria’s \$37 billion external debt. Nigeria has also made substantial contributions to multilateral efforts, including international peacekeeping and the Group of 77, which it chaired in 2000.

In bilateral relations, Nigeria has forged increasingly significant commercial and diplomatic ties with the emerging global powers of China and

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<sup>43</sup> New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic, and Corporate Governance (adopted 18 June 2002).

<sup>44</sup> The twenty-five states are: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Saõ Tomé and Príncipe has also indicated its willingness to accede, but there has not been meeting since that declaration to accept its memorandum of understanding.

<sup>45</sup> In practice, only base reviews have been conducted thus far.

<sup>46</sup> Communiqué Issued at the End of the First Summit of the Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APR Forum) (13 February 2005).

India in recent years. And while Obasanjo used his country's considerable capacity for political persuasion to help forge an anti-terrorism consensus in Africa which the United States had sought, Nigeria also opposed the American-led invasion of Iraq, in part due to the sensitivities of the Muslim populations in northern Nigeria. Since 2005, Nigeria has been a partner in the U.S. State Department-funded Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which operates with support from the Department of Defense's Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OEF-TS). Bringing together Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia with the goal of helping "participating nations to plan and execute command, control and communications systems in support of future combined humanitarian, peacekeeping and disaster relief operations."<sup>47</sup> The training was "to ensure all nations continue developing their partnerships" while further enhancing their capabilities to halt the flow of illicit weapons, goods and human trafficking in the region; and prevent terrorists from establishing sanctuary in remote areas."<sup>48</sup> Funding for TSCTI has increased steadily from \$16 million in 2005 to \$30 million in 2006, with plans for up to \$100 million a year until 2011. Nigeria's involvement in the TSCTI—especially when considered in the context of the counterterrorism cooperation agreement which Algeria, Chad, and Niger which it had signed in July 2003—is especially significant because it represents the first tentative steps that the West African power has ever taken towards any sort of permanent alliance.

Closely related to the terrorism issue is the religious question which has had Nigeria dancing very close to the precipice since 1999 when twelve predominantly Muslim northern states (out of a total of thirty-six states plus the federal capital territory of Abuja) began adopting separate legal codes based on Islamic *shari'a* law over the objections of their own Christian and other religious minorities as well as other states in the federation. The resulting communal riots have taken an estimated 10,000 lives and, unless the underlying social pathology is resolved, there is the risk of the country turning into *the* front line of a "clash of civilizations" between Islamist militancy and those who oppose it. While the underlying conflict in Nigeria—as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa—is largely a "mix of competition for scarce resources, legacies of corrupt government and collapsing state institutions, and political entrepreneurs who compete with one another to arm marginalized youth to press increasingly radicalized agendas,"<sup>49</sup> the sectarian terms in which it is cast risks embroiling Nigeria in a far wider conflict. (In fact, there are worrisome indicators that the at least some parts of the country have already been drawn in.<sup>50</sup>)

Overall, however, the constraints of Nigeria's internal dynamics—including the lingering crisis of national legitimacy and cohesion, the nature of its political elites, and its structural economic weaknesses—have hindered it from

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<sup>47</sup> United States European Command, "Exercise Flintlock 05 Under Way in Africa" (9 June 2005), <http://www.eucom.mil/english/FullStory.asp?art=565>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> William Reno, "The Roots of Sectarian Violence, and Its Cure," in *Crafting the New Nigeria: Confronting the Challenges*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 236.

<sup>50</sup> Moshe Terdman, "The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): Al-Qaeda's Unlikely Ally in Nigeria," *Islam in Africa Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (January 2007): 29.

being the major global player that its geopolitical and strategic endowments might otherwise have indicated as its natural destiny.

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### **Conclusion**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century British statesman Lord Palmerston is usually credited with the aphorism that nations have neither permanent enemies nor permanent friends, just permanent interests. While this assertion is clearly an oversimplification, there is much truth in it. And, if an outsider, albeit a friendly one, may offer a counsel, it is that the Nigerian government needs to articulate a clear foreign policy that is clearly focused on the country's national interests as learned in the terrible days of the civil war—the primacy of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, assured through a stable subregion and guaranteed by strong pan-African institutions, balanced with an extensive network of bilateral and multilateral international relationships—while being firmly anchored in the domestic political realities of the Federal Republic. The latter must increasingly be characterized by political stability and good governance which alone will lay the foundation for solid economic growth and palpable social progress which will, ultimately, lead to the legitimacy which has long eluded successive Nigerian governments. The former can be achieved through a judicious combination of subregional economic integration and continent-wide political progress towards greater accountability and co-responsibility in the fully-established institutions of the African Union. This course alone will secure for the Nigeria of the 21<sup>st</sup> century its fundamental national interests, the assurance of which is the measure *par excellence* of a successful foreign policy.