Nigeria and its United Nations Relations

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Abstract
This study examines Nigeria's rabid commitment to its multilateral bent and therefore its Africa centre-piece policy; its United Nations diplomacy; and the pursuit of permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council within the established asymmetrical UN structure. However, the United Nations system superintended by the Security Council possesses a system whose distribution of authority cannot independently be altered.Thus,s the contradiction between sovereign equality and the privileged position of the five permanent members has persisted because institutional rules are embedded in geopolitical bargains. The paper situates Nigeria's aspiration within three defining strands of its foreign policy: multilateralism, Africa as the centrepiece of foreign policy, and non-alignment. Nigeria pursued African decolonisation, African solidarity, peacekeeping, regional integration, and participation in global institutions; but they have not automatically yielded commensurate influence on the Security Council deserving of its entitlement to a permanent seat. This study adopts Existentialism model, that the global inequalities is not predetermined and that it does not preclude Nigeria's prospects at converting its natural and human endowments into demonstrable strategic value, capable of assuming relevance and its global indispensability. The research adopts a qualitative, documentary and analytical approach, using the UN Charter, Nigerian constitutional provisions, African Union reform positions, and published scholarship. It concludes that strategic indispensability cannot guarantee permanent membership, because the decisive legal and political barriers remain; nevertheless, it can improve Nigeria's bargaining position, strengthen African representation claims, and make its candidacy more credible. This study recommends a coordinated strategy linking domestic transformation, African consensus, issue-based multilateral coalitions, and sustained diplomacy with the permanent members.

Keywords: *United Nations System, Institutional Asymmetry, Multilateralism, Non-Alignment, Africa Centre-piece Policy*

Introduction

The United Nations Organization was established in 1945 to forestall the recurrence of a 'Third World War', organise international cooperation, maintain international peace and security, and

provide a forum in which states could pursue common goals. Its founding design, however, combined a universal membership principle with a concentrated allocation of coercive and decision-making authority. The Charter affirms the sovereign equality of all members, but the Security Council gives five states permanent membership and veto power over substantive decisions. The resulting tension between legal equality and institutional privilege is central to debates about the legitimacy, representativeness, efficiency and effectiveness of contemporary multilateralism (United Nations, 1945). Nigeria joined the UN on 7th October 1960 as its ninety ninth member barely a week after its independence, and has been prominent in African liberation and UN diplomatic affairs since then (Gambari, 2012; Uhomoibhi, 2008). Of course, it is generally asserted that there has been continuity in the substantive content or focus of Nigeria's foreign policy, meaning the principal objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy, since independence (Akinyemi, 1989; Akindele, 1990; Isah, 1991; Akinboye, 1993; Gambari, 1986; Saliu, 1999; Obiozor, 2007; Ayam, 2010; Akinboye, 2013 in (Fayomi, Oluyemi O. Chidozie, Felix C. Ajayi, Lady A. 2015). Its aspiration is not merely a demand for prestige; it reflects the belief that Africa's demographic, political, security, and economic importance is insufficiently represented in the institution primarily responsible for international peace and security. Yet Nigeria is seeking admission to a privileged category whose existence embodies the same asymmetry it criticises. The situation creates a paradox - Nigeria remains committed to the United Nations as a central instrument of international cooperation while attempting to secure a place within its most unequal decision-making structure. The argument is developed around some propositions: firstly, the UN system contains a structural asymmetry between the principle of sovereign equality and the special authority of the permanent members. Secondly, the asymmetry persists because it is supported by the interests of the powerful states and protected by the demanding amendment rules. Thirdly, Nigeria's foreign policy has historically been shaped by multilateral engagement, Africa-centred diplomacy, and non-alignment. Fourthly, these principles have generated diplomatic opportunities and continental responsibilities, but they have not necessarily translated into proportional influence. The fifth axiom is that Nigeria's material and human endowments become strategic assets only when converted into reliable capabilities and international public good. The sixth point is that an ideology of strategic indispensability may strengthen Nigeria's candidacy, although it cannot substitute for African consensus, P5 consent, and a feasible Charter reform arrangement.
The study therefore shifts attention from the question of whether Nigeria deserves a permanent seat to the process through which Nigeria might improve its ability to secure one. It argues that eligibility claims, population figures, resource endowments, and historical contributions are necessary components of a case for representation, though the sufficiency is in doubt. The decisive question is how these assets can be transformed into power, diplomatic leverage, coalition support, institutional credibility, and demonstrated contributions to collective problem-solving.

Statement of the Problem

The Security Council's composition reflects the geopolitical settlement that dominated the period of the Second World War more than the distribution of population, regional representation, or political authority in the contemporary international system. Although the General Assembly provides each member state one vote, the Council's permanent members enjoy a distinctive status, including the capacity to block substantive decisions through the veto. This arrangement raises a legitimacy problem because decisions with global consequences may be shaped or paralysed by the strategic preferences of a small group of states. It also raises an effectiveness problem when rivalry among permanent members prevents collective responses to crises, though this argument

is often countervailed by efficiency. More especially, a greater volume of issues that dominate the UN concerns are from Africa. This institutional problem is reinforced by the legal procedure for the amendment of the UN Charter. Article 108 provides that amendments must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members. Thus, the states whose privileges would be affected by reform are indispensable to the legal process that could alter those privileges (United Nations, 1945). This is not proof that reform is impossible, but it creates a powerful status quo advantage. Reform advocates must build a broad support while also addressing the interests and concerns of states whose ratification is necessary. Nigeria's predicament is especially significant because since independence, it has presented itself as an advocate of African liberation, regional cooperation, multilateral diplomacy, and a more equitable international order through anti colonial and anti-Apartheid measures. Section 19 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria identifies the promotion and protection of national interest, African integration, international cooperation, respect for international law, peaceful dispute settlement, and a just world economic order as foreign-policy objectives (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). These constitutional objectives provide a normative basis for Nigeria's multilateral engagement. Nevertheless, its sustained participation in international institutions and contributions to African security have not yielded adequate prospects for permanent membership of the Security Council. Nigerian scholarship reveals a continuing debate over the costs and benefits of Africa-centred foreign policy. Some scholars emphasise Nigeria's historic role in decolonisation, anti-apartheid activity, peacekeeping, and regional institution-building; others question whether a generous continental posture has consistently served domestic development and national interest (Egwim, 2023; Nnanyere & Nwogbaga, 2024; Shatambya, 2023). This debate is directly relevant to the Security Council question. If Nigeria's continental contributions are not accompanied by economic transformation, institutional credibility, reciprocal partnerships, and sustained diplomatic organisation, the country may continue to bear responsibilities without converting them into additional influence.

Scholarship on Nigeria-UN relations dwell on the rationality of Nigeria's choice and the immutability of the UN Security Council. The problem is therefore a fork between the UN's institutional architecture which is resistant to reform; Nigeria's long-standing foreign-policy commitments to securing permanent membership; and the mechanisms through which Nigeria's endowments and contributions can be transformed into durable diplomatic leverage remain insufficiently specified. The study therefore investigates how Nigeria can navigate these constraints without abandoning multilateralism or treating Africa-centred diplomacy as an unconditional obligation detached from national interest.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim is to examine the structural asymmetry of the United Nations Security Council and assess how Nigeria can convert its natural, human, economic, diplomatic, and regional endowments into strategic indispensability as a pathway towards permanent membership.

The specific objectives are to:

(a) examine multilateralism, Africa-centred foreign policy, and non-alignment as defining principles of Nigeria's external relations;

(b) analyse the contradiction between sovereign equality and the privileges of permanent Security Council membership and the political and legal factors that sustain the existing structure and complicate reform;

(c) examine how Nigeria's material resources, human capital, peacekeeping experience, and regional leadership can be utilized to produced measurable international relevance and indispensability.

Research Questions and Propositions

The paper is guided by three questions: What constitutes the principles and the guiding policies of Nigeria? What is the physiological operation and the architecture of the United Nations system? How does multilateralism, Africa-centred policy, and non-alignment reinforce Nigeria's relevance and indispensability to the global players?

Certain factors indicate the relevance of above questions; firstly, Nigeria's multilateral bent and endowments produce diplomatic leverage. Secondly, there is an entrenched institutional asymmetry in the UN structure reflecting interests of the permanent members and protected by the Charter amendment procedure. Nigeria's endowments and accruing diplomatic leverage can only be meaningful when converted into effective national capabilities that sustain its relevance and indispensability, without necessarily agitating openly for a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council. African coalition-building, international public goods, and sustained diplomacy is more credible than episodic lobbying based primarily on entitlement.

Conceptual Clarification

Institutional asymmetry refers to a structured inequality in authority, access, and decision-making power within an institution. In the Security Council, asymmetry is evident in the distinction between permanent and elected members and in the veto authority available to the P5. The term does not imply that every UN organ operates identically; rather, it identifies a specific imbalance in the Council's distribution of authority. Multilateralism refers to the coordination of relations among three or more states through generalised principles, procedures, and institutions. Ruggie (1992) distinguishes multilateralism from ad hoc coordination by emphasising the organisation of relations according to shared principles. For Nigeria, multilateralism has offered a means of amplifying diplomatic voice, cooperating with states of varied capabilities, and advancing African and developing-country concerns through the UN, the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and other institutions. Africa as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy is the doctrine that places African affairs at the centre of Nigeria's external relations. Historically, this orientation has been associated with decolonisation, opposition to apartheid, African solidarity, regional integration, peacekeeping, and the promotion of African agency. The policy can be understood as a strategic and normative orientation rather than a requirement that Nigeria subordinate every domestic interest to continental expectations. Contemporary scholarship disputes whether the traditional formulation remains adequate in a globalised environment (Inamete, 1993; Nnanyere & Nwogbaga, 2024; Shatambya, 2023). Non-alignment emerged from the Cold War context in which newly independent states sought to avoid automatic subordination to either superpower bloc. It did not necessarily mean neutrality on every international issue or equal distance from all powers. For Nigeria, non-alignment expressed the aspiration to preserve policy autonomy, resist external domination, and engage different powers according to issue-specific interests. In contemporary conditions, its practical meaning is better understood as strategic autonomy and independent judgement rather than rigid equidistance. Strategic indispensability is the study's central analytical concept. It refers to a state's demonstrated capacity to make sustained contributions to the resolution of problems that other states or international institutions regard as important. It is not synonymous with size, resource abundance, or moral deservingness. A country becomes

strategically valuable when its capabilities are reliable, difficult to replace in relevant contexts, and connected to outcomes that matter to partners. Even then, strategic value may not produce institutional concessions if the states controlling reform oppose them.

Theoretical Framework

Waltz (1979) writing on Structural Realism argues that the distribution of capabilities in an anarchic international system shapes state behaviour and the possibilities for cooperation. Structural Realism explains the resilience of the status quo but may understate the agency available to states that are not great powers. Neoclassical Realism offers a bridge between external constraints and domestic capacity. Rose (1998) argues that foreign policy is shaped by systemic pressures as interpreted through domestic political and institutional factors. In Nigeria's case, population, energy resources, geography, and regional significance do not automatically become diplomatic power. Their value depends on the state's ability to mobilise resources, sustain political and economic performance, coordinate institutions, implement commitments, and maintain a credible foreign-policy strategy. The underlying philosophical perspective concerns state agency under structural constraint. Nigeria cannot unilaterally rewrite the UN Charter, but it can choose how it develops national capabilities, frames its diplomacy, builds coalitions, and contributes to regional and global problem-solving. Role theory complements these perspectives by examining how states understand and perform their international roles. Nigeria has often presented itself as an African leader, a supporter of multilateralism, a regional security provider, and an advocate of a more equitable international order. The analytical issue is whether these claimed roles are matched by consistent performance and whether partners recognise the contribution. The theoretical synthesis is that structural realism explains the barriers, neoclassical realism explains the conversion of national resources into usable power. Existentialist theory is well-suited to explaining how Nigeria can overcome the predeterminism assumption that global inequities permanently determine its position in the world, because it holds that individuals and societies are defined not only by circumstances, but also by the choices, responsibilities, and purposeful actions through which they create meaning and shape their future. The theory is associated with Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, and was further developed by Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus (Dimonye, 2014; Milner, 2006). Its major tenets such as freedom, individual choice, responsibility, authenticity, self-definition, commitment and resistance to oppressive conditions make it particularly relevant to Nigeria. Freedom rejects the belief that colonial history, poverty, corruption, unequal international structures or dependency must define Nigeria's destiny; responsibility requires leaders and citizens to accept accountability for national choices; authenticity demands policies based on Nigeria's own realities rather than borrowed models; and purposeful action calls for the transformation of the nation's oil, gas, fertile land, water, human capital, cultural creativity, strategic location and scientific potential into productive, diversified and innovative capacity. Thus, the pursuit of a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council may not be necessary through rhetorical pronouncement, rather, by becoming an indispensable force to Africa and the international community.

An Overview: Nigeria's Multilateral Bent in Foreign Policy

Multilateral engagement has been an enduring feature of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence. Nigeria's membership of the United Nations and participation in African and global institutions have provided platforms for advancing national interests, defending sovereignty,

cooperating on development, and supporting collective security. The constitutional objectives in Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution explicitly support international cooperation, African integration, respect for international law, peaceful settlement of disputes, and a just world economic order (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Multilateralism is therefore not merely a diplomatic preference; it is also consistent with the country's stated constitutional orientation.

For a state whose influence is substantial but not equivalent to that of the major powers, multilateral institutions can multiply diplomatic voice. Collective forums permit Nigeria to form coalitions, shape resolutions, participate in norm development, and bring African concerns into wider debates. The UN has also been an arena for Nigeria's opposition to colonialism and apartheid, support for peacekeeping, and advocacy of international cooperation. Akinyemi's edited collection *Nigeria and the World* illustrates the long-standing importance of international organisations and bilateral relations in the formation of Nigeria's external outlook (Akinyemi, 1978). Multilateralism, however, has an ambivalent character. Institutions provide access and legitimacy, but the distribution of authority within them may reproduce inequality. The General Assembly's one-state-one-vote principle does not erase the Security Council's differentiated membership structure. Nigeria can therefore be committed to multilateralism while criticising the institutional design of a particular multilateral organ. The contradiction is not necessarily between cooperation and opposition; it is between commitment to the institution's purposes and dissatisfaction with its unequal allocation of authority. Nigeria's strategy should accordingly avoid treating multilateralism as passive acceptance of existing arrangements. A more effective multilateral posture would combine participation with agenda-setting, technical expertise, coalition-building, policy consistency, and the ability to propose workable solutions. Nigeria's commitment to the UN is more likely to strengthen its claim if it demonstrates that it can improve the provision of international public goods rather than merely request a greater share of institutional status.

Africa as the Centre-piece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Africa-centred foreign policy emerged from the circumstances of decolonisation and the belief that Nigeria's security, identity, and international influence were inseparable from the political future of the continent. Nigeria's leaders viewed colonial domination, apartheid, racial discrimination, and instability in neighbouring states as issues with direct moral and strategic implications. African solidarity was consequently pursued through diplomatic support for liberation movements, participation in continental institutions, regional cooperation, and peacekeeping. Inamete (1993) identifies Afrocentrism as a major concept shaping Nigeria's foreign-policy decision-making, while the wider literature links the policy to Nigeria's post-independence regional and continental ambitions. The policy's multilateral dimension is important. Nigeria's African commitments have been pursued not only through bilateral diplomacy but also through the Organisation of African Unity, its successor the African Union, ECOWAS, and the United Nations. These institutions offer channels through which Nigeria can convert regional engagement into broader diplomatic influence. The creation and development of ECOWAS, Nigeria's support for African integration, and its participation in peace and security initiatives illustrate the practical relationship between continental priorities and multilateral action. Nevertheless, Africa-centred policy has attracted criticism. Shatambya (2023) questions the returns Nigeria has received from sustained continental commitments, while Nnanyere and Nwogbaga (2024) challenge the traditional doctrine from a national-interest perspective. Ugwu-Okoye and Adu-Gyamfi (2020) similarly argue that the costs of Nigeria's Afrocentric commitments and the experience of xenophobic attacks require

reconsideration of how African solidarity is operationalised. These critiques should not be dismissed as arguments for isolationism. Rather, they raise the question of whether solidarity is supported by reciprocity, domestic capacity, and measurable national and continental benefits.

For Nigeria's Security Council ambition, the Africa-centred principle remains both an asset and a test. Nigeria's case is strengthened when it is presented as a contribution to correcting Africa's underrepresentation, not merely as a national claim to status. Yet Nigeria cannot assume that African support will be automatic. Other African states have their own aspirations, and regional consensus requires negotiation over representation, selection criteria, veto rights, and the relationship between permanent and elected seats. Nigeria's continental leadership will be more persuasive when it is consultative, credible, and responsive to shared African priorities.

A refined Africa-centred approach should therefore combine continental responsibility with reciprocal national interest. It should prioritise initiatives that improve regional security, trade, energy interconnection, public health, food systems, and institutional capacity while demonstrating how these benefits also advance Nigeria's welfare and international standing. This is not a retreat from African solidarity; it is an effort to make solidarity sustainable and strategically consequential.

Non-Alignment and Strategic Autonomy

Non-alignment was shaped by the bipolarity of the Cold War. Newly independent states sought to avoid becoming instruments of either the Western or Soviet bloc and to preserve room for independent foreign-policy choices. For Nigeria, the principle reflected concerns about sovereignty, the risks of external domination, and the desire to engage different powers on the basis of national and African interests. Non-alignment also connected Nigeria to wider movements seeking decolonisation, racial equality, and a more equitable international order. The historical practice of non-alignment was never free from contradiction. Economic dependence, security relationships, ideological affinities, and specific crises could pull policy in directions that complicated claims of equal distance from competing powers. Halidu, Nwokedi, and Adie (2018) identify non-alignment, multilateralism, Afrocentrism, legal equality, and non-interference as recurring principles in Nigeria's foreign policy, while also noting inconsistencies between declared principles and practice. Such tensions are common in foreign policy: principles provide orientation, but decisions are made under changing material and strategic conditions. In the contemporary international system, non-alignment is best treated as a commitment to strategic autonomy rather than a mechanical refusal to cooperate closely with any major power. Nigeria may work with the United States, China, Russia, European states, and emerging powers on different issues without automatically aligning with one bloc. The essential requirement is that partnerships should be assessed against Nigeria's long-term interests, African priorities, economic development, and international obligations. Strategic autonomy is directly relevant to Security Council reform. Nigeria needs relationship with all permanent members and a broad coalition of non-permanent members, regional groups, and developing states. A policy perceived as an extension of one major power's preferences would weaken Nigeria's credibility as a representative candidate. Conversely, a consistent capacity to engage competing powers, defend African positions, and propose practical compromises could increase its diplomatic value. Non-alignment thus becomes an instrument of coalition diplomacy and independent judgement rather than an end in itself.

Institutional Asymmetry and the Limits of Security Council Reform

The Security Council is the UN organ with primary responsibility for international peace and security. Under Article 23 of the Charter, its membership includes five permanent members and elected members. Article 27 establishes the voting procedure, including the special position of permanent members in substantive decisions. The veto has become the most visible expression of institutional asymmetry because it allows any one permanent member to prevent the adoption of a substantive resolution even when a majority of Council members support it (United Nations, 1945). The veto was embedded in the founding bargain of the United Nations. The architects of the post-war system recognised that collective security would be difficult to sustain if the major powers were not willing to participate in, or accept, the decisions of the organisation. The veto was thus defended as a mechanism to keep the major powers inside the system and prevent the organisation from acting against their vital interests. The same arrangement, however, has enabled paralysis when permanent members disagree and it has raised questions about the equal application of international norms. Reform has been repeatedly demanded because the Council's composition does not fully reflect changes in global population, regional representation, or the political importance of states that were not independent in 1945. African states have argued that a continent of more than 50 countries should not remain without permanent representation. The AU's Ezulwini Consensus articulates a common African position calling for two permanent African seats with all the prerogatives and privileges of permanent membership, including the veto for as long as the veto exists, alongside additional non-permanent seats (African Union, 2005). The position is both a demand for representation and a statement about equality: Africa should not be offered a lesser category of permanent membership than other regions or states possess. The main legal obstacle is Article 108. Charter amendments require adoption by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including every permanent member. Article 109 also provides a Charter review conference mechanism, but amendments recommended through that process likewise require ratification by two-thirds of members, including all permanent members (United Nations, 1945). Consequently, reform requires both broad membership support and the consent of the states whose privileges may be affected. The claim that reform is impossible should nevertheless be qualified. The amendment procedure makes reform difficult, not logically impossible. The UN Charter has been amended, including amendments affecting Security Council membership and other institutional arrangements. The deeper obstacle is the political challenge of constructing a package that can obtain broad support while avoiding rejection by a permanent member. Nigeria's strategy must therefore combine principled criticism of asymmetry with a realistic understanding of bargaining, institutional design, and the interests of states whose consent is legally indispensable.

Nigeria's Quest for Permanent Membership

Various perspectives abound on Nigeria's bid to represent Africa on the United Nations Security Council; amongst them, whether Nigeria the choice is rational, whether Nigeria is qualified, whether the reform is possible or whether it is necessary to reform. Nevertheless, these views are overlapping. Nigeria's demographic weight, regional influence, contributions to African peace and security, diplomatic experience, economic potential, and the principle that Africa deserves meaningful representation in the Security Council are mutually reinforcing. The case is strongest when these grounds are integrated into an argument about the capacity to contribute to the Council's work and the legitimacy of a more representative international order. It is weaker when national size or historical sacrifice is treated as an automatic entitlement to permanent membership.

Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping and regional security initiatives has supported its image as a consequential African actor. Its role in ECOWAS and regional responses to conflict has provided experience in mediation, collective security, and institution-building. These contributions are relevant because permanent membership should involve more than symbolic representation; it entails sustained responsibility for international peace and security. However, past contributions do not automatically create a legal right to permanent membership, and other states may assess Nigeria's candidacy according to its present capabilities, policy consistency, and the wider design of reform. The Nigerian literature also warns against confusing diplomatic activism with national power. Ubi and Akinkuotu (2014), in their study of foreign policy and economic development, examine the relationship between external relations and domestic economic priorities. Their approach reinforces the importance of asking whether foreign policy generates tangible development outcomes and whether national economic conditions support international ambition. A state that seeks greater international responsibility must be able to finance commitments, sustain professional diplomatic institutions, provide reliable security contributions, and maintain credibility with partners. Nigeria's candidacy is also inseparable from African politics. If the AU maintains a common position, Nigeria's argument can draw strength from a continent-wide claim for representation. If African states become divided over which countries should occupy permanent seats or over the veto question, the bargaining position may weaken. Nigeria therefore needs to treat African consensus as a substantive diplomatic project rather than assume that population or regional prominence will automatically secure continental endorsement.

The question of veto rights requires particular care. Accepting a permanent seat without a veto could be presented as a practical compromise, but it might institutionalise a second tier of permanent membership. Insisting that new permanent members receive the same rights as the existing P5 aligns more closely with the AU position but may face greater resistance from current permanent members. Nigeria should therefore support a clear African position while evaluating the political feasibility and long-term consequences of alternative reform packages.

From Endowments to Strategic Indispensability

The central conceptual contribution of this paper is the proposition that national endowments must be converted into strategic indispensability. Nigeria possesses important natural, demographic, economic, geographic, and human resources. Yet these resources do not automatically translate into international influence. A resource-rich state can remain economically vulnerable; a populous state can struggle to mobilise its human capital; and a state with a record of peacekeeping can fail to convert its contributions into lasting diplomatic support. The conversion process depends on institutions, policy coordination, productive transformation, and the delivery of outcomes valued by partners. Natural resources could contribute to strategic influence if Nigeria develops reliable energy supply, value-added processing, transparent investment frameworks, and regional energy partnerships. Oil and gas alone are not sufficient. Overdependence on commodity exports may increase vulnerability to price fluctuations and reduce the resources available for diplomacy and development. Strategic value would be strengthened if Nigeria became a dependable contributor to regional energy security while investing in infrastructure, renewable energy, industrial capacity, and technology. Human capital is equally important. Nigeria's population and diaspora provide potential in professional services, education, science, technology, health, culture, and entrepreneurship. However, demographic scale becomes diplomatic capital only when people have the skills, institutional support, and opportunities to produce internationally relevant solutions. Investment in research, public health, digital infrastructure, professional training, and diaspora

partnerships can enhance Nigeria's contribution to global public goods and strengthen the credibility of its development diplomacy. Security contributions offer another route. Nigeria can deepen its role in mediation, peacekeeping, counterterrorism cooperation consistent with international law, maritime security, and regional conflict prevention. The key measure should not be the volume of personnel or expenditure alone, but the quality and sustainability of outcomes. Successful mediation, improved regional coordination, and reliable implementation of agreements may generate greater diplomatic confidence than symbolic declarations of leadership.

Food security and climate adaptation are additional opportunities. Nigeria's agricultural capacity, scientific institutions, and regional markets could support programmes addressing food supply, drought resilience, flood response, and climate-related displacement. These are transnational problems with direct implications for stability. If Nigeria can deliver practical regional solutions, it can demonstrate that its international role is grounded in problem-solving rather than status-seeking. Finally, strategic indispensability requires a professional diplomatic system. Nigeria needs clear priorities, continuity across administrations, rigorous policy research, effective coordination among foreign affairs, finance, trade, energy, defence, and development institutions, and a diplomatic service equipped to negotiate complex institutional questions. Without such coordination, the country's endowments may remain fragmented and its international commitments inconsistent.

The Framework and Operational Indicators

The proposed explanatory model links institutional environment, national endowments, strategic conversion mechanisms, strategic indispensability, and diplomatic outcomes. The institutional environment includes the veto, P5 preferences, amendment requirements, and competing reform proposals. National endowments include natural resources, population, human capital, economic capacity, geographic position, peacekeeping experience, and regional influence. Conversion mechanisms include productive transformation, institutional competence, political policy consistency based on democratic principles, coalition-building, and the provision of international public goods. The expected intermediate outcomes are greater agenda-setting capacity, stronger diplomatic partnerships, and increased support for Nigeria's reform position. Permanent membership remains a contingent long-term outcome rather than an automatic consequence.

The independent variables are Nigeria's material and human capabilities, economic resilience, security contributions, and diplomatic engagement. The mediating variables are the quality of conversion mechanisms: how well Nigeria turns resources into reliable contributions, how effectively it builds coalitions, and whether it maintains credibility over time. The moderating variables include African consensus, P5 preferences, global power shifts, domestic political stability, and the design of the proposed reform. The dependent variables should be measured incrementally through evidence of diplomatic influence, coalition support, agenda-setting success, and progress in reform negotiations. Indicators should distinguish inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Budgetary expenditure and personnel deployed are inputs; participation in negotiations, peacekeeping missions, or technical programmes are outputs; successful mediation, durable cooperation agreements, and measurable improvements in regional security are outcomes. Likewise, diplomatic statements supporting Nigeria are not equivalent to a commitment to ratify a Charter amendment. Research must therefore examine the strength of support, its consistency, and whether it translates into action. A qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach is suitable. Documentary analysis can examine the Charter, General Assembly resolutions, AU statements, Nigerian foreign-policy documents, and diplomatic records. Historical process tracing can

compare successive administrations and identify how particular contributions affected coalitions or negotiations. Quantitative secondary data can describe trends in trade, economic diversification, peacekeeping, and development indicators. Elite interviews, where feasible and ethically approved, can clarify how diplomats and scholars understand Nigeria's opportunities and constraints. The analysis should avoid causal claims unsupported by evidence and should distinguish correlation from mechanism and causation.

Discussion

The analysis supports a qualified version of the strategic-indispensability proposition. Institutional asymmetry is real, and the Charter's amendment requirements give the permanent members a decisive role in reform. Nigeria cannot overcome this constraint by national effort alone. At the same time, institutional barriers do not render national agency meaningless. Domestic transformation, regional leadership, policy consistency, and international public goods can improve the quality of Nigeria's candidacy and increase the value of its diplomatic partnerships.

The three defining principles of Nigeria's foreign policy should be understood as mutually reinforcing when applied strategically. Multilateralism offers institutional channels for coalition-building and international cooperation. Africa-centred policy provides the regional foundation for Nigeria's claim to represent a continent that remains underrepresented in permanent Security Council membership. Non-alignment supports strategic autonomy and the ability to negotiate with competing powers. Their value depends, however, on their practical implementation. Multilateralism without agenda-setting can become passive participation; Afrocentrism without reciprocity and domestic capacity can become costly symbolism; and non-alignment without a coherent national strategy can become ambiguity. The paper also challenges a simplistic understanding of power. Nigeria's resources are not irrelevant, but they are not self-executing. Resource wealth must be translated into productive and fiscal capacity; population must be supported by education, health, and employment; regional leadership must be recognised by partners; and diplomatic activity must produce durable coalitions. Strategic indispensability is therefore a relationship between capability and the needs of others, not a self-declared status.

A final qualification concerns the meaning of success. Nigeria may gain influence, strengthen African representation, and shape reform debates without obtaining a permanent seat in the near term. These intermediate gains should not be confused with the ultimate objective, but neither should they be dismissed. They can create institutional memory, improve coalition capacity, and position Nigeria to respond if a politically feasible reform opportunity emerges.

Conclusion

The United Nations Security Council embodies a persistent tension between sovereign equality and institutional privilege. The permanent members' special status and veto power create an asymmetrical decision-making system, while the Charter amendment procedure makes fundamental reform dependent on broad international support and the consent of all five permanent members. This arrangement helps explain why reform is difficult, but it does not establish that reform is impossible. Nigeria's multilateral bent, Africa-centred foreign policy, and tradition of non-alignment provide both the historical foundation and the diplomatic instruments for its quest for permanent membership. Multilateralism offers access and coalition opportunities; Africa-centred policy gives Nigeria's candidacy a continental dimension; and non-alignment supports independent engagement with competing powers. Yet these principles must be translated into effective capabilities and consistent policy outcomes if they are to strengthen Nigeria's influence.

The central argument of this paper is that Nigeria's candidacy will be strengthened not by endowments alone but by the conversion of those endowments into strategic indispensability. Natural resources, human capital, economic capacity, peacekeeping experience, regional diplomacy, and technical expertise must be organised into reliable contributions to international problem-solving. Such contributions can improve Nigeria's credibility, widen its coalitions, and increase its bargaining position. They cannot, by themselves, guarantee permanent membership, because the final outcome remains dependent on African consensus, the preferences of the permanent members, and the political design of reform. Nigeria's most credible pathway is therefore neither passive acceptance of institutional asymmetry nor reliance on moral entitlement. It is a sustained strategy that combines domestic transformation, reciprocal African leadership, strategic autonomy, professional diplomacy, and a realistic reform proposal. In this approach, Nigeria seeks to become not merely a state that asks to be included in global decision-making, but a state whose demonstrated contributions make its inclusion more compelling. That is the strategic proposition the study has advanced and the empirical question future research should test.

Recommendation(s)

Democratic systems are strengthened by the independence of its institutions, therefore, for democracy to thrive, the institutions must be valued above individuals. Democracy should be emphasised by all stakeholders, extending to the processes, which renders the government responsible to the people to which it owes survival and legitimacy. The bane of African states is the willingness to subvert the rules in favour of individuals – and therefore the rampant corruption. Nigeria should strengthen its domestic foundations of international influence: economic diversification, energy reliability, technological capability, education, health, security, and institutional integrity are not separate from foreign policy. Third, Nigeria should pursue African consensus through sustained consultation with the AU, regional organisations, and states with competing or complementary ambitions. Fourth, Nigeria should develop issue-based coalitions across regional and geopolitical lines. Non-alignment should be practised as strategic autonomy: the ability to work with diverse partners without surrendering independent judgement. Nigeria can build partnerships around peacekeeping, climate adaptation, energy security, food systems, public health, and UN institutional reform. Akinyemi's (1987) argument for reciprocity is useful because it treats African responsibility and Nigerian national interest as compatible considerations. Reciprocity should not mean abandoning solidarity when immediate returns are uncertain; it should mean ensuring that continental policy remains sustainable, mutually beneficial, and accountable. Nigeria should invest in diplomatic expertise and evidence-based public diplomacy. A permanent-seat campaign requires detailed knowledge of Charter amendment procedures, voting coalitions, competing reform models, and the concerns of individual states. Nigerian missions, universities, think tanks, and policy institutions should work together to produce sustained research and negotiation strategies. The country should articulate not only why it seeks a seat but what additional value it would bring to the Council's work.

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