

Of Sound and Fury: A Critical Appraisal of President Bola Tinubu's 4D Foreign Policy Thrust

Adelaja Odutola Odukoya and Judith Anene

Abstract

No nation is an Island to itself. For several reasons, among them the promotion of their development, nations, irrespective of their endowments, relate with other nations across the globe. For this reason, countries accord as much importance to their foreign policy as they do domestic policies. The reality is that both domestic and foreign policies are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, reinforce one another. At independence, Nigeria's Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, proclaimed the cardinal principles of Nigeria's foreign policy thrust. Rather than being static, Nigeria's foreign policy has been dynamic, changing with regime type, leadership personalities, the domestic challenges, and in reaction to the international environment. Hence, Nigeria's foreign policy has moved in terms of primacy from Afrocentrism to non-alignment, concentric circle, economic diplomacy, and now to the "4D" (democracy, demography, development, and diaspora) doctrine of President Bola Tinubu's administration. This paper undertakes a critique of Tinubu's "4D" foreign policy orientation using the theories of decadence, postcolonialism, and globalisation. It argues that despite the policy's acclaimed newness, Nigeria remains trapped in dependency, a product of its position in the international political economy. The paper notes that Nigeria's weak state capacity and its subjection to Western developmental paradigms are among the causes of a disjunction between foreign policy aspirations and reality. It argues that to achieve its objectives, there is an urgent need to match rhetoric with concrete actions and strategies of ending imperialist domination and transnational capital control of Nigeria.

Keywords: Dependency, Afrocentrism, Non-alignment, Post-colonial, Globalisation, Foreign policy

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Introduction

On all accounts, Nigeria is a preeminent global player. Nigeria's position as the most populous Black nation in the world, coupled with its abundant human and material resources, including its status as the fifteenth (used to be the sixth) most significant producer of crude oil (Global Firepower, 2025) and a vast reserve of natural gas, cements its importance on the global stage. Though recent conditions of its less-than-stellar performance on most developmental indices continue to cast a gloomy picture on Nigeria, its regional influence and historical contributions remain significant. This has affirmation even through the prism of Nigeria's self-image and self-consciousness as a regional hegemon. For Odukoya and Odubajo (2006, 29), "Having been regarded as the 'Giant of Africa', with a manifest destiny to pursue on the continent, the country never relents in its self-assigned role to project and protect the image of the continent in its interaction with the outside world. However, since its independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria has only tangentially fulfilled the role that this reputation confers on it within the international system.

This is not to dismiss Nigeria's glorious contributions to the independence struggles in Southern Africa and to the global arena in various respects. Despite its geographical distance, Nigeria assumed the position of a frontline state, providing unwavering support against apartheid, even in the face of opposition from powerful Western nations and transnational corporations that were beneficiaries of the oppressive Apartheid system. We recall the nationalisation of British Petroleum, the support of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) following South Africa's invasion of Angola in order to support the National Liberation Front of Angola (UNITA) by the General Muhammadu Buhari government, and the activist foreign policy under General Olusegun Obasanjo in the late 1970s. Following his assumption of office as the Head of State, Obasanjo's administration nationalised Barclays Bank in 1978 due to the bank's chairman's support for the Apartheid regime in South Africa, despite Nigeria's long-term historic relationship with the United Kingdom. Obasanjo created the South African Relief Agency to raise funds to support liberation movements in South Africa, with agencies like the Committee Against Apartheid (NACAP) engaged in international campaigns in support of liberation organisations in South Africa, who were also allowed to operate openly from Nigeria. Leaders of the Soweto uprising were brought to Nigeria by Obasanjo, where they formed the South African Revolutionary Youth Council (SARYCO); some of them received military training and regular education in Nigeria (Aluko 1986, cited in Odukoya and Odubajo, 2006, 27).

Earlier, Nigeria had contributed troops to the Congo. The country also played a commendable role in helping to form the Non-Aligned Movement and participated in several successful peacekeeping operations. Closer home, its sacrificial role in forming and deploying the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), in which the lives of many patriotic Nigerian soldiers and civilians were lost in order to end conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, was particularly laudable. Similarly, it played a role in 2003 and 2004 in the return of Sa Tomé and Príncipe and Guinea-Bissau to democratic order, respectively (Odukoya & Odubajo, 2006). Unfortunately, current realities in Nigeria's foreign affairs make these achievements seem like distant fairy tales. A combination of colonial legacies, structural constraints, imperialist manipulation, state and governance crises, corruption, and leadership deficits has conspired to undermine the nation's image in the global order. It is a tragic story of descent from glory to scorn with Nigeria and Nigerians objects of ridicule even among African

states. The xenophobia attacks on Nigerians in South Africa, as well as the recent "Nigeria must go" protest in Ghana, are good examples.

In what has historically become unnecessary meddlesomeness and unconscionable extravagance, at independence in 1960, in line with what he considered Nigeria's manifest destiny, Prime Minister Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa proclaimed that Nigeria would not only stand for its own citizens but would also make the affairs of all Africans its business. This way, Africa occupies a primary place and stands at the heart of Nigerian foreign policy, which administrations, after administration, have remained faithful to, irrespective of regime type. Nigeria has demonstrated this commitment through generous financial support for the continental organisations, the Organisation of African Unity and the African Union, as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria's support for liberation organisations and peace efforts on the continent cannot be overemphasised. This continuity is change of Nigeria's foreign policy thrust resonate with Ogunsanwo (1986 cited in Odukoya and Odubajo, 2006, 35) to the effect that "The principle and objectives guiding a country's foreign policy hardly change from one administration to the other – at least in so far as the basic national interest are concerned – unless there is a revolutionary change in regime in such a way to affect the basic definition of national interests".

Commendable as this Afrocentric policy has been, many Nigerians are concerned that other African nations have taken it for granted. For them, reciprocity, which underpins foreign relations among nations, is not being applied to Nigeria. Nigeria's monumental investments in human and material resources to African nations have often not been reciprocated, as evidenced by xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa. In the same vein, a worrisome wave of "Nigeria must go protests is presently sweeping through Ghana. Similarly, many Nigerians have questioned the country's "Father Christmas" generosity, given the grinding poverty and economic hardship at home. Reference can be made to Nigeria's payment of a \$ 2,000 monthly allowance to academics, including non-professors, deployed with the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) in African countries. At the same time, Nigerian professors at home earn less than \$400 per month. For these individuals, allocating resources to diplomatic projects in the name of African unity is a misplaced priority, as these funds could be used to address domestic security and development problems. However, some have argued to the contrary, noting that the benefits that accrued to Nigeria from such seemingly wasteful spending cannot be overemphasised. The vast resources committed to ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as funding for ECOWAS, are often cited as examples. This negative perception highlights the elitist nature of the nation's foreign policy, with little attempt to ground it in popular discourse beyond the foreign affairs bureaucracy.

The Afrocentric foreign policy under Balewa was complemented by a policy of non-alignment, which was in effect from the 1960s to the 1980s. Nigeria was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement; it deployed as an avoidance strategy designed to steer clear of the ideological rivalries between the dominant international powers of the time. This stance of ideological neutrality, to some extent, served as a stabiliser for the global order, as these nations constituted a "third force," however feeble and ephemeral. However, the truth was that many of these nations were only "non-aligned" in pretence, being covertly aligned with either the United States of America or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Nigeria proclaimed non-alignment has not been profitable nor resonated with its developmental aspirations. Due to its overt non-alignment, Nigeria has paid some costs as it missed out on certain strategic developmental benefits that would have accrued from partnerships and alliances that could have

brought developmental dividends (Olukoshi, 1991; Ake, 1981; Falola & Heaton, 2008; and Beckman, 1983)

This was followed by the Concert of Medium Powers under Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1985 to 1987. The initiative aimed to give developing countries a greater voice in global affairs. It was rooted in Nigeria's Afrocentric and non-aligned foreign policy orientations since independence. In the context of the bipolar global order of the Cold War, the Concert of Medium Powers proposed a platform where regional powers like Nigeria could act as a balancing force and an alternative power. Other regional powers involved included Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Egypt. With this policy, Nigeria strategically positioned itself as a bridge between the global North and South. The initiative was projected to foster better cooperation among countries of the global South and use multilateral diplomacy to strengthen global peace and justice.

Furthermore, the Concert was expected to reduce the dependency of countries in the global South on those in the global North (Akinyemi, 1986). A significant failing of this policy was the mismatch between its idealism and domestic economic conditions, which were unable to drive the initiative. It was also not helped by poor reception from other regional powers in the global South, whose foreign policy agendas were at odds with the initiative. This highlights Nigeria's failure to consult adequately and its mistaken assumption that others, possibly envious of its growing international status, would jump on board irrespective of their own national interests. Nigeria, sadly, failed to consider the realist contention that foreign policy is based on national interest rather than on sentimental ideological solidarity. It is also doubtful whether there was adequate buy-in from Nigeria's foreign affairs bureaucracy, as the initiative died an untimely death due to a lack of institutional support following the short tenure of Professor Akinyemi. In a sense, the Concert could be seen as superficial and a mere academic rehash of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The dysfunctional nature of previous foreign policy approaches and the need to reinvent its direction led to the introduction of the Concentric Circles by the General Abdulsalami Abubakar administration in the late 1990s. The Concentric Circles foreign policy orientation lasted for about a decade into the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In response to trenchant critiques from Nigerians of what was seen as wasteful foreign policy ventures and expenditures on African problems, the Concentric Circles model was adopted. Domestic concerns, including national security and the welfare of Nigerians, were given primacy and stood at the core of this new model. Africa followed this, then the rest of the world. It should be stressed that with the Concentric Circles, Nigeria's commitment to Africa did not diminish; instead, the issues of Nigeria and Nigerians were brought to the forefront, exemplifying the saying "charity begins at home." It was a way of also underscoring the adage that "to move the world, one must first move oneself."

Another foreign policy thrust of Nigeria was economic diplomacy, which took centre stage under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian presidency from May 29, 1999, to May 28, 2007. Economic diplomacy, a product of Nigeria's dwindling economic resources, signalled Nigeria's readiness to embrace pragmatism and focus more on its own national interest above all else, rather than on African solidarity and an activist foreign policy. What underpinned economic diplomacy in Nigeria, as argued by Ogwu and Olukoshi (2002, 26 cited in Odukoya and Odubajo, 2006, 40), "is the fact that it signals the abandonment by the state of any political or economic activism that the leading Western countries might construct as obstructive of their goals."

Economic diplomacy in Nigeria, as a foreign policy thrust that uses foreign policy as a mechanism for economic development, can be traced back to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) under the military presidency of General Ibrahim Babangida. Unlike traditional foreign policy, which is primarily political and diplomatic, economic diplomacy transformed Nigerian diplomats and other foreign policy operatives into sales and marketing agents tasked with selling Nigeria's economy globally. These diplomats had as their primary responsibilities attracting foreign capital, technology, and investors, and opening up access for the country's products and services in other nations (Ate, 2000). To achieve this objective, exhibitions, investment promotions, road shows, trade conferences, business-to-business matchmaking, building international partnerships, trade missions, economic cooperation, market intelligence, etc.

Between 1999 and 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo effectively served as Nigeria's number-one economic diplomat, travelling the globe to promote Nigeria, seek foreign investment, and negotiate for debt forgiveness. As noted by Odukoya and Odubajo (2006, 39):

Obasanjo's foreign policy entrepreneurship is anchored on four levels: attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), securing the forgiveness of Nigeria's debt, returning Abacha's loots, and returning the country to global reckoning. A consistent threat that links all these preoccupations is the favouritism and accommodation of Nigeria within the globalising world order.

President Obasanjo relied primarily on charismatic diplomacy driven by his personality and charm. He leveraged his global diplomatic currency, rooted in his acclaim as the first military head of state in Nigeria, to voluntarily hand over power to a civilian regime on October 1, 1979. His membership of the respected Commonwealth Eminent Personality Group (CEPG), which negotiated the end of apartheid in South Africa, was a great reputational currency that proved valuable. These efforts bore remarkable fruit, such as the Paris Club's debt forgiveness for Nigeria and Nigeria's exit from its hitherto pariah status, as evidenced by its return to global acclaim and relevance.

However, the fact that the president, rather than the nation's foreign policy institutions, drove economic diplomacy had adverse effects. As noted by Ogwu (2005), this personalisation of economic diplomacy severely impaired continuity in foreign policy. Ate (2000) similarly highlighted poor policy coordination, leading to inconsistencies and diplomatic confusion due to the absence of a mechanism to coordinate key institutions, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Investment, and the Central Bank of Nigeria. The failure to ground the economic diplomacy domestically by putting in place the necessary infrastructure, addressing regulatory deficiencies, improving the ease of doing business, and tackling corruption, insecurity, banditry, and terrorism were all factors that worked against its success, making Nigeria an unfriendly and unattractive destination for foreign investments.

Furthermore, the lack of experts in the real sector and agriculture within Nigeria's foreign missions, a result of the excessive concentration on oil as the lifeblood of the economy, also hampered success. Those tasked with promoting and anchoring economic diplomacy were ill-equipped for this crucial assignment (Ogunbadejo, 2003). In this respect, Sesan (2012) correctly argued that Nigerian foreign missions lacked the tools to effectively determine whether their economic diplomacy activities were producing the desired results. In reality, at the nation's foreign missions abroad, economic diplomacy never really finds traction.

The paper raises important concerns about how the structural dilemma of colonial legacies and imperialism constrains the ability of the 4D policy to depart from Nigeria's foreign policy

orthodoxy. It further contends that 4D is all motion without movement, given its lack of any bold initiative to challenge the prevailing lopsided global order. The 4D rebranding largely rehashes existing foreign policy principles and lacks the structural changes necessary to address Nigeria's core challenges. The rest of the paper will focus on the theoretical framework, a historical overview of Nigeria's foreign policy, and a critique of President Tinubu's 4D Foreign Policy. It will conclude with recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

The paper's theoretical framework is built around three key theories: dependency theory, postcolonial theory, and globalisation theory.

Dependency Theory

The first theory this paper draws on is dependency theory, an offshoot of Marxist theory that explicitly explains the crisis of underdevelopment in countries of the global South. Unlike institutional and formalistic theories of modernisation, which place blame for underdevelopment on the victims themselves, dependency theory persuasively argues that the root cause of underdevelopment lies in these countries' forced integration into an exploitative, unequal international capitalist system. It notes that the global capitalist system, which privileges imperialist expansion globally, is rooted in the need to resolve the crisis of capitalism at home through rapacious exploitation of human and material resources abroad, as well as the desperation for a new market to pour the excess industrial production at home, which is unaffordable to the exploited workers in the capitalist economy.

The argument is that countries in the global South are subjected to the excruciating conditions of the power imbalance in the international capitalist system, unequal exchange, exploitation, and restrictions on producing capital goods rather than primary commodities by countries in the global North. This is dictated by the international division of labour, which condemns them to underdevelopment and backwardness. Dependency manifests at the levels of trade, finance, and technology, leading to the "development of underdevelopment" in the global periphery. At the same time, the core prospers from the appropriation of surplus from the periphery. It further notes that dependency is a structural order that renders victims infertile and economically unproductive, as a lack of momentum for autocratic growth constrains its agency. This exemplifies a fate akin to that between a puppet and its puppeteer, with countries of the global South as the puppets and those of the global North as the puppeteers. In this way, underdevelopment is neither natural nor divine but a product of capitalist exploitation.

To develop, dependency theorists propose delinking as a solution. While the way the world is configured through global interdependence makes delinking impossible, as experience of China and India has shown, the uncritical embrace of dependency, globalisation, and the failure to challenge deepening capitalist exploitation—a reinforcement of the global capitalist division of labour—implied by the 4D foreign policy makes its utility for Nigeria's national development problematic. The 4D foreign policy doctrine lacks a program of action to mobilise domestic resources rather than foreign capital. It also lacks any conscious effort to diversify the Nigerian economy away from oil, promote national technological breakthroughs through investment in university education, or fund research and development. It is highly counterintuitive for the 4D doctrine to hope to solve Nigeria's crisis of underdevelopment through the very mechanisms and structural underpinnings responsible for it in the first place.

The government's aggressive pursuit of foreign direct investment through its 4D foreign policy can only continue to reinforce Nigeria's dependency rather than its development.

Postcolonial Theory

At the core of the postcolonial theory is the crucial issue of colonial continuity despite the pretence of independence. Postcolonial theory underscores three fundamental concerns with wide-ranging implications for the economies and societies in these countries. First, there is the resilience of long-established and institutionalised colonial structures, which are carried over into postcolonial life in the framework of neocolonialism. Second, there is the lack of a domestic hegemonic class in the postcolonial state. The situation is complicated by the fact that there is no single dominant class, but a tripartite class structure, with the most powerful being the metropolitan class residing outside the country. As a result, the roots and control of the economy lie outside the country. Since the managers of the Nigerian state remain puppets of imperialism, the economy responds to external conditions and powers rather than to internal needs and the Nigerian people.

Finally, the postcolonial state lacks autonomy. Incapable of promoting its own survival and the reproduction of the domestic class control, it acts as a mechanism of rapacious accumulation for its two masters: one external and one internal. This finds expression in the 4D's commitment to liberal democracy, which is underpinned by the neoliberal economic orientation of the Washington Consensus, clearly showing the continued hegemony of Western diplomatic orthodoxy and the government's desperation for Western validation.

Globalization Theory

The thrust of globalisation has been the homogenization of the globe in the interest of transnational capitalism. The primary objective is to achieve a more profound and extensive exploitation of countries in the global South through a more subtle, deceptive mechanism, packaged in the language of mutual benefits and collective destiny. The idea of the "villagisation" of the globe gives the erroneous impression that the global North and South are equal partners in a new world de-territorialised by Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The theory of globalisation contends that states are no longer what they once were, as transnational capitalism—which is simply a newer and more intensive dimension of imperialism—has whittled away state sovereignty. This has serious consequences for the economic, social, cultural, and political conditions of states, as they are now determined by the logic of the market and corporate profitability. The theory further underscores that inclusivity in the globalised order is a function of a nation's alignment with a "profitability coefficient." Thus, nations with little relevance to profitability, such as the majority of nations in the global South, are excluded from the globalisation order, a sign of their backwardness and underdevelopment. Hence, globalisation favours powerful nations while disadvantaging less powerful ones. This is evident in the three pillars of globalisation—trade liberalisation, financial deregulation, and privatisation—where power is a determining factor in outcomes.

What has become very clear in the context of climate change, global food and energy crises, and the unipolar hegemony of the United States is a new scramble that represents a "second colonisation" of Africa. With its economy ordered by neoliberalism, Nigeria has not fared well under globalisation, as shown by increasing capital flight, debt overhang, currency devaluation, trade deficits, brain drain, mass poverty, runaway inflation, food insecurity, and

technological dependency. The 4D foreign policy is highly uncritical and ignores these realities of neoliberal globalisation. At best, it wishes away the structural handicaps and power imbalances Nigeria faces within the international capitalist system.

Nigerian Foreign Policy: An Historical Survey

A nation's foreign policy is the framework through which it relates to and engages with other nations in the international system. Given its implications for domestic well-being and stability, foreign policy is a programmatic and often elite-driven concern, despite attempts at democratising it. It is therefore unsurprising that top executives—presidents, prime ministers, cabinet members such as ministers of foreign affairs, trade, and finance, as well as ambassadors and high-ranking military chiefs—play crucial roles in foreign affairs. Nigeria's case has been no different.

The importance of foreign affairs was evident at independence when Prime Minister Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa made an unambiguous declaration of Nigeria's foreign policy as Afrocentric. This commitment was reaffirmed by succeeding leaders, as military heads of state and civilian presidents, upon assuming office, typically make a declarative statement of their foreign policy and pledge to honour all international obligations and treaties. Despite differences in rhetoric, Nigerian foreign policy has been a mixture of Afrocentric idealism, informed by Pan-Africanist ideology, and realist pragmatism, rooted in the country's contemporary socio-economic conditions and the realities of the international system.

Balewa's Afrocentric foreign policy resonated with the Pan-Africanist fervour of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was a time when Africa was widely believed to have come of age, and great hope was placed on Nigeria as a leader not only for Africans but for all Black people globally. It was no surprise that Nigeria came to see its manifest destiny as leading the continent. In a 1959 speech to the London branch of the Nigerian Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Premier of the Eastern Region, proposed a customs union with Nigeria's neighbours as a prelude to a common market. In his vision of African integration, Dr Azikiwe accorded Nigeria a primary role, stating, "It should be Nigeria's manifest destiny to join hands with other progressive forces in the world in order to emancipate not only other peoples of African descent from the scourge of colonial domination. Nigeria should therefore be in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yoke of colonial rule" (blackpast.org, 2009). In this respect, Abarigwe and Offorbuike (2018) suggest that the sentiments expressed by Dr Kwame Nkrumah about Nigeria's flagship role in Africa may have swayed the Nigerian prime minister to adopt this ambitious Afrocentric foreign policy.

The military's entry into Nigerian politics, the oil boom, and the Nigerian civil war introduced two different tendencies into the nation's foreign policy. First, a shift to personal diplomacy emerged, where foreign policy direction often flowed from the personal preferences of the military leader, in the absence of a democratic party system, a cabinet, or a parliament to debate these issues. The activist foreign policies that supported liberation movements and the nationalisation of British Petroleum were the result of the military backgrounds and personalities of leaders like Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo, who personalised foreign policy between 1975 and 1979. This was also true of General Yakubu Gowon, whose generous nature earned Nigeria friends across the globe and fueled its larger-than-life and flamboyant foreign policy, particularly its desire to establish a continental hegemony.

Nigeria was not only a major sponsor of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) but also a founder and the largest funder of the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS), which hosts its secretariat. The oil windfall during the 1970s provided the systemic empowerment that made these ventures possible. The country's involvement in ECOMOG, which cost approximately 8 billion dollars (The New Humanitarian, 2002; Osakwe & Audu, 2017) during a period of severe economic problems at home, was a consequence of the military leadership's personal preferences rather than national interest. During this era, foreign affairs ministers—with the notable exception of those who served under Murtala and Obasanjo, who were already prominent internationally—like Okoi Arikpo (1967-1975), Joseph Nanven Garba (1975-1978), Ibrahim Gambari (1984-1985), Professor Bolaji Akinyemi (1985-1987), and others, were obvious and initiated personal policy agendas.

The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) was a watershed in Nigerian history. When supposed friends supported the Biafran secessionists, Nigeria's need for survival forced it to embrace a realist foreign policy. The new orientation was based on the success of the war effort to keep the nation united, which became "the friend of my enemy is my enemy." The experience of betrayal during the civil war profoundly shaped Nigeria's post-war foreign policy in important ways. Nigeria renewed its commitment to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of nations. It became a strong advocate for Africans to solve their own problems without external interference, as reflected in its support for decolonisation efforts in Southern Africa. Given the role of European powers such as France, Nigeria viewed Western powers as unreliable allies. It renewed its commitment to non-alignment while gradually moving toward the Eastern Bloc (Russia and China) to reduce its dependence on Western powers. The contract for the Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Company was one such outcome, demonstrating a new embrace of multilateralism.

Finally, Nigeria transitioned from an excessively ideological and emotive foreign policy to a realist one informed by national interest, leading to strategic alliances and pragmatic relationships. National interest, sovereign consciousness, survival, partnership, economic viability, and regional leadership became the overarching orientation of Nigeria's foreign diplomatic relations post-civil war. Upon assuming office, the Tinubu administration introduced the 4D doctrine to revamp Nigeria's foreign policy, promising to change the country's precarious state. The question remains whether the 4D can overcome Obi's (2009) pessimism that not much should be expected from elite-based policies, as they have historically failed to deliver due to their top-down orientation.

The 4D Foreign Policy: So Much Sound and Fury

Regardless of ideological or developmental differences, all systems of government, as theoretical constructs, valorise democracy in some form, making it a "global citizen." However, in practice, this global ideal takes on national and ideological flavours. The reason is that in Africa, "people's power"—the primary desideratum of democracy—is often abandoned in favour of political and class exegesis, thus emptying democracy of its essence and turning it into elite rule. Given its Western appropriation as an ideology of development and a counter-ideology to communism, democracy has become synonymous with liberalism and the political correlate of a market-fundamentalist order. This subjugation of democracy to capitalism, as reflected in liberal democracy, highlights its inherent problems and political inappropriateness for countries in the global South.

The articulation of democracy by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, as one of the 4D in Nigeria's foreign affairs doctrine underscores the importance of governance, with a particular emphasis on democratic governance as an indispensable

component of development, both at home and regionally. This resonates with the unsettled debate about whether democracy engenders development or vice versa. Considering the development experiences of countries like China, which are at the bottom of the democratic spectrum, compared to the struggling economies of supposedly democratic countries like Nigeria, the link between democracy and national development is far from clear.

In pursuing the democratic content of its 4D foreign policy, which is oriented toward strengthening democratic institutions and political stability, President Bola Tinubu, as Chairman of ECOWAS, has sought to take a strong stance against military coups in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. However, a lack of implementation capacity has softened ECOWAS's tough stance, leading to a split among its members, with the three countries moving into Russia's embrace, which is desperately seeking a strategic foothold in the region. As Stronski (2023,85) notes, "Over the past year, Russia has doubled down its focus on Africa's Sahel region, a troubled part of the continent...". This development has grave security implications for the region as a whole and for Nigeria, which is already facing a severe security crisis at home. This fear was captured by the European Union Institute of Security Studies Brief in its "Shifting alliances in West Africa: Measuring Russian engagement and support" where in Terren, Aeist, Peter and van Damme (2025,1) submit thus, "Russia's engagement is particularly evident in Sahel countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, where the Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) has established a strong presence - Exploiting acute security challenges - Russia's growing influence in the region is a catalyst for conflict and undermines democratic aspirations ...".

It has also been argued that the neoliberal economic policies pursued by Tinubu's administration have severely impoverished Nigerians, thereby undermining democracy and national development. For most Nigerians, policies such as the removal of fuel subsidies, hikes in electricity tariffs, increases in telecommunications costs, currency devaluation, and other price increases in municipal services have "weaponised poverty," making the populace highly vulnerable to political manipulation during elections. This raises the critical question: whose democracy does Tinubu's 4D doctrine have in mind? Based on what has been seen since Tinubu came to power, it is not popular democracy but an admixture of liberal and bourgeois democracy (Beckman, 1989). Liberal democracy is, as Sandbrook (1988) contends, merely a mask for bourgeois domination. As the political attire of capitalism, liberal democracy is anything but liberal, particularly given the capture of the Nigerian state by the combined forces of imperialist capital and the domestic conspiratorial class.

As Ake (1996) points out, "There are elements of democracy in liberal democracy, but it is not democracy. In fact, it is distinguished by its repudiation of the essence of democracy, which is popular power." The pretence of liberal democracy as the best form of government—with its supposed respect for human rights and the rule of law—has been exposed by the abuse and misuse of executive power, legal subversion, and executive lawlessness seen in various contexts, including in the United States under President Donald Trump. While democracy has been reduced to electoral superficiality, this should not be seen as a rejection of elections. A free and fair election is a crucial mechanism for people's power in contexts where class contradictions have not yet matured into a revolutionary uprising and the oppressed classes have not yet developed the necessary consciousness to organise as a potent force. To this end, Gutto (1989) is correct when he notes that "Free and fair elections are crucial and must be pursued resolutely as part and parcel of the overall struggle for political rights. There is nothing bourgeois about free and fair elections. In fact, the bourgeoisie fear free and fair elections in Africa in particular." As an imported product birthed by donor conditionality and a misplaced chorus of "good

governance," liberal democracy is far from being rooted in Nigeria, let alone serving as a doctrine for a robust and assertive foreign policy.

The development component of the Tinubu administration's 4D foreign policy aligns with the overarching focus of succeeding Nigerian administrations since independence. Given the precarious state of Nigeria's economy, characterised by high unemployment, mass poverty, hyperinflation, infrastructural decay, capital flight, and food insecurity, the concern with development cannot be overstated. Following Seers (1969), answering the question in the affirmative about whether poverty, inequality, and unemployment are reducing signifies development. Even realities have followed capitalist organisations such as the United Nations Development Organisation (UNDO) in embracing the notion of development as human development. By contrast, the government's 4D foreign policy seeks to drive economic growth underpinned by a neoliberal ideology, with an emphasis on foreign direct investment, trade cooperation, and regional integration. This is primarily driven by existing structures and relations defined by an unequal and exploitative international division of labour, which is skewed against Nigeria's developmental possibilities. The colonial-oriented model remains extractive and deepens Nigeria's dependency as structured by global imperialism.

The 4D doctrine focuses on the economics of development with only a rudimentary understanding, while completely ignoring the politics of development and development as politics. This is evident in the failure to recognise that Nigeria's development crisis is a direct product of transnational capitalism. Therefore, the determination to resolve this crisis by depending on neoliberalism is fatally dangerous. The truth is that every facet of Nigeria's unproductive and comatose political economy bears the hallmark of imperialist manipulation and exploitation. Continuing an imperialist and dependency-driven economic trajectory as encouraged under the 4D foreign policy is simply an endorsement of Nigeria's underdevelopment through other means—or, better still, an ingenious rebranding of underdevelopment. There is no doubt that mere normative posturing and rhetorical declarations will not produce substantive sovereign developmental controls and outcomes for Nigeria. The continued external funding of development through foreign direct investment and debt exposes the limitations of the 4D development orientation. Experience since the adoption of International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionality in the 1980s has shown that the conditions precedent to these funding supports have been anti-developmental, constituting serious impediments to progress.

The diaspora, especially in financially underdeveloped countries like Nigeria, constitutes a developmental gold mine that cannot be ignored. Thus, in the contemporary global order, every country calls upon its diaspora community to enhance its domestic prosperity while strengthening its image abroad. Nigeria has a highly formidable diaspora community with a strategic presence, exporting human and intellectual capital globally. On the surface, the decision to harness this pool of diaspora resources through the 4D foreign policy is highly commendable. In pursuit of the diaspora context of the 4D foreign policy, the Tinubu administration has undertaken several commendable initiatives to promote economic growth by leveraging diaspora remittances, encouraging investment from Nigerians abroad, and fostering a reverse process from brain-drain to brain-gain. Some of these initiatives include a diaspora mortgage scheme with a \$10 billion fund and the "Motherland Festival," a platform to promote Nigeria's culture, heritage, creativity, and innovation that engages the diaspora and attracts foreign investment. The first Motherland Festival is scheduled for December 15–21, 2025. It is interesting to note that,

beyond being a cultural event, the festival incorporates diverse areas, including technology, entertainment, healthcare, and a citizenship-by-investment program.

The 4D diaspora policy has also addressed a significant constraint on diaspora investment in Nigeria: the difficulty that Nigerians abroad face in opening bank accounts in Nigeria. With the introduction of a Diaspora Bank Verification Number (DBVN) under the 4D doctrine, this problem has become a thing of the past, thereby promoting financial inclusion and easing diaspora remittances.

However, a deeper reflection on the forces driving Nigeria's burgeoning diaspora community, particularly over the next two decades, reveals that this is not a cause for celebration, as the 4D foreign policy doctrine suggests. While significant remittances flow into Nigeria from abroad, it must be remembered that this phenomenon is positively correlated with systemic failure and a vote of no confidence not just in Nigeria's political leadership but also in the country itself. The majority of those involved in the "japa" (emigration) trend are privileged elite on whom the nation has expended considerable resources to train. Non-elites in the informal sector have also joined the emigration wave in desperation for survival. The saddest aspect of this trend is that to leave the country, people, including the elite, sell their properties and life investments, take out loans, and do unimaginable things to flee Nigeria for a condition of "second slavery" abroad. When citizens of a country, as we are witnessing in Nigeria, define success as fleeing abroad by any means, things are upside down and call for urgent concern, not for promoting emigration as a key foreign policy thrust.

The core issue is that the 4D doctrine ignores the structural push factors that drive Nigeria's diaspora community, which stem from deteriorating economic conditions, insecurity, mass poverty, unemployment, banditry, and kidnapping, among other factors. For instance, a booming kidnapping economy has developed in Nigeria. A report titled "Grim Reaping: Economics of Nigeria's Kidnap Industry - A 2024 Update" states that 7,568 people were abducted in Nigeria between July 2023 and June 2024, with kidnappers raking in N1,048,110,000 in ransom. This clearly demonstrates the ease with which kidnappers operate and how insecure Nigeria has become. Furthermore, Odukoya and Adedokun (forthcoming) note that the Global Terrorism Index 2020 ranks Nigeria as the third most terror-affected country, accounting for 72% of all terrorism-related deaths. In light of these facts, Odukoya and Adedokun (forthcoming) submit that "Terror groups operate with impunity, exploiting institutional weaknesses. Despite numerous initiatives and efforts by federal, state, and local governments, civil society organisations, and the international community, insecurity continues to escalate."

Beyond the usual rhetoric of "youths being the future," Nigeria's youth have forced themselves onto the central stage of national and global attention despite the state's failure to deliver. They have proven, through their global acclaim, especially in the arts and creativity, that they are unstoppable and cannot be ignored. There is no part of the world where Nigerian youth's music is not being played. Recently, Davido performed at the closing ceremony of the 2022 Qatar World Cup. Kizz Daniel's hit songs "Buga" and "Cough" filled the air at the FIFA Fan Fest, where Patoranking also performed. Burna Boy thrilled fans at the 2023 UEFA Champions League final in Turkey. Tiwa Savage made history as the first Afrobeats artist to perform at King Charles's coronation ceremony in the United Kingdom.

Nigeria's youthful population is a geopolitical asset. However, it receives absolutely no support from the Nigerian state, especially amid an increasing debt overhang that has not only distanced the state from social provisioning, such as education and job creation, but also poses a

serious threat to national sovereignty. Numerous Nigerian youths are wasting away because of the country's profound underdevelopment. Many have been denied access to education, lack gainful employment, and have been forced into a life of crime due to the state's failure. The frustration with education is so severe that for the average Nigerian youth, it is considered a "scam." Who can blame them when they see the poverty and hardship faced by university professors, whose salaries are often less than \$500 a month? However, without massive investment in and access to quality, affordable education, healthcare, and infrastructure, the "demographic dividend" that the 4D foreign policy hopes to leverage could easily become a liability.

Given globalisation and the "japa" syndrome, the primary beneficiaries of the creativity of these Nigerian youths will be Europe and America, where they are migrating. This has resulted in a massive externalisation of social reproduction costs, a factor the 4D doctrine fails to consider. The lack of participation and effective voice in the country's affairs is a serious problem that shows the youth are not valued as national assets. The mishandling, brutalisation, arrests, imprisonment, and killing of Nigerian youths during the #EndSARS protest, as well as various cases of extrajudicial murder and injustice, continue to turn these youths against the country, making them desperate to leave by any means possible.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Now more than ever, Nigeria requires a robust foreign policy that can serve as a basis for reviving its struggling economy and leveraging its global influence within the international political economy. Achieving these demands is more than mere aspirations laced with rhetorical flair; it requires demonstrable capacity. The 4D policy, however, reveals a regrettable disconnect between Nigeria's foreign policy aspirations and its actual capacity, as exemplified by domestic realities and its relationships with dominant global players.

Therefore, while the 4D policy may differ from previous administrations' foreign policy postures in rhetoric and semiotic orientation, it is vague mainly and appears more of a theatrical fury of "motion without movement." This approach is inadequate for Nigeria's contemporary conditions, where global capitalism is no longer content with simply exploiting nations of the global South but mercilessly leverages their catastrophic conditions (Leowenstein, 2015). This situation explains why discontent with capitalist globalisation far outweighs its beneficiaries (Stiglitz, 2002).

It is impossible to have a foreign policy that serves as a basis for national renewal with a domestic policy rooted in neoliberal orthodoxy, which disempowers the masses, panders to the dictates of transnational capital, engenders insecurity, and forces Nigerian youths to migrate into "second slavery"—a situation the government ironically hopes to profit from. The need to reassert Nigeria's national interest as the fulcrum of its foreign policy is urgent and cannot be achieved by the debt-based economy of the Tinubu government, which poses a serious threat to national sovereignty.

This makes it imperative to adopt an inward-looking approach and foster African solidarity, rather than uncritical dependence on Europe, America, and China. The push factors behind youth diaspora migration must be urgently addressed and curtailed by making Nigeria the best place to live, work, and prosper. For those who must go abroad, diaspora engagement should transcend mere remittances and become a form of "reversed process," in which the "brain drain" becomes a "brain gain" for Nigeria through the repatriation of strategic and critical skills not available domestically. National autonomy, anchored in strategic engagement and

partnership rather than in paternalism and domination by external forces, is key to this new orientation. This requires a foreign policy of sovereign development, which is only possible through the development of Nigeria's internal capacity and a leadership that is both able and ready to take on this challenge, rather than merely making rhetorical proclamations. It is only in this way that an end can be put to the "past in the present" foreign policy orientation that the 4D doctrine represents.

The 4D doctrine has failed to address the conditions that make the country's democracy disempowering, resulting in a forced and painful diaspora exemplified by the unending "japa" trend, and a largely poor demography. The paper argues that, with these conditions unaddressed, Nigeria's 4D foreign policy remains an empty orientation, offering no substantive means to transform Nigeria's position in the global order. By deploying an eclectic theoretical framework—including dependency theory, postcolonial theory, and globalisation theory—the paper demonstrates that the 4D policy is unable to change the power asymmetry, imperialist conspiracies, and structural entrapment that shape Nigeria's immersion in the global order.

Hence, the paper expresses strong reservations about the 4D foreign policy's redemptive power, noting that it is more of an ambitious rhetoric with no possibility of redressing the existing structural contradictions that underpin Nigeria's backward position. The paper concludes that the 4D doctrine is an elegantly exaggerated and cosmetic policy that merely rehashes past failed foreign policy thrusts in new, luxurious costumes, lacking any transformative agency. The paper suggests that Nigeria needs a foreign policy thrust that is normatively clear and strategically viable. This would be a radical foreign policy rooted in a people-driven paradigm that seeks to break with the entrenched culture of dependency and neoliberalism. Such a policy should invest in the people, especially its youth; leverage its abundant human and material resources for domestic production; address the state's disconnection from the lived realities of ordinary Nigerians; and make the country secure and livable so that it no longer encourages brain drain by sending its citizens into a "second, voluntary slavery" in the name of a diaspora community. The assumed diaspora "harvest" is not worth the immense cost to Nigerians, whose conditions at home have forced them to seek accommodation and survival abroad.

The 4D foreign policy is more symbolic than substantive. Conclude that without a fundamental reevaluation of Nigeria's political and economic structures—particularly a move away from neoliberalism and a strong emphasis on national self-reliance—the "4D" policy will continue to face the same challenges, albeit under a new, more assertive brand name.

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