

The Determinants of Foreign Policy of Nations in the Contemporary International System: An Analytical Overview

Ojinnaka, Ify. Evaristus PhD ¹, Ozor Cyril Ositadinma, PhD ²

¹ Research Scholar, Geopolitics (Int'L Relations) Peace and Conflict Studies, IGNATIUS Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolimieni Port Harcourt

² Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

Email: ¹ einndoprojects@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

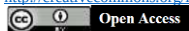
determinants of foreign policy,
foreign policy elites,
national interest,
foreign policy,
international political system,
asymmetry in economic relations.

Vol. 01, No. 05, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23610344>

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CCBY4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



ABSTRACT

This Paper examines the determinants of foreign policy of nations in the contemporary international system. The determinants of foreign policy can constrain or enable a nation to pursue its foreign policy objectives. The Paper maintains that foreign policy is a vehicle through which nations pursue their national interests and determinants of foreign policy of a nation is a function of its national power and capabilities, engendered by the core geostrategic, socio-economic, political ideals and values it projects from the domestic setting to external environment. The Paper further states that determinants of foreign policy are the core geostrategic, socio-economic, political ideals and values that influences the behavior of a nation in its interactions with other states and non-state actors in the international system. The Paper finds that the international system is a highly complex, fluid and competitive environment; And the determinants of foreign policy of nations activates their capability and capacity to respond to the challenges of the international system; the Paper also finds that in execution of foreign policy decisions no nation/state exercises perfect control of foreign policy dynamics; that foreign policy makers needs intelligent balancing of both internal and external elements that influences their nation's foreign policy. The Paper recommends among others; that foreign policy elites ensure the determinants of foreign policy reconcile both its internal and external elements; that foreign policy makers should thoroughly understand determinants of a dynamic foreign policy; that foreign policy elites needs to improve on strategic thinking, analysis, and determined application of national interests.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Determinants of foreign policy of states are the multiple factors that inform the choices nations' make in their foreign policy decisions. It is the factors that balance the internal and external elements of foreign policies of nations and shape their external behavior on issues as important as diplomacy, trade, security, and alliances. In essence, determinants of foreign policy are the inputs, influences and constraints that offer pathways, as well as limit the actions of states. These are the factors that determine the strategy of states in their interactions in the international system. It covers how a country pursues security, prosperity, and values abroad (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025).

The determinant factors of foreign policy originate inside a state. They include consequential issues like culture, politics, public opinion, resources, and leadership. They are derived from both internal and external environment: alliances, power balance, threats, and norms and are influenced by combine forces of rational actions, bureaucratic politics, and geostrategic culture (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025).

Foreign policy is not made in vacuum or built upon generalization or abstractions. It is the results of realistic conceptions of national interest and capabilities; hence a nation's foreign policy must serve the interest of the state within the international system (Gilbert, 2024). The state do not act in void, before the formulation of foreign policies, states take into cognizance their national interests, capabilities and the subsequent implementation of such policies geared towards the attainment of such interests (Gilbert, 2024). Foreign policy as the projection of a country's values and aspirations abroad is

essentially, a set of goals and course of actions a nation wishes to pursue or pursues in respect to the demands or interactions of the internal and external settings as perceived by the decision makers (Pym 1985; Mbachu, 1998). In essence, foreign policy as the goal of a state being pursued in her national interests, in international interactions is by nature the international objectives of states and is determined by national interests and is expected to be used to secure those things which are presumed to be it the interest of the nation.

The three most discernable features of foreign policy from whence comes its determinant are the domestic environment, the external environment and the psychological or perception threshold of the foreign policy makers. In view of the fact that the states do not act in void, a dynamic foreign policy must as of great necessity be moderated by these three factors (Mbachu, 1998). These factors moderate the actions and inactions of states in the international system. Though the international system is a system of interaction made possible by foreign policy of states, the determinant factors from both internal and external environment has substantial moral impacts n the variety of international situations.

However, a dynamic and well articulated foreign policy must reconcile between domestic capabilities and developments in the international setting, hence foreign policy is a reflection and careful consideration of national values, the reality of political, socio-economic and military capabilities influenced by internal and external determinant factors. Be what it may, the primary objectives of foreign policy are to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of citizens (Ojo & Sesay, 1988). Thus the primary determinants of foreign policies of nations are **the** factors that are most likely to constrain or enable them in their interactions in the international system; such as economic capability or security environment (Ojinnaka, 2017; Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025).

Against the background of the foregoing, in this Paper we intend examine the determinants factors of foreign policy of nations in the international system.

Statement of the Problem

The determinants of foreign policy are the factors that influence the behaviour of states in their interactions in the international system. These are the factors that can constrain or enable the state to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Every state in the international system has its foreign policy, a set of goals, and or objectives which it aspires to promote vie- vis the foreign policy objectives of other members of the international political system (Obiukwu, 2001). Thus the foreign policy of any state must be seen to reflect identifiable goals and objectives, hence foreign policy of a state would be adjudged to be a sources or failure depending on the extent to which the set objectives have been achieved or not achieved (Obiukwu, 2001; Ojinnaka, 2022).

In every nation, there are foreign policy actors who articulate and formulate the objectives of their foreign policy which is presumed to be in accordance to their national interests. There some socio-political, economic, cultural, historical and geostrategic considerations which influences and wholly determines the forces and character of a nation's foreign policy. Most of these factors of consideration emanates from outside the governmental structure and do critically influence a nations foreign policy formulations. These forces or pressure points of foreign policies of states that are outside governmental structure includes: interest groups, public opinion, the mass-media, external political and diplomatic pressures, and power of world opinion. These pressure points are often organized on the basis of common interests or set on interests that pressures and persuade legislators and bureaucrats to take a favorable stand on an issue that is of interest to them. Pressure groups carry out enough research on the issue and present their position to ensure that the final foreign policy decision favors their own position (Mbachu, 1998).

In the age of contemporary globalization nations foreign policies are designed to ensure interaction with each other in the areas of economy, trade and investment culture, sports, scientific and technological co operations. Because the globalized international system is a web of complex interdependence, no nation can survive in isolument, or be sustained in autarky. They make foreign policies as a designed framework for engagement with each other. And on the course of their engagement with one another, states pursue foreign policy objectives to defend and preserve their national interests. Fundamentally, it

is the desire to pursue and defend a national interest that houses the determinant factors of a nation's foreign policy.

The pursuit of national interest is a legitimate consideration of states in the articulation and formulation of foreign policy. The citizens of nations are living in different countries of the world in pursuit of various ventures, like trade, commerce, investment or even scholarship. Thus nations formulate foreign policies designed to defend and protect its citizens and investments abroad. In this vein, no nation overlooks its citizens and investments abroad because their activities have implications for domestic stability (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Consequently as it were, the protection of the interests and wellbeing of nationals abroad, foreign investments and/or economic interests are some of the critical determinant factors of foreign policies of nations (Ojinnaka, 2017). Hence, states sometimes adopt stringent measures like military options, economic sanction or diplomatic means to protect and defend the wellbeing of their nationals, foreign investments and/or economic interests abroad. If a nation decides to use force among other available options in pursuit of its national interests, the choice of force (Gun Boat Diplomacy) means that the nation have weighed available options and considers the situation analysis, and opt for the use of force as the most viable preference in pursuit of a particular foreign policy objectives (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026).

However, when foreign policies are articulated and formulated, they must be executed either through coercive or military measures, economic, diplomatic, Alliance and or treaties and propaganda (Gilbert & Otuya, 2005). In articulating and formulating foreign policy objectives, a state must make sure that the foreign policy objectives must be within its capability to attain, this is to avoid a paradoxical and disastrous situation whereby a country satisfies other actors in the international system but leaves its domestic environment in shambles and crisis ridden. This is to say that foreign policy must be realistic and not a retreat to idealism which amounts to self-contradiction (Mbachu, 1998).

Since the era of globalization the methods and strategies used by countries in pursuit of national interest have changed considerably. Not only that the international system have become intertwined, competitive and highly complex (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026), the increasing economic dependence and complex interdependence resulting from the globalization of the world economy have made use of force as a vehicle for the pursuit of foreign policy less fashionable (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Determinants of foreign policies of nations rarely act alone, they intersect, compete, and combine, as policies often results in tradeoffs. For example the United States foreign policy supports the promotion of human rights, as part of the ideology of liberalism, but economic dependency may restrain action if found to be in conflict with America long-term strategy of national interests.

Consequently as it were, the determinants of foreign policies of nations constitute in the factors that influences the behaviour of nations in the international system, which constrain or enable them achieve their foreign policy objectives.

Conceptual Overview of Foreign Policy

Professor L.D. Gilbert contends that foreign policy like many other concepts in the social sciences has been given several definitions by various authors (Gilbert, 2024). Also, Obiukwu (2001) posits that foreign policy like most other concepts in the social sciences has a great deal of semantic ambiguity attached to it. Joseph Frankel in his book "International relations theory and the behaviour of states" defines foreign policy as consisting of decisions and actions which involves to some appreciable extent relations between one state and another (Frankel, 1979). On the other hand, Obiukwu (2001) in his descriptive analysis of foreign policy consent that foreign policy making is the responsibility of the state, but the state as a moral person exercises this function through its government. The scholar averred that foreign policy decisions are credited to the state because the decisions are made on their behalf by the government. The scholar argues that the government comprises of individuals or group of persons who hold officially elected or appointed positions, and who by the disposition of power in the state, are vested with power to make decision for the state in international affairs.

In the same vein, Adeniran (1983) defines foreign policy as policies pursued by a state in her dealings with other states. According to William Wallace in his book: *Themes in Western European Foreign Policies Process in Britain*, argues that foreign policy of a state is concerned primarily with its political relations with other states, with international stability and the rules of the international system, and with the promotion of national interests through the cultivation of good relations with other governments and the negotiation and maintenance of international agreements (Wallace, 1976). Agreeing with Wallace definition Chibundu a Nigerian diplomat contends that foreign policy is a country's response to the world outside or beyond its own frontiers or boundaries. That response may be friendly or aggressive, casual or comprises many elements; diplomatic, military, trade, economic, social, cultural, educational, and sporting and it varies according to circumstances. Chibundu posits that whatever form it takes, some response to the outside world is always there. Therefore, he argues that every country must have a foreign policy in order to live and survive as an independent state in the complex, sometimes dangerous world. Chibundu, consented that foreign policy is a strategy with which institutionally designated decision makers seek to manipulate the international system in order to achieve certain national objectives (Chibundu, 2004).

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1981) assert that foreign policy is the formulation, implementation and evaluation of external choices within one country viewed from the perspective of that country. Akinboye (1999) highlights that foreign policy is a dynamic process involving interactions between the domestic and the external environment of the actors that make it. Gilbert (2024) contends that foreign policy is domestically formulated based on national interests of states and externally implemented, cognizant of the power and capabilities of states- end and means calculus-, national interest is the end, while power and state capabilities is the means. After the deliberate articulation of foreign policy, it is communicated, explained and executed within the international system (Gilbert and Otuya, 2005). Gilbert (2023) maintains that foreign policy is basically the instrumentality by which states seeks to influence or influence the external world for the attainment of objectives that are in conformity with their perceived national interests. Drivable from the utility of foreign policy as an instrument of interaction among states in the international system, Gilbert (2024) persuasively argues that it is incontrovertible fact that before the formulation of foreign policy, states take into cognizance their national interests and the subsequent implementation of such policies are geared towards the attainment of such interests. Gilbert explain that foreign policy is largely state-centric, because it is formulated and executed by the government of a country, which acts as the instrumentality of the state

The Objectives of Foreign Policy

It is not quite easy to say with precision what the objectives of foreign policy of a state is (Obiukwu, 2001). Many scholars and writers of international relations substitutes national interests with foreign policy objective due to its ambiguity and misapplication (Gilbert, 2024). These problem arises especially when we realize the elusive and evasive nature of the concept of national interest (Obiukwu, 2001). Nevertheless, national interests constitutes the ingredients for the articulation and formulation of foreign policy objectives of states (Gilbert, 2024). Thus foreign policy objectives are a mere policy outline drawn by a nation to guide, promote and pursue its national interest (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). In essence, the objectives of foreign policy of a state comprises its national interests which it tends to pursue through its foreign policy.

Foreign policy is indeed futuristic (Ojinnaka, 2017). It a condition or realization that a state through strategic interactions with other states aspires to attain (Gilbert, 2024). Thus foreign policy objectives represent the realizable and rationalistic wishes, desires and aspirations of a state in the international system and they are usually predicted on their national interests (Gilbert and Otuya, 2005). The fact remains that there are some governments that have set foreign policy goals which they needs to actualize. These set of goals or objectives of foreign policy could be logical or consistent, shot term or long term (Ojinnaka, 2017; Obiukwu, 2001). Precisely, foreign policy objectives comprise the following collective welfare goals a state pursues through its foreign policy: Its territorial integrity (political sovereignty), its military security and its economic wellbeing. There are also domestic collective welfare goals such as

to improve public education. Also, it is in the national interests of some states to adopt certain foreign policy objectives that would rather enhance the stability of the international system.

The dynamics of the internal and external environment of foreign policy of any state is a function of its outlined objectives, which to a very large extent determine the external behaviour of the state. Foreign policy makers require national interests' components to formulate strategic foreign policy objectives, which are eventually executed as foreign policies. The national interests' components of foreign policy objectives have had very salutary impacts on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy objectives of modern states in the international system. Some foreign policy objectives are constant, while others are subject to change based on the realities of both internal and external dynamics (Gilbert, 2024). For example, since Nigeria independence, her foreign policy objectives have been characterized by continuity and change. This is because the character of foreign policy elites in Nigeria has remained unchanged, even in its vertical ties with the Western capitalist culture. Evident changes have only been noticeable in the size, the composition and structure of the ruling elites and records of economic growth without development (Mbachu, 1998).

Hans Morgenthau maintains that foreign policy objectives of all nations must necessarily refer to their survival as their minimum requirement-necessarily- in the sense of practical necessity. Morgenthau suggests that in terms of necessity, all nations in their foreign policy objectives must do what they cannot help but do to protect their physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations (Morgenthau, 1952). In this light, foreign policy objectives of states must be defined in terms of national interests and must be supported with adequate power or means to attain them (Morgenthau, as cited in Gilbert, 2024). Thus the objectives of a country's foreign policy must be related to its available resources; hence foreign policy requires a clear cut understanding and stated goals or objectives. It would be counter-productive for a country to relate with others in the international system without a clear cut goals or objectives (Mbachu, 1998).

However, based on the notion of practical necessity, the objectives of foreign policy of nations must be compatible with their national interests. This affirms and rationalizes actions of states aimed at self-interests and self-preservation. Evidently, for a nation to pursue its national interests, the objectives of its foreign policy must be designed towards furthering territorial integrity, military security, economic wellbeing, preservation of cultural identity of the people and securing geo-strategic and political influence. Nevertheless, in some circumstances engendered by contemporary globalization, the realities have shown that foreign policy objectives of states are easily realized when compatible with cooperative strategy. This is correct as noted by Keohane (1994) intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating the realization of their own objectives. For a country to realize the objectives of its foreign policy in a highly complex, competitive and intertwined international system like ours it must be economic independent, socio-political stable and military strong. This is because foreign policy objectives are at best realistic and attainable only when they are divorced from sheer enthusiasm expressed in coloured and impressive words (Mbachu, 1998). A foreign policy objectives must as of necessity be based on domestic capabilities, and in a manner which cannot commit the nation to the total exhortation of the available capabilities (Mbachu, 1998; Ojinnaka, 2022; Keohane (1994)

In any case, foreign policy objectives should be distinguished from declaration made by a statesman or a mere statement of intention by politicians in government, which may be declaration of hopes or ideals expected from his government within a period of time (Ojinnaka, 2017; Obiukwu, 2001). According to Obiukwu, (2001) foreign policy objectives has been classified differently and base on their importance to the state; this could be vital or secondary objectives, permanent or variable, general or specific objectives, complementary objectives and conflicting objectives. Generally speaking, Gilbert (2024), Rodee et al (1983), Okere (2001), Mbachu (1998), Robert, (1996) and Obiukwu (2001) broadly categorized the objectives of foreign policy of states as follows:

- i. Preservation of national security
- ii. Maintaining of the integrity of the states

- iii. Promotion of economic interest
- iv. Protection of national prestige
- v. Development of national power, and
- vi. Preservation of world peace

According to Gilbert, notwithstanding the general policy objectives stipulated above, states formulate their foreign policy objectives based on the peculiarity of their interests and circumstances and execute them in the international system as foreign policies cognizant of their power and capabilities. Usually, most states coherently articulate the objectives of their foreign policy (Gilbert, 2024). In the same light, it is these basic ingredients of national interests as broadly categorized as the objectives of foreign policy that are the determinant of the foreign policy. It is these determinant factors of foreign policy that influences the behavioral pattern of a state in the international system.

Agencies of Foreign Policy and Making of Foreign Policy

The articulation and formulation of foreign policy is a very dynamic excise involving forces from outside governmental structure and within the governmental structure. Both the government and non-governmental groups with external considerations are involved in the making of foreign policy. The organs or institutions that are responsible for articulation and formulation of foreign policies includes: The Office of the President or the Chief Executive Officer of a state, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,, the Legislature, Diplomatic Corps, international organizations, and the enlightened Public Opinion (Ojinnaka, 2022). These Agencies are formal (legal) informal (extera-legal) institutions deployed by states for attainment of foreign policy objectives (Gilbert, 2024), which must be in accordance with a nation's national interests.

The Executive branch of government plays mayor and decisive role in the making of foreign policy of a state. The President or Chief Executive Officer of any country has enormous influence on the articulation, formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy. The ideological leaning or the personality trait of the President does have great impact on country's foreign policy (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). A dynamic, astute and purposeful foreign policy often comes from a great and astute political leadership whose exposure and articulate disposition enhances the predictability and vitality of the nation's foreign policy (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026).

The Chief executive is assisted by his Advisers, Legislators, Ministries, depending on the particular issue. In addition, the Chief Executive could receive advice from any quarters in or/and outside the government. These agencies of foreign policy of a state are the instruments of foreign policy that are engaged in the process of foreign policy formulation. They are state owned institutions, or organizations that oversee the articulation, formulation and implementation of foreign policies of states. They also engage in diplomatic consultations on behalf of their governments (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is headed by a Cabinet member who is a political appointee, appointed by the Chief Executive to oversee the administration of foreign affairs. In the United States he is designated as the Secretary of States, in Britain, he is known as the Foreign Secretary and in Nigeria and other African countries he is designated as the Minister of External Affairs or Minister of Foreign Affairs. Accordingly, the Ministry is always staffed with experienced technocrats and bureaucrats who are often experts in international relations and geopolitics. According to Gilbert and Thom-Otuya (2005) these experienced technocrats and bureaucrats bring their experience, expertise and sagacity to bear in the articulation and formulation of their country's foreign policies, ensuring that the technical niceties are adequately taken care of.

Equally, the members of the diplomatic corps such as Ambassadors are not only the official representatives of their country in another country, but are also concerned with relations with the management of their country's relations with other countries. They are also involved in bargaining and negotiations on behalf of their country, and gathering of useful information from their countries of residence and transmit same to their home government for foreign policy formulation (Gilbert and Thom-Otuya (2005) as cited in Ojinnaka (2022). Some political elites often use Mass Media as political communication instrument of propaganda to influence government foreign policy decisions. While the

Mass Media is deeply involved in foreign policy making, its influence is exerted through news casting, commentaries, discussions, intellectual platforms and syndicated columns. By disseminating information, the Mass Media help to shape the views and enlightened opinions of the knowledgeable people in foreign policy issues. Obviously, the influence of Mass Media on Public Opinion in regards as vital to foreign policy issues and as an important ingredient of a strong and resilient foreign policy. The Mass Media tries to mobilize public opinion and develop mature and supportive environment for or against a particular foreign policy issue. This fundamentally, leads to meaningful discussions that enhance understanding and cooperation among states on the complexities of international engagements (<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov>). This particularly so when allies and friendly nations expresses concerns over the possible consequences for them with regard to a particular foreign policy decision. Some democratic states usually consider the impacts of foreign policy decisions on their friendly countries. This is why state engages in wide consultations with their allies before a firm foreign policy position is taken, especially on an issue of international conflicts or declaration of war (Ojinnaka, 2022).

Consequently, since no state is in autarky or wholly sole dependent, mostly those that share common values consults each other, with the view to accommodate general interests of peace and stability of the international system. In view of collective welfare goals of a state foreign policy decisions are often influenced by groups that wields power over government or in democracies by public opinion at large (Oppenheim, 1991). This brings to the fore the relevance of international mass media and international organizations as the maintainers of peace and stability of the international system.

Thus both internal and external forces as well as economic and military considerations come into focus in the formulation and execution of a state's foreign policy (Mbachu, 1998; Obiukwu, 2001), hence they are factors of considerable impact on foreign policies of nations. However, when foreign policies are formulated, it must be executed. The execution of foreign policy of states are done through, diplomacy, foreign aid, alliances, treaties, propaganda, military force or coercive measures (Gilbert & Otuya, 2005)

The Determinants of Foreign Policy of Nations

The determinants of foreign policies of nations can generally be divided into two classes: Domestic/Internal determinant factors; External/International / Systemic determinant factors. Nevertheless, the domestic/internal factors are moiré significant than the external/ international /systemic factors (Ojinnaka, 2017). The understanding of the determinants of foreign policy of nations necessitates the examination, and the analysis of the human and non-human factors which influences the external behavior of states. There are both contending internal and external environmental factors that influence the nature and character of foreign policy of nations in the international system. Though sovereign states are equals in the international law, they have different national capabilities. They are Superpowers, Great powers, Medium powers and even Small powers. The disparities in the capacity and capabilities of states is critical in the understanding the determinants of their foreign policies.

In addition, the procedures involved in the articulation, formulation and execution of foreign policy, structural impacts, and the impacts of foreign policy elites make the determinant factors a critical ingredients in the relations among states in the international system. Accordingly, foreign policy provides the platform for states involvement in international politics (Obiukwu, 2001). Fundamentally; it is the determinants of foreign policies that make states to behave the way they do in their interactions with others in the international systems (Ojinnaka 2017). Accordingly, every sovereign state derives its foreign policies from both the dynamics of internal and external environmental. And the extent to which conflicting interests are reconciled largely depends on the material power: economic, military, financial, and technology resources at the disposal of the state (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026).

Ideological orientation of the ruling class, particularly, the foreign policy elites is an important determinant of foreign policy of nations. Years of colonial experience had conditioned the ruling elites in Africa who inherited power at independence to be pro-capitalist and pro-Western in their ideological orientation (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). In spite of their said commitment to non-alignment, the foreign policies of ruling elites who inherited power at independence in most African states were clearly

pro-West (Ojinnaka, 2017). Most of these elites were educated in the west which greatly influenced their reasoning, thinking and way of life and attitude towards the Western civilization. Thus leadership style, values and ideological inclinations of the leaders, particularly, the President, his advisers and policy makers do determine foreign policy orientation of states. Their beliefs, worldviews, and values color decisions. A president's worldview, advisors, risk appetite, and ideologies influence alliances, diplomacy, intervention, or restraint. Ideology also guides norms. For example, a country emphasizing human rights may condition relationships on governance. Equally, a realist-oriented leadership may prioritize security and power (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025),

Viewed from an angle of political economy rationality, the economic strength, resources or economic weakness of any state is a fundamental determinant factor of its foreign policy. Foreign policy is costly and resources demanding ventures. A weak economy limits ambition. A strong one enables leverage. Economic factors include GDP, trade volume, foreign reserves, access to capital, and resource supply. States rich in natural resources may use resource diplomacy (e.g. oil, minerals). States with industrial base can support defense, technology, aid, and soft power (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). A state with a weak, dependent and fragile economic structure cannot afford to pursue a dynamic or radical foreign policy for fear of alienating those to whom it is dependent. Equally, a state with strong economic foundation can adopt a vibrant and assertive foreign policy (Ojinnaka, 2017). Thus the economic capacity of a country is a very potent factor in determining its foreign policy (Onyeneho, 2006)

Most of the developing countries emerged from colonialism to a neocolonial status with underdeveloped and extremely dependent economic structures. The economies of the developing countries were and still are dependent on the export of few raw materials or minerals and the import of manufactured consumer and capital goods from the developed and industrial powers (Ojinnaka, 2016). They are structurally, economically, militarily and financially weak and dependent on the West, China and Russia for some Aids (Ojinnaka, 2001). Particularly, African economic projections like trade, investments, financial aids, technology transfer since independence were predominantly with the Western Europe and America (Mbachu, 1998; Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026), but now highly expectant of China as an emerged industrial and economic power. Their structural, economic, military and financial weaknesses to a very large extent are determinant factors in the character of their foreign relations with the developed countries of the West, China and Russia (Ojinnaka, 2016). Because their weakness places great constraints on their foreign policy articulations, formulation and implementation, it undermines their capacity for global outreaching, independent, or vibrant foreign policy ambition (Ojinnaka, 2017).

Consequently, the African states lack the economic, military or financial strength to pursue an independent foreign policy in their relations with these aforementioned industrial and economic hegemonic powers. Since most of the Africa and the other developing countries lack the economic, military and financial capabilities compared to the major powers in the international system, they did not have the capacity for hegemonic foreign policy ambitions and limits their foreign policies to such issues as national unity, stability, improving the living standards of their nationals which are critical to their domestic peace and stability (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). By implication, the foreign policies of Africa and other developing states towards these industrial and economic powers is circumscribed by their economic, military and financial dependence on them. They are therefore, incapable of pursuing what could be described as a dynamic or truly non-aligned foreign policy (Aja, 2009; Mbachu, 1998; Obiukwu, 2001, Ojinnaka, 2016). The U.S. economy undergirds much of its global reach. Through aid, trade deals, and military deployments, the U.S. converts economic strength into foreign policy influence (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). American uses hegemonic economic power helps to shape its foreign policy to global influence. Consequently, the economic strength of the United States enables its foreign policy to expand influence across the globe.

Equally, in the era of globalization, the foreign policies of states are designed to ensure interactions with each other in the areas of economy, trade and investment, security, culture, sports, scientific and technological co-operations. Because the globalized international system is a web of interdependence

and complex interdependence, no sovereign state can survive in precarious condition of international “isolement”, or be sustained in “autarky”. This makes foreign policies a designed framework for state’s engagement with each other. And on the course of their engagement with one another, states pursue foreign policy objectives to defend and preserve their national interests. Fundamentally, it is the desire to pursue and defend national interests that houses the determinant factors of a nation’s foreign policy.

Obviously, the concerns for international peace and stability are one of the prime considerations of states that determine their foreign policies. The needs for preservation of international peace and stability necessitate peaceful relations among states in the international system. The contemporary era of globalization that engenders interdependence and complex interdependence of states highlights the essence of diplomacy in the settlement of international conflicts, and this is achieved through foreign policy that engenders interactive relations between states (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Also, the pursuit of national interests is an important consideration in the articulation and formulation of foreign policies of states. In view of the fact that the citizens of a states are found in different countries of the world in pursuit of various ventures; trade, commerce, investment or even scholarship (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Therefore, it is in the national interest of a state to formulate foreign policy designed to defend and protect its citizens and investments abroad. In this vein, no nation overlooks its citizens and investments abroad because their activities have implications for domestic stability (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Consequently, the protection of the interests and wellbeing of nationals abroad, foreign investments and/or economic interests abroad are some of the critical determinant factors of foreign policy formulations (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026). Hence, states adopt stringent measures like military option, economic sanction or diplomatic means to protect and defend the wellbeing of their nationals abroad, their foreign investments and/or economic interests (Ojinnaka, 2017).

Also, the trends of events in the international system at any epoch in history do influence the foreign policies states. For example at the African sub-system level, during the decade of decolonization the foreign policies of many African countries were greatly influenced by anti-colonial policies and the decolonization efforts. The presence of colonialism and white minority governments in the continent of Africa was a determinant factor in the formulation of foreign policies of many African countries. Needless to say, for many decades, colonialism and white minority governments in Africa was a determinant factor in the formulation of Nigeria foreign policies. This made the successive Nigeria governments to adopt pattern and focus Nigeria foreign policy on the philosophy of altruistic Afro-centrism. Thus following the Nigeria independence, the Nigeria Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa insisted that Africa must claim first position in Nigeria external affairs (Akindele & Ate, 2000). Also, in his address to the Conference of Ambassadors in June 1965, the first Nigeria Military Head of State Major General Aguiyi Ironsi reiterated that Africa is the centerpiece of his government’s foreign policy. According to him his administration attaches importance to our African policy.. the majority of the opinion in the civilized world looks up to us to provide responsible leadership in Africa (Akubor, 2021, as cited in Gilbert, 2024).

In the same light, when General Olusegun Obasanjo came to power in 1976, he reaffirmed the Nigeria commitment to the foreign policy of Afro-centrism. Major General Joseph Nanven Garba, as the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Summer 1975, stated in clear terms that Africa remains the centerpiece of Nigeria foreign policy, but certainly not at the expense of Nigeria national interest. Joe Garba contends that Nigeria could not consider itself truly independent while African people were still subject to Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mosambique. Nor could Nigeria tolerate complacently the daily humiliation of fellow Africans in Southern Rhodesia now Zinbabwe and South Africa (Garba, 1991).

In the same trend, during the period of the Cold war the interest of the African countries were directed at staying out of the cold war rivalry between the two super powers by adopting official policy of non alignment and working towards the achievement of a peaceful international environment (Mbachu, 1998). The East-West Cold War and struggle for world domination determined the foreign policy of many developing countries who adopted foreign policy of non-alignment and non-commitment

to ideological contestations between America and her harmony of nation in one hand, and the former Soviet Union (Russia) and its Eastern bloc Allies in the other. Thus under the hostile international atmosphere of Cold War rivalry of the two Super powers, the policy of non-alignment greatly influenced the foreign policy of many non-aligned developing countries. Analytically, the foreign policies of most developing countries, indeed, African states, overtime, are derived largely from such domestic environmental factors as their autonomy, internal political pressures, colonial legacy, and ideological orientation of the ruling class, as well as such external environmental factors as geographical location, the existence of colonialism and white minority regimes and the Cold War rivalry between the two Super-powers (Ojinnaka and Uhuegbu, 2026).

Again, the nature and character of political structure and institutions are important determinants of foreign policy of nations. The form and nature of governmental system influences foreign policy. Democracies, dictatorships, federations each function differently. Democratic states face electoral cycles, checks and balances, and public scrutiny, while authoritarian states may act more swiftly (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). These factors determines how foreign policy is decided by the inputs of the executive branch, the legislature, and sometimes the Judiciary, how bureaucracies are designed, and how stable the institutions remain an important factors in foreign policy formulation and articulation (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025)

Geography location as an element of national power is a significant determinant factor of foreign policy. It is a permanent material factor of consideration that influences the articulation, formulation and implementation of foreign policy of most states in the international system. A nation's terrain, climate, topography, territorial size and borders, coastal access, and neighbors all matter. An island, a landlocked state, a peninsula, they each bring distinct constraints to a nations foreign policy making (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). Geographical factors rarely changes. It anchors on many choices, and can make or mar a country in geopolitical calculations (Ojinnaka, 2024; Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). The U.S. benefits from oceans on both sides. That provides strategic depth and buffer zones. Geography also affects resource endowments. Access to energy, minerals, agricultural land, all depends on location. Also geography shapes trade routes and security concerns (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025).

Geo-political analysts and Political geographers agree that the dynamics of contemporary international politics has made the geopolitical location of a state a critical factor of consideration in making of foreign policies. Since the international system has become complex, lawless, great and hegemonic powers like America and Russia, France, China and Britain do no longer respect international law, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of weak countries geographically located close to a powerful and imperial powers can no longer be guaranteed. The recent international developments in Venezuela, Ukraine, Mali, Burkina-Faso and Niger whose leaderships doubt the hegemony of these imperial powers attest to the vulnerability of weak states geographically located close to a powerful country. At the same time, unfolding events in the Euro-Asia geopolitics, NATO Eastward expansion and the ambivalent relationships between Russia- and its former Eastern European ally states of Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Finland now in NATO, have changed the trend of international politics since the end of the Cold War. And these states have ambivalent relationship with Russia and deeply suspicious of the possible resurgence of Kremlin imperial ambition (Ojinnaka, 2024). The changing dynamics of European geopolitics underscores the importance of geographical considerations in the formulations of foreign policies of these countries. Thus most countries of the world focus their foreign policy on issues that are relates to their geographical location. Equally, the geopolitical dilemma of the Eastern European states now in NATO and their relations with Russia highlights the importance of geography as an element of national power and key determinant of foreign policies of states. The incontrovertible fact of geography as a prime determinant of national power is more explicit in the case of Russia and its relations with East European neighbours (Ojinnaka, 2024).

Geography as a political, strategic and economic factor to a very large extent determines the character of foreign policy of states. For instance, Israel is a small country located in the Middle East

and surrendered by hostile enemy nations. Israel's national security policy is deeply influenced by its narrow, compact geography. Over the years, Israel has evolved geostrategic, security and defense policy of survival by investing massively in military technology and scientific innovations. Its strategic defense, security and military doctrine focuses on prevention, early warning, and fast offensive action (Oxford Academic, 2026). However, based on the 1950s Ben-Gurion doctrine, Israel's foreign policy strategy relies on three main doctrinal foundations: Deterrence that showing the enemies in practical terms that attacking Israel would bring to them a massive and painful response; Early Warning by using advanced radar and intelligence to spot incoming threats before they hit; Using an offensive power: by moving battles quickly into enemy territory; also Israel maintaining a small active military that can quickly scale up using trained reserve soldiers.

The geo-security threat Israel is facing from hostile Arab-Muslim countries and their proxy terrorist organizations made the state of Israel to evolve security-cum foreign policy strategy that is conscious of its geographical location. The recent developments in the Middle East, particularly the Iran-Israel-American wars will likely lead to dramatic changes in balance of power in the region in favour of Israel, and will reshape Israeli foreign policy, political, economic, and cultural relations with some European states. Today, technology, communication and informational power, cyber security and intelligence are key factors of national power. A state like Israel that has strong cyber capacity is able to project military and economic power in the Middle East. The emergence of these technologies have enhanced information warfare, hence disinformation and media influence counts in foreign policy of nations.

The importance of geography as a determinant factor of foreign policy of nations is more pronounced in the articulation, formation and implementation of foreign policy of land-locked states that have no direct access to sea and have to pass through other coastal states to engage in international trade. The implication is that such states have to consider the position of the state through which it has access to the sea before taking foreign policy decisions. In reality the land-locked state cannot afford to adopt foreign policies that would negatively impact and offend the state through which it has access to sea (Ojinnaka & Uhuegbu, 2026). This played out in the relationship between the Apartheid South Africa and the Southern African states of Lesotho, Botswana, Switzerland and Malawi. These states have access to the coast through South Africa, and in spite of their evident opposition to the South Africa's apartheid policy during the apartheid era, they still traded and maintained close relation with the racist South Africa regimes (Ojinnaka & Uhuegbu, 2026)..

The incontrovertible fact of geography as a key determinant of foreign policy is very explicit in the making of Russia foreign policy. Russia geographical characteristics had an enormous impact on the dynamics of its internal politics and foreign relations (Robert, 1996, as cited in Ojinnaka 2024). Russia is fundamentally located on the largest continent, Eurasia with 17 immediate neighbor countries. Russian is a pre-eminent country whose territory covers a vast expanse of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia (Ojinnaka, 2024). As a geographical Superpower, Russia With an area of 17,098,242 km², Russian Federation is the largest country in the world, covering more than 11% of Earth's inhabited areas (<https://geographyofrussia.com/russiasneighbors/> as cited in Ojinnaka, 2024) Thus Russia geographical distinctiveness enhances its diplomatic relations and geo-political status in the international system. The availability of a large expanse of land, serves as an advantageous defensive strategy as its armed forces can retreat into interior to regroup on an event of war (Ojinnaka, 2024; Gilbert, 2013; Ojinnaka & Uhuegbu, 2026). Ojinnaka (2024) acknowledge that Russian unique geographic position make it a force to reckon in global power politics. Equally, its close located with some NATO member countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries reinforces its dynamics in the international political system. This is a factor of material consideration in the strategic foreign policy objectives of both Russia and its Eastern Europe NATO members.

There are some notable factors that determine and shape American foreign policy. For instance, geographically the United States is insulated by oceans, which allows strategic flexibility in its interaction in the international system. Again, the U.S. has one of the largest economies, which gives it

leverage in giving foreign aid to countries in need, uses trade and sanctions as an instrument of diplomacy (Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). Equally, under a democratic system of government, The American institutions of separation of powers constrain executive action, Congress matters for treaties, war authorization (Encyclopedia of Political Science (2025)). This limits the power of the President and ensure due diligence in the use of executive power in American foreign relations. In the same vein, the U.S. Presidents bring leadership and values in the affairs of the state. Ideologies like liberal internationalism, realist restraint, and populist nationalism are keys to American democratic governance. This gave relevance to Public opinion, as the public always demand accountability for actions or in actions of the government. This is why Media and public sentiment constrain always interventions in American foreign policy (Ojinnaka, 2001; Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025). According to the Encyclopedia of Political Science (2025) Alliances is a key determinant factor of the United States foreign policy. The NATO, bilateral security pacts, Indo-Pacific partnerships tie the U.S. into commitments with its allies. The U.S always maintains good relations with its allies. Though, the Washington Doctrine of Unstable Alliances points to the fact that the U.S. has foreign policy of a long tradition of flexibility. Nevertheless, a 2025 survey shows ASEAN nations place more trust in the U.S. than China, the rising Asian economic power. The survey points 47.2% trust vs. 33% distrust, reflecting how American soft power diplomacy and policy consistency has feathered its interests abroad (Ojinnaka, 2001; Encyclopedia of Political Science, 2025).

In a final analysis, the foreign policy of every state is designed to pursue and actualize its national interests: Primary, Secondary and General Interests. These constitute the fundamental elements of foreign policy of any state. National interest as the totality or the aggregate of interests of individuals and groups within a given state expresses its core-socio-economic and political ideals, values and aspirations which a state pursue, promote and or defend in its interactions with other states in the international system (Morgenthau, 1951).. Since national interests are anchored on national self preservation of every state it drives the conduct of foreign policy and external behaviour of any state is the international system (Morgenthau, 1951). National interests are a commanding factor of foreign policy articulation, formulation and implementation by states to ensure self preservation and survival in the highly complex and competitive international system. Because national interests is a fundamental factor that determine the foreign policies of states, states do go to war and use instrument of coercion as a means to achieve their national interest, which are their foreign policy objectives. The values and yardstick of national interests as a determinant factor of foreign policies of states make powerful and hegemonic states to use force to compel weak states to accept their terms and condition in a complex international system (Ojinnaka, 2017).

Against the background of the foregoing, in a complex, highly volatile and globalized international system, the determinants of foreign policies of countries are derived largely from such domestic environmental factors like their autonomy, internal political pressures, desire for domestic political stability, colonial legacy, and ideological orientation of the ruling class, and external environmental factors of geographical location, and asymmetry economic relations between the developed and developing countries, security concerns, historical and cultural values, Global power structure, International Organizations and Alliances, terrorism, the Cold War rivalry between the two super-powers, relaxation of the Cold war, NATO Eastward expansion and continued rivalry between Russia and the West. In the present day international politics, it is these realistic considerations that determine the foreign policies of states in their interactions within the international system.

Conclusion

The determination of foreign policy of any nation is to further or promote its national interests, which are derived from [geography](#), [history](#), [economics](#), and the distribution of international power (Britannica, 2026). This is derived from the necessity for safeguarding national independence, security, territorial integrity, political, economic, and moral values of the nation which is considered as a country's principal obligation, followed by preserving a wide freedom of action for the [state](#) (Britannica, 2026). Fundamentally, sovereign states devise foreign policy on the basis of what is considered by the foreign

policy actors as national interests which are the key determinants of foreign policy. Thus these determinants of foreign policy ensure that a nation adjust its foreign policies to balance both the internal elements and external conditions necessary for it accomplish its foreign policy objective, in line with its considered national interests. The responsibility for supervising the execution of foreign policy lies with the head of state or government, or a designated cabinet Minister who reports to the Chief Executive or nominally a Minister who presides over the foreign ministry, directs policy execution, supervises the ministry's officials, and instructs the country's diplomats abroad (Britannica, 2026).

Thus determinants of foreign policies of nations are the human and non-human factors which influence the external behavior of states in the international system. These determinant factors of foreign policies of states are derived from the core economic and political ideals, values and aspirations a state pursue in its interaction with other states in the international system.

In reality, the foreign policy strategy of a state is moderated by three variables of internal setting, external environment and the psychological threshold of the foreign policy makers. These variables reinforce the complexity and competitive nature of international system and determine the actions or inactions of states in their interactions in the international system. Determinant factors of foreign policies of nations rest on national interests. It is embedded on socio-economic, political, cultural and geostrategic interests of nations. The key determinants of foreign policies of nations are: national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic wellbeing which are the major factors that drive inter-states relations.

Consequently, as it is, a nation's core national interests like socio-economic, political, cultural, geostrategic issues, national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic wellbeing of the citizens are the key determinants of its foreign policy. In reality, the determinant factors of foreign policies of states have tremendous impacts on the methodology and strategies adopted by states in pursuit of their national interest. In essence, the methodology and strategies adopted by states in the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives is often a reflection of the determinant factors of their foreign policies.

Recommendations

THE Paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. That the foreign policy makers should thoroughly understand the dynamic factors that determine foreign policy and improves on strategic thinking, analysis, and resolute application of national interests in execution of foreign policy decisions.
- ii. That in view of the fact that no state exercises perfect control of foreign policy dynamics, the foreign policy makers needs intelligent balancing of both internal and external elements that influence their nation's foreign policy.
- iii. That the determinants of foreign policy of nations should be able to activate their national capabilities and capacities to respond to the challenges of the international system.

References

1. Ademiran, T. (1983). Introduction to international relations. Macmillan Publishers.
2. Aja, A. A. (2009). Policy and strategic studies: Unchartered waters of war and peace in international relations (Rev. ed.). WillyRose & Appleseed Publishing Co.
3. Akinboye, S. O. (1999). Nigeria's foreign policy. In R. Anifowose & F. Enemuo (Eds.), Elements of politics (pp. 360–385). Sam Iroanusi Publications.
4. Akindele, R. A., & Ate, B. E. (Eds.). (2000). Selected readings in Nigeria foreign policy and international relations. Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.
5. Britannica. (2026). Foreign policy and diplomacy. <https://www.britannica.com/>
6. Chibundu, V. N. (2004). Foreign policy: With particular reference to Nigeria, 1961–2002. Spectrum Books Limited.
7. Dougherty, J. E., & Pfaltzgraff, R. L. (1981). Contending theories of international relations. Harper & Row.

8. Encyclopedia of Political Science. (2025, October 5). Determinants of foreign policy: What really shapes a nation's foreign policy choices. [URL requires verification: the supplied link appears incomplete.]
9. Francis, P. (1985). *The politics of consent* (New ed.). Sphere Publishers.
10. Franke, J. (1979). *International relations theory and the behaviour of states*. Oxford University Press.
11. Garba, J. N. (1991). *Diplomatic soldering* (Rev. ed.). Spectrum Books.
12. Geography of Russia. (2024). Is Russia Asian or European? <https://geographyofrussia.com/is-russia-asian-or-european/>
13. Geography of Russia. (2024). Russia's neighbors. <https://geographyofrussia.com/russias-neighbors/>
14. Gilbert, L. D. (2013). *International relations: A handbook for beginners* (2nd ed.). Alheri Books.
15. Gilbert, L. D., & Thom-Otuya, B. E. N. (2005). *Themes in Western European foreign policies*. Nissi Books.
16. Gilbert, L. D. (2024, September 20). Recalibrating Nigeria's African policy: From altruistic Afrocentrism to strategic Afro-centric economic diplomacy (SAED) [Professorial inaugural lecture]. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
17. [Incomplete source information]. (n.d.). [The supplied Google redirect URL does not identify the original source; the source must be identified before this reference can be formatted.]
18. Geography of Russia. (n.d.). Russia's neighbors. <https://geographyofrussia.com/russias-neighbors/>
19. U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>
20. Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press.
21. Mbachu, O. I. (1998). *Foreign policy analysis: The Nigerian perspective*. Kosoko Press.
22. Morgenthau, H. J. (1973). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace* (5th ed.). Alfred A. Knopf.
23. Morgenthau, H. J. (1951). *In defense of the national interest: A critical examination of American foreign policy*. Alfred A. Knopf.
24. Morgenthau, H. J. (1952). Another "great debate": The national interest of the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 46, 971–978.
25. Obiukwu, C. (2001). *Foundation of contemporary international relations*. Ugonna Ventures Nigeria.
26. Ojo, O., & Sesay, A. (1988). *Concepts in international relations*. Jad Publishers.
27. Okere, J. O. (2002). *International relations in a globalized world*. Achugo Publications.
28. Ojinnaka, I. E. (2022, March 18). *Foreign policy and national security interest: An appraisal of Nigeria's involvement in the Liberia crisis* [Concept paper for advanced foreign policy analysis]. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
29. Ojinnaka, I. E., & Uhuegbu, I. C. (2026). Foreign policy and national interest: Analysis of contending issues. *American Journal of Multifunctional Publishing*, 3(9).
30. Ojinnaka, I. E. (2001). *American neo-globalism and its implications in international relations* [Master's thesis]. Imo State University.
31. Ojinnaka, I. E. (2016). *Politics of development and underdevelopment: Contending and consenting issues in Third World underdevelopment*.

32. Onyeneho, E. E. (2006). The web of world politics: Analyzing international relations. Chambers Book Ltd.
33. Oppenheim, F. E. (1991). The place of morality in foreign policy. Lexington Books.
34. Oxford Academic. (2026). Geography and Israeli defense policy. [The supplied URL is a Google redirect and requires verification.]
35. Pym, F. (1985). Politics of consent (New ed.). Sphere Publishers.
36. Robert, A. H. (1996). Political science: An introduction. McGraw-Hill.
37. Rodee, C. C., Anderson, T. J., Christol, C. Q., & Greene, T. H. (1983). Introduction to political science. McGraw-Hill.
38. Wallace, W. (1976). The themes in Western European foreign policy process in Britain. George Allen & Unwin.