

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATISATION PRACTICE, 1979-1999: SELFISH OR EGALITARIAN ACT?

Ini Ememobong Essien
iniemem2001@yahoo.com
07039484281

Abstract

This article interrogates the motives behind international responses to Nigeria's turbulent democratisation between 1979 and 1999. Employing the theoretical lenses of the Third Wave of Democratisation and Democratic Peace Theory, it argues that while Western powers and international institutions publicly championed democracy for normative reasons, their actions were predominantly shaped by strategic and economic self-interest. Through a chronological analysis of Nigeria's Second Republic, the military regimes of Buhari and Babangida, and the pariah Abacha dictatorship, the study demonstrates that international support was consistently contingent upon the protection of commercial interests, debt repayment, and Cold War alignment. The critical omission of an oil embargo against the Abacha regime starkly reveals the limits of normative action when it clashes with vital material interests, underscoring that egalitarian commitments were ultimately secondary to economic and strategic calculations.

Introduction

Nigeria's geopolitical significance has made it the cynosure of the international community due to its population, rich natural resources, and regional power, etc.¹ Nigeria's democratization journey, which has been obviously non-linear, reveals a rich tapestry of both indigenous and exogenous influences that have been impactful and definitive. From the demand for independence and the transition to self-governance, through to the emergence of the first to the fourth republics, the international community has played more than a passive role. The country's democratic experiences have coincided with global democratization timelines-the third wave of democratisation and its concomitant reverse wave.² These developments, which are debatably coincidences, deservedly attracted international notice and reactions. This paper will interrogate these influences and reactions to determine whether they were done with egalitarian intentions or motivated by selfish reasons. It is important to add, passively, that while the country has undeniably been a recipient of external influences, it has also exerted significant influence on other nations far beyond its borders, especially within the African continent.³

This qualitative research will rely on both primary and secondary sources in its task of deepening the understanding of the primary motive of the international community in the promotion of democracy. It will also adopt the interpretivist view to highlight and interrogate the responses of the international community to Nigeria's democratic experience within a two-decade chronology (1979-1999), showing its impact on the subsequent democratization journey of the country.

The period under review represents one of the most interesting and turbulent periods in Nigeria's political history and democratization journey-it witnessed twice, the successful transition from military to democracy (the second and fourth republics), an inchoate third republic (truncated by the presidential election cancellation), an Interim National Government (a nouveau

¹ Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 1. publ., 3. print (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Nachdr., The Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Series, Vol. 4 (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

³ E. O. Oni and A. Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy', *Canadian Social Science*, 2016.

unconstitutional coinage and contraption), and a prolonged military rule. These significant events not only had domestic impact but also deservedly attracted international attention and reaction.⁴

This research, while critically examining the events and international responses that defined the years within our chronological scope, it will interrogate the motives (normative and strategic) that underpinned those responses. It has been argued that the spread and promotion of democracy by Western powers were for normative purposes, drawing from the inherent ability of that system of government to protect human rights, prevent wars as posited by the democratic peace theory,⁵ spread prosperity etc⁶.

A counterargument also exists in proof of the suspicion that the spread of democracy was undertaken for the strategic commercial reason of facilitating the exportation of produced goods to new markets abroad and importation of raw materials from those places, increased global security, diplomacy and exercise of soft power.⁷ This perspective is particularly important contemporarily due to the recent international outbursts linking international donor agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations to political interference, regime change and insecurity funding.⁸ The lens of some theoretical constructs like the Democratization Theory and the Democratic Peace Theory will help in the discussion of this topic.

Third Wave Democratization Theory

Samuel Huntington espoused this concept in his seminal work titled "Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century" (1991) where he undertook a historical analysis of the spread of democracy from the first (1828-1926), second (1943-1962) and third (1974-1991) waves. The first wave started in the United States of America with the enlargement of suffrage to include about 50% of the adult male population and ensure periodic elections. While this wave achieved the spread of democracy to 29 countries across the world by 1918,⁹ it also suffered a reverse wave in 1922 with the rise of fascism and authoritarianism in Europe, which drastically reduced the numbers of democratic nations in the world to 12. Furthermore, the second wave achieved a peak with 36 democratic countries in 1962, due mainly to post-World War 2 democratization and decolonization, though it experienced a reverse wave catalysed by weak institutions, military coups and cold war politics, reducing the number this time to 30.¹⁰

The third wave of democratization, which is the centre point of the theoretical compass sought to aid the navigation of our subject matter, is an effective theoretical lens to use in the proper understanding of global transitions (Nigeria inclusive) to democracy in the latter part of the twentieth century, and to analyse the role of international state and non-state actors during this

⁴ Daniel C. Bach, 'Nigerian-American Relations: Converging Interests and Power Relations', ed. Timothy M. Shaw and Olajide Aluko (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1983), 35–55, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-06301-7_3; Yemi Aluko and Ediagbonya Michael, *The Fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria, 1979 -1983: A Lesson for the Future*, 3 (April 2020): 807–27; Carl Levan and Patrick Ukata, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics*, 1st edn (Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198804307.001.0001>.

⁵ Bruce Russett et al., 'The Democratic Peace', *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 164–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539124>; Sebastian Rosato, 'The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory', *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 585–602.

⁶ Rosato, 'The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory'.

⁷ Michael W. Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (1983): 323–53; Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

⁸ Sarah Blodgett Bermeo, 'Foreign Aid and Regime Change: A Role for Donor Intent', SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 1780357 (Social Science Research Network, 7 February 2011), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1780357>; Ann Marie Clark, 'Non-Governmental Organizations and Their Influence on International Society', *Journal of International Affairs* 48, no. 2 (1995): 507–25.

⁹ Samuel P Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (1991): 12–34.

¹⁰ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

sojourn. More than its predecessors, the third wave had a global reach,¹¹ spreading democracy to Latin American, European, Asian and sub-Saharan African countries.

This wave began with the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, followed closely by democratic transitions in Spain, Latin America, Asia-Pacific countries (Taiwan, Philippines and South Korea), the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) then it swept across other continents simultaneously, changing more than 30 countries from authoritarian rule to democracy.¹²

Huntington listed five conditions that facilitated cum enabled the third wave democratisation as follows:

1. The deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes in a world where democratic values were widely accepted, the consequent dependence of these regimes on successful performance, and their inability to maintain "performance legitimacy" due to economic (and sometimes military) failure.
2. The unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries.
3. A striking shift in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church, manifested in the Second Vatican Council of 1963-65 and the transformation of national Catholic churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism.
4. Changes in the policies of external actors, most notably the European Community, the United States, and the Soviet Union.
5. "Snowballing," or the demonstration effect of transitions earlier in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at democratisation.¹³

As with its predecessors, this wave had its concomitant reverse wave, causing the return of some democratic countries back to non-democratic rule. Reasons for this reversal of governance preference is postulated as follows:

1. The weakness of democratic values among key elite groups and the general public.
2. Severe economic setbacks, which intensified social conflict and enhanced the popularity of remedies that could be imposed only by authoritarian governments.
3. Social and political polarization, often produced by leftist governments seeking the rapid introduction of major social and economic reforms.
4. The determination of conservative middle-class and upper-class groups to exclude populist and leftist movements and lower-class groups from political power.
5. the breakdown of law and order resulting from terrorism or insurgency.
6. intervention or conquest by a nondemocratic foreign power.
7. "reverse snowballing" triggered by the collapse or overthrow of democratic systems in other countries.¹⁴

Under this theory, as can be gleaned from the conditions quoted for and against the spread of democracy, the role of the international community is undeniable, especially actors like America and the European Union, who were actively championing and sponsoring the adoption of democracy, and others like China and some Islamic countries who were also vehemently opposing it.

Huntington, though optimistic that democracy will continue to spread, in fact predicting a fourth wave, however identified some very critical factors that may ultimately impede the movement of democracy- difficulty in late democracies (especially in Africa), bridging the gap between the rich

¹¹ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

¹² Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

¹³ Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave'.

¹⁴ Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, 'The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond', *Comparative Political Studies* 43, nos 8–9 (2010): 931–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010370431>; Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave'.

and the poor through impressive economic development and the likely emergence of new forms of authoritarianism anchored on high-level information manipulation.

Interestingly, Nigeria featured in both spectra of the third wave with the 1979 elections, and the resultant brief second republic that occurred during the third wave (five years into the wave), while its relapse to military dictatorship in 1983, also occurred within this period and was specifically mentioned alongside Sudan as some examples of the third reverse wave, "By 1990 at least two third-wave democracies, Sudan and Nigeria, had reverted to authoritarian rule."¹⁵ Again, the inchoate third republic transition programme that culminated in the annulment of the elections of June 12, 1993, was another third wave moment that though started, was incomplete. With it, came its own reversal moment with the introduction of an unelected Interim National Government and later, a military junta.¹⁶ From the above scenario, Nigeria's participation in the third wave democratization was far from linear, rather it was like a pendulum swinging to both ends of the wave, at least twice, before eventually settling at the democratic end, with the birth of the fourth republic in 1999. The proper understanding of this theoretical framework will be most helpful in the discussion of the international reaction to Nigeria's democratization journey within the period under review.

Democratic Peace Theory

Democratic peace theory is one of the very debated theories in international relations and democracy promotion. The theory posits that democratic states are less likely to engage in armed conflict against each other. This postulation has greatly influenced academic research, diplomatic engagements and the spread of democracy globally. This theory has its foundations on "Liberalism and World Politics,"¹⁷ "Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World"¹⁸ and "The Democratic Peace."¹⁹ These sources argued convincingly that democratic countries operate on institutions like the legislature, civil society, free press that inhibit or constrain the leaders' ability or disposition to undertake war, while concurrently entrenching normative practices or culture that enhance peaceful resolution of conflicts both internally and in international relations. The reasoning is that if leaders are unable to immediately deploy weapons of aggression or coercion due to institutional or cultural setbacks, they will be more ready to engage in compromise, negotiation and other peaceful means of conflict resolution.

This theory provided the impetus for the aggressive promotion, and exportation of democracy to other countries. In fact, it became the justification for the United States of America, NATO, European Union and other international organizations budgeting and spending huge sums of money for the adoption of democracy by non-democratic states.²⁰ It was the thinking at that time that a fully democratised world will to a large extent prevent, if not totally eliminate the occurrence of another world war.²¹ This mindset was also deployed to handle post-conflict reconstruction, by building democratic institutions and getting the warring parties to subscribe to democracy.²² International organizations like NATO and European Union also made adopting democracy as a condition for countries seeking their membership.

¹⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

¹⁶ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

¹⁷ Michael W. Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1960861>; Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2'.

¹⁸ Bruce Russett et al., *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*, REV-Revised (Princeton University Press, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7rqf6>.

¹⁹ Russett et al., 'The Democratic Peace'.

²⁰ Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave'.

²¹ Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, 'Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986', *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938740>.

²² Bermeo, 'Foreign Aid and Regime Change'.

Another significant contribution to this theory is contained in "Liberal Peace, Liberal war"²³ where the probability of democracies going to war against non-democratic states is highlighted, in addition to the role of economic factors, like bi-lateral trade. Owen posits that a free market which is most guaranteed under a democratic governance will guarantee interdependent trade and economic integration, which will increase understanding and impede war among the trading countries. The role of international melting pots like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization etc., as places for dialogue and conflict resolution found deep expression in this theory.

Conversely, some scholars have criticized the democratic peace theory as suffering from selection bias and methodological weakness, wrongful classification of economic reasons²⁴ as a political derivative of democracy,²⁵ wrongful conclusion on the causal relationship between democracy and peaceful existence of democratic states²⁶ etc.

Rosato argued that democracies and in fact all countries are at peace when their interests do not clash enough to breed strife and that they do not respect or trust each other, just because they are democratically administered, but because of managed interests.²⁷ This has been adjudged as the most potent and virulent academic attack or deconstruction on the democratic peace theory,²⁸ based his claim that the proponents of the Democratic Peace theory are unable to create a incontrovertible causal nexus between the democratic institutions and peaceful disposition.

Erik Gartzke pushes a counter argument that the peace enjoyed by democracies are economy-driven and not merely democratic.²⁹ His work titled "The Capitalist Peace" situates free market capitalism, market integration, and shared economic interests as the foundation of peace, not democracy and the attendant normative culture.

Henderson and Spiro attacked the theory from an empirical standpoint citing circumstantial coincidences and lack of consistency of results when data and methodology used are rigorously tested.³⁰ Specifically, it was held the historical contingencies from the post-war period were responsible and not democracy, were responsible for the result of the peace in the countries surveyed. It was further held that using the same methodology deployed by the proponents of the theory, an opposite result can be arrived at.³¹ In fact, the proponents of democratic peace theory have been accused of statistical manipulation and selective case selection.³²

Some works outrightly challenge the entire efficacy of the democratic peace theory by positing that democracy does not reduce the propensity for war, and that new democracies are more prone to war than established democracies and stable autocratic regimes.³³ It is therefore obvious that while abundant evidence exist to suggest that democratic countries are less likely to have armed conflict with each other, there is also evidence to shake the proposition, especially with

²³ Owen Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security*, First printing, Cornell paperbacks, 2000, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Cornell University Press, 1997).

²⁴ Rosato, 'The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory'.

²⁵ Erik Gartzke, 'The Capitalist Peace', *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 166–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00244.x>.

²⁶ Errol A. Henderson, *Democracy and War: The End of an Illusion?* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685855062>.

²⁷ Rosato, 'The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory'.

²⁸ David Kinsella, 'No Rest for the Democratic Peace', *The American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005): 453–57.

²⁹ Gartzke, 'The Capitalist Peace'.

³⁰ David E. Spiro, 'The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace', SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 1398047 (Social Science Research Network, 1994), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1398047>.

³¹ Henderson, *Democracy and War*.

³² Spiro, 'The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace'.

³³ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (The MIT Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/2660.001.0001>.

the many democratic countries that have had wars between them since after the end of the second world war.³⁴

Despite these criticisms, democratic peace theory remains a critical influence till date on the promotion and advancement of democracy as a form of government, in addition to guiding diplomatic policy formation and execution and international relations. This theory in addition to the third wave democratization will serve as the theoretical frameworks for the critical analysis of the reaction of the international community to Nigeria's democratic experience between 1979-1999.

In conclusion, the theoretical frameworks of the Third Wave and Democratic Peace Theory establish the dualistic nature of international democratization efforts. While these theories provide a normative justification for promoting democracy, by framing it as a universal offering for peace and human rights, they simultaneously expose the strategic underpinnings of such campaigns. The very conditions Huntington outlines, such as changes in policies of external actors, reveal that the global spread of democracy is never an apolitical process. Therefore, an analysis of Nigeria's journey not as a passive recipient of innocuous international goodwill, but as a case study in how these normative and strategic motivations interact, conflict, and ultimately expose the unvarnished character of foreign intervention in a nation's political development.

The Second Republic Background

It will be necessary to provide a background as to the end of the first republic and significant events and international responses that preceded the birth of the second republic. In 1960 when Nigeria became an independent country, it operated the Westminster parliamentary system with a Prime Minister and a ceremonial President. This republic was plagued by many challenges like weak democratic institutions, corruption, ethnic strife, and general political tension.³⁵ These tensions continued unabated until January 15, 1966, the military staged a coup, killing the Prime Minister and other key political leaders in the country,³⁶ and taking over the federal government.

According to declassified Department of State documents, the military administration informed the United States Government on January 20, 1966, that the Council of Ministers had voluntarily and unanimously decided to hand over the administration to the military. They promised to continue to honour the country's treaty with the United States, to which the American government responded in similar vein indicating their willingness to continue to maintain diplomatic relations with the country. The government of Britain was also taken unawares by the coup, possibly because by 1962, both countries had agreed to abrogate the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement.³⁷ The British Parliament had a prolonged debate on what their reaction should be to the military take over and the disruption of democracy in Nigeria. They agreed to maintain diplomatic relations with the country, regardless of the coup. As a former colony of Britain and an influential country in Africa, both Britain and America were very keen in protecting Nigeria from external influences, especially the threat of communist alignment during the cold war,³⁸ so both countries kept a close proximity in terms of communication and strategic support to the West African country.³⁹

The year 1966 witnessed two coups, the first in January and a counter coup in July, both were similar on many fronts, specifically, bloody and ethnic coloured. The first coup was viewed as a strike

³⁴ James Ray, 'Wars between Democracies Rare or Non-Existent?', *International Interactions* 18 (February 1993): 251–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629308434807>; James Lee Ray, 'Democracy and Peace: Then and Now', *The International History Review* 23, no. 4 (2001): 784–98.

³⁵ R Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁶ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Lai Joseph, *Nigeria: Shadow of a Great Nation*, 1st ed (Dubeo Press Ltd, 1995).

³⁷ Marco Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA', *The Historical Journal* 61, no. 4 (2018): 1065–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X17000498>.

³⁸ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

³⁹ Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics'.

against the north by the Igbos, while the second was perceived as a retaliatory attack against the Igbos.⁴⁰ The countercoup was trailed by largescale anti-Igbo killings in the northern part of Nigeria, with few uncoordinated reprisals in the Eastern Region.⁴¹

These led to the declaration of secession by the Governor of the Eastern Region, Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, leading to a civil war from 1967-1970. During this period, Nigeria was still a theatre for the exertion of influence by the international community. By that time, though America had commenced training of the Nigeria Army, because of the abrogation of the Defence Treaty with Britain, it was not directly involved in the war, as it left Britain to protect their interest in the country.⁴² France and England found a new arena for muscle flexing in this war, as they supported Biafra and Nigeria, respectively. England as the former colonial master saw it as a responsibility to maintain the entire country as one, thereby supporting the federal government with arms and ammunition,⁴³ while France saw the war as an opportunity to make an inroad into an Anglophone African giant, in addition to information gathered and believed by its secret service that the war was a pogrom against Christians.⁴⁴ The House of Lords of the United Kingdom had to reconvene from a recess on 27th August, 1968 to comprehensively deliberate on different aspects of the Nigeria-Biafra war-the support by other countries, the humanitarian crises of huge proportion, the use of excessive force, blockade by the federal government etc. The House of Lords agreed after extensive debate to continue to offer military assistance to Nigeria, noting that to fail to do that will allow others to do so and thereby have some influence over the country.⁴⁵

It is worthy of mention that beyond the reaction of state actors, there are many non-state actors whose roles and influence on Nigeria was significant. One of such is the role of the International Red Cross, which pressured the federal government to grant a humanitarian corridor and mobilized help to Biafra through that route. It was on that trip that the inspiration to form the organization Doctors Without Borders came. A young medical doctor, Bernard Kouchner, who was a part of the more than 50 personnel deployed by International Red Cross to convey food, medicine and other supplies to the Biafran territory⁴⁶ participated in the mission and witnessed first-hand the deteriorating health and nutrition state of the people in Biafra. Upon his return to France, he reported what he saw and complained about the limitations of the structure of International Red Cross and eventually found Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Doctors Without Borders.⁴⁷

Another non-state actor that played a significant role was the global press community, which described the war as a genocide and pogrom,⁴⁸ attracting global attention and forcing the hands of the military government in Nigeria to slow the offensive on Biafra and granting a corridor for help

⁴⁰ Siyan Oyeweso, *The 1966 Coups D'état and the Nigerian Civil War* (1990), 77–108; Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Evans Brothers, 1981); Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁴¹ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Oyeweso, *The 1966 Coups D'état and the Nigerian Civil War*.

⁴² Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'État*, in *Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, ed. Ronald Segal (Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), <https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3622/>; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁴³ Marc-Antoine Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War: Lessons Not Learned', *Africa Development* 34 (October 2009): 69–82, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v34i1.57357>; Antoine Glaser and Stephen Smith, *Comment la France a perdu l'Afrique* (CALAMANN-LEVY, 2005); Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁴⁴ Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War'; Glaser and Smith, *Comment la France a perdu l'Afrique*.

⁴⁵ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁴⁶ Marc A. Shampo and Robert A. Kyle, 'Bernard Kouchner—Founder of Doctors Without Borders', *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 86, no. 1 (2011): e6, <https://doi.org/10.4065/mcp.2010.0796>.

⁴⁷ Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses, 'The Nigeria–Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos 2–3 (2014): 169–203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936700>; Shampo and Kyle, 'Bernard Kouchner—Founder of Doctors Without Borders'.

⁴⁸ Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War'; Heerten and Moses, 'The Nigeria–Biafra War'.

to get to the civilians in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. It has also been argued that though the civil war created a humanitarian crisis of historic proportion,⁴⁹ without the opening of the corridor for what is now established as ingequence or the international responsibility to protect, the war would not have lasted beyond a year. It is suggested that the supplies were beyond humanitarian aid, helping the secessionists to recoup military hardware and consumables.⁵⁰ It is worth a mention here that this was the first time that the international responsibility to protect was deployed by the global community, and has since become a regular deployment in areas of conflict.⁵¹

The war ended in 1970 with the unconditional surrender by Ojukwu's deputy, General Philip Effiong on behalf of the government of Biafra. General Yakubu Gowon declared a no victor, no vanquished policy for the reunification of the country, after a fatality level of more than three million people.⁵² In 1975, a coup happened, this time without the concomitant bloodletting of its predecessors, removing General Yakubu Gowon and replacing him with General Murtala Mohammed, who immediately announced a transition programme determined to return to civilian rule by October 1, 1979.⁵³ He was however assassinated in 1976, but his successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo followed through with the promise of democratic transition. As a part of the transition, a new constitution was drafted, aligning to the American Presidential style, abandoning the Westminster Parliamentary style, indicating growing American and declining British, influence on Nigeria.⁵⁴ The elections held and received wide support from the international community, who mobilized observers to the election, giving it credibility.⁵⁵ The new President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was sworn in on October 1, 1979, effectively commencing the second republic. The successful and peaceful transition from military rule to democratic governance without external intervention received global acclaim and buoyed Nigeria's standing within diplomatic circles.⁵⁶ The United States, then under the Carter administration, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth welcomed the transition and offered their support.

The Second Republic, 1979-1983

The Shagari-led administration came at a critical point in Nigeria's history, after more than a decade of military rule. It had the duty of stabilising the polity and commencing the reintroduction of democratic norms which had been eroded by the military. Apart from stabilising the internal politics, they also undertook strategic posturing internationally, exerting their presence beyond their territorial borders by encouraging independence demands and democratic rule in other countries, for example the administration pledged \$15 Million during Zimbabwe's independence celebration in 1980.⁵⁷ The administration supported the fight against apartheid in South Africa and provided both financial and diplomatic support to liberation movements in countries like Angola, Mozambique and

⁴⁹ Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War'.

⁵⁰ Heerten and Moses, 'The Nigeria-Biafra War'; Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War'.

⁵¹ Montclos, 'Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War'.

⁵² Ademoyega, *Why We Struck*.

⁵³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*.

⁵⁴ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁵⁵ Kwame Dwamena Dakwa, 'Gulliver's Troubles: Nigerian Foreign Policy After the Cold War', BOOK REVIEWS, *Africa Today* (Bloomington, United States) 57, no. 2 (2010): 122-24; Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*.

⁵⁶ Timothy M. Shaw, 'Transition Without End: Nigerian Politics and Civil Society under Babangida', *Australian Journal of Political Science* (Abingdon, United Kingdom) 33, no. 3 (1998): 482-83.

⁵⁷ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

Zimbabwe.⁵⁸ These contributions bolstered Nigeria's image and facilitated her easy acceptance as a leader by other countries within the continent.⁵⁹

With Nigeria's return to democracy, foreign powers began to view it as a regional leader in West Africa and a powerful influence in the continent.⁶⁰ To shape its relationship with other countries and the international community, the administration championed continental unity (Pan-Africanism)⁶¹ and continued with the Afrocentric foreign policy, which was proposed by the Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa administration, where Africa was the centrepiece of the foreign policy.⁶² Apart from its afro-centric disposition, it remained noncommittal and non-aligned all through the cold war, choosing to engage with both the west and east, based on her national interest. So, in effect the country kept her national interest as the determinant of her engagement with other countries or block of countries. For example, while the country dealt with the west on traditional and historical basis like trade, security and other economic interests, they also interfaced with the socialists' countries on economic and technical projects, while clearly maintaining an ideological distance from socialism and communism.⁶³ This posture was well received by the international community, highlighting Nigeria's diplomatic independence.

Specifically, the United States of America and Britain were obviously elated with the return to democracy for different reasons-America, primarily because of the change to a presidential system styled after theirs, while Britain was impressed at the adoption and continuation of Common Law and other colonial legal systems.⁶⁴ Officially, the United States under the Jimmy Carter regime saw the democratization as a consequence and justification of their administration's promotion of democracy worldwide.⁶⁵ In Africa, there were mixed reactions, while countries like Ghana and Senegal were very welcoming and supportive of Nigeria's democratization, which they knew will enhance regional cooperation in West Africa through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), while countries under authoritarian rule viewed the development with suspicion and caution, conscious that with Nigeria's population and resources, its democratisation had the potential and capability to inspire and incite democratic movements in their country.⁶⁶

Economically, whilst the global financial community welcomed the return to democracy, which by their expectations guaranteed secure internal and external investments,⁶⁷ the time was too short for international investments to flow into the country significantly, as an offshoot of the

⁵⁸ Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*; Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

⁵⁹ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Ejitu Ota and Chinyere Ecoma, *Nigerian Foreign Policy And The Democratic Experiment: The Lessons Of History And Options For The 21St Century*, 1 January 2016, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.154756>.

⁶⁰ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

⁶¹ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

⁶² Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Julius O. Ihonvbere, 'The 1999 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: The Unresolved Issues', *African Issues* 27, no. 1 (1999): 59–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167008>.

⁶³ Aluko and Michael, *The Fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria, 1979 -1983*; Toyin Falola and Julius Omozuanvbo Ihonvbere, *The Rise & Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84* (Zed Books, 1985); Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁶⁴ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁶⁵ Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*.

⁶⁶ Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*; Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁶⁷ Maoz and Russett, 'Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986'; Russett et al., *Grasping the Democratic Peace*.

democratic transition.⁶⁸ However, international finance institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund offered financial and policy aids to the new administration, as a means of welcoming them to democracy.⁶⁹ It is believed that the oil boom of that period, which made Nigeria a major oil producer, had bolstered the country's global standing, making it difficult, if not impossible to ignore her in the global scheme of international engagements.⁷⁰ This boom, apart from the global recognition and the abundant financial resources it offered the country, became one of the biggest vulnerabilities of the economy due to the country's over reliance on it, neglecting other sectors.⁷¹

On the other hand, despite the high international support that the Shagari administration had earned because of Nigeria's democratization, it was not all bliss as there were concerns about the rising domestic instability within the country caused by heightened political rivalry, increasing fiscal deficits, largescale corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues.⁷² These were red flags that gave the international community a cause for concern about the sustainability of democracy in the country. As anticipated, the democratic experience was truncated by the military in 1983, citing the exact reasons the international community feared.

In essence, the international response to Nigeria's Second Republic demonstrates that support for democracy was contingent on its alignment with the strategic and economic interests of foreign powers. The initial acclaim for the 1979 transition was driven by the United States' satisfaction with the adopted presidential system and Britain's comfort with continued legal and economic ties, while Nigeria itself leveraged its oil wealth and regional influence. However, this support was shallow. When the Shagari administration began to falter due to domestic instability and economic mismanagement, the international community's concerns did not translate into meaningful action to bolster the fragile democracy. Their passive stance taken as the military coup unfolded reveals that the normative commitment to democracy was secondary to global calculations of stability and continued access to Nigeria's economic resources.

Military Rule, 1983-1999

The Buhari Regime, 1983-1985

In December 1983, the Nigerian military overthrew the civilian administration led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, effectively bringing the second republic to an end. The response of the international community to the military take-over was shocking, rather than offer condemnation and sanctions, the military administration received cooperation from western countries and an international institution.⁷³ The United Kingdom emphasized continued economic and diplomatic relations, despite the change in government from civilian to military, while the United States was more concerned with the cold war that was still on.⁷⁴ Even the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was silent on the coup in line with their non-interventionist disposition.⁷⁵ Many Africa countries accepted the new military government, though some neighbouring countries like Niger and Benin, complained of some the

⁶⁸ Russett et al., *Grasping the Democratic Peace*; Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave'; Aluko and Michael, *The Fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria, 1979 -1983*.

⁶⁹ Falola and Ihonvbere, *The Rise & Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*.

⁷⁰ Aluko and Michael, *The Fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria, 1979 -1983*; Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*.

⁷¹ Joseph, *Nigeria: Shadow of a Great Nation*.

⁷² Falola and Ihonvbere, *The Rise & Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁷³ William D. Graf, *The Nigerian State: Political Economy, State Class, and Political System in the Post-Colonial Era* (Heinemann, 1988).

⁷⁴ Falola and Ihonvbere, *The Rise & Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'; Graf, *The Nigerian State*; Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

⁷⁵ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

harsh policies of the administration like the border closure and currency policies changes, which impacted negatively on regional trade.⁷⁶ Additionally, there were international condemnation⁷⁷ on some of the harsh policies of the Buhari administration like the Decree 4, which was promulgated to curtail press freedom. Besides the condemnation, there were no sanctions or even a threat to severe diplomatic sanctions.

It is believed that the military administration's quick and strategic overtures to the international community facilitated its acceptance and kept sanctions away. The administration upon assumption of power, began the repayment of the first instalment of the \$1.9 billion loan owed to a consortium of European banks and began debt refinancing negotiations with the IMF. In the oil sector, the administration assured members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) of their preparedness to adhere to the existing quotas and price regime, thus earning the confidence of participating countries.⁷⁸ The military junta also assured the international community that all diplomatic treaties and relationships entered by previous governments will be respected.⁷⁹

The Babangida Regime, 1985-1993

In August 1985, the Buhari administration was toppled in a coup and was replaced by General Ibrahim Babangida, who immediately gave a promise to return the country to democratic rule. This promise in addition to the economic reforms which he accepted from the Bretton woods institutions, positioned him as a reformer which the international community welcomed with open hands.⁸⁰ The administration implemented the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as designed the World bank and International Monetary Fund by in 1986, signifying the deepened harmony that defined the country's international relations at that period. While it was a diplomatic streak⁸¹ for a military junta to pull through, the resultant economic woes impacted negatively on the economy and created domestic pressures and tensions for the administration,⁸² thereby increasing opposition to military rule.

Though General Babangida visited many countries and was very well received, with lavish ceremonies and other diplomatic courtesies,⁸³ some countries, especially those in the global north, began to complain about the continuous postponement of the return to civil rule.⁸⁴ The administration was relentless in offering assurances that the transition was on track, and that though it had shifted the handover date from October 1, 1992, a fully democratically elected government will be back in power in the country in 1993. The administration established a Political Bureau chaired by Professor Sam Cooley, to supervise the transition, in addition to creating two political parties-the National Republican Convention and the Social Democratic Party.⁸⁵ In a bid to avoid a carry-over of the bickering of the second republic, major politicians from the last republic were banned from participating in the third republic.⁸⁶ To expand the political space, in 1987 and 1991, the Babangida regime created 13 new states, which became 13 new political administrative points, which required election to fill the executive and legislative spaces required to run a state democratically.

⁷⁶ Graf, *The Nigerian State*.

⁷⁷ Oluwaseun Tella, 'Nigeria's Democracy Promotion in Africa: Hard, Soft or Smart Power Stratagem?', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 6 (2022): 1277–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221076103>.

⁷⁸ Aluko and Michael, *The Fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria, 1979 -1983*; Graf, *The Nigerian State*.

⁷⁹ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

⁸⁰ Shaw, 'Transition Without End'; Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*.

⁸¹ Dakwa, 'Gulliver's Troubles'.

⁸² Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁸³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁸⁴ Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁸⁵ Saleh Dauda, *AN APPRAISAL OF ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY USED AS A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA 1988-1993*, 6 February 2024.

⁸⁶ Falola and Ihonvbere, *The Rise & Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*.

To kickstart the handover to civilian leaders, elections were held at state level in 1991, and civilian governors were elected, sworn in. The twin houses of the National Assembly were also proclaimed in December 1992, after series of delays, giving hope of a total return to democracy. The presidential elections set for June 12, 1993, was the cynosure for all-citizens, international observers, international organizations, countries etc. The election was concluded and generally adjudged to have been free and fair by both local and international observers.⁸⁷ The results were announced at different sub-national levels, but the final result declaration was delayed and eventually the election was annulled.⁸⁸ This elicited widespread condemnation and protest internally, while the international community largely condemned the act without immediately following up with sanctions, apart from the United States and United Kingdom which suspended military assistance and financial aid, respectively. The commonwealth was very emphatic in their opposition because few years before the annulment, they had met and adopted the Harare declaration, which emphasised the need for democratisation.⁸⁹ Civil society organizations, both local and international held several protests, mounting significant pressure on the government.⁹⁰

General Babangida had earlier in January 1993, appointed a Transitional Council headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, to serve as the vehicle for a smooth transition from military to civilian rule. But following immense pressure after the annulment, the Head of State, handed over the government to an Interim National Government headed by Shonekan, in August 1993. This new and totally unexpected introduction to the political architecture of the country was strange and unworkable, because while it had a titular civilian head, who was powerless, the government was completely managed by the military under the command of the Chief of Defence Staff, General Sani Abacha.⁹¹ The Interim Government lasted for only two months, before General Abacha took over, informing that Shonekan had resigned and announced a Military takeover.⁹²

Throughout the Buhari and Babangida regimes it is obvious that the international community prioritized strategic stability and economic compliance over consistent democratic enforcement. Despite being military juntas, both administrations received cooperation rather than condemnation, because they strategically assured Western powers of their commitment to debt repayment, adopted IMF reforms, and adhered to OPEC quotas. The international community, particularly financial institutions, welcomed Babangida's economic liberalization under the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), effectively rewarding economic subservience, despite the pains inflicted on the local economy, conscription of political freedoms and the continuous postponement of an overtly delayed democratic transition. This period starkly illustrates that a military government could paradoxically maintain international legitimacy and avoid sanctions by guaranteeing the core economic and strategic interests of global superpowers, even when it defers and strangulates the democratic principles championed publicly by those powers.

⁸⁷ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁸⁸ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁸⁹ Olukayode Bakare, 'The Nigerian-Commonwealth and UN Relations: Nigeria, from Pariah State to Exporter of Democracy since 1999', *Cogent Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1658999, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1658999>.

⁹⁰ Shaw, 'Transition Without End'; Ismaila Adegboyega Ibraheem, 'The Power of Influence : Human Rights Organisations and Political Mobilisation in Nigeria (1990-1999)' (thesis, University of Leicester, 2003), https://figshare.com/articles/thesis/The_power_of_influence_human_rights_organisations_and_political_mobilisation_in_Nigeria_1990-1999_/10183268/1.

⁹¹ Adeoye O. Akinola and Ratidzo Makombe, 'Rethinking the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 27 January 2024, 00219096231224680, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096231224680>; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; First, *The Barrel of a Gun*; Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁹² Akinola and Makombe, 'Rethinking the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa'; Adewunmi Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria: The General Sani Abacha Regime, 1993-1998*, 4 (November 2018): 1–16; Raphael Chijioko Njoku, 'Deconstructing Abacha: Demilitarization and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria after the Abacha Era', *Government and Opposition* 36, no. 1 (2001): 71–96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00054>.

The Abacha regime, 1993-1998

The Abacha takeover and its attendant highhanded, attracted both largescale domestic protests and extensive international sanctions. Civil society groups like National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS),⁹³ etc. in the country mounted protests in different states, demanding an immediate return to civilian rule. In response, the administration mounted a stiff resistance, using force to suppress the pro-democracy demonstrations, in an unprecedented manner. On the international scene, there was widespread condemnation and sanctions on Nigeria, for example, the United States, issued visa restrictions to Nigerian officials and their families, in addition to the suspension of all humanitarian aid; the European Union followed suit with visa restrictions, arms embargo and stoppage of all development cooperation; in the case of the Commonwealth, they suspended Nigeria's membership of the group in 1995.⁹⁴

However, despite these sanctions and global condemnation, there was no ban on Nigerian oil exportation, which some scholars opine would have brought the military administration to its knees.⁹⁵ The reason for this is varied, some posit that the international oil companies had informed their home countries that if there was an oil exportation embargo, their assets would be expropriated to others or nationalised.⁹⁶ This inability to reach a consensus by the global community on the ban of oil export from Nigeria, despite the repeated calls by some countries and international civil society organizations, revealed the tension between the demand for democracy and the primary economic interest of countries. Within the continent, despite the traditional non-interventionist stance, expressed concerns about the Nigeria's democratic recoil, South Africa, under Nelson Mandela loudly criticised Abacha's administration, especially after the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa.⁹⁷ This opened a new intra-continental vista, coming from a fellow African leader. These sanctions and global rebuke made Nigeria an isolated nation, diminishing in esteem from its previous glorious height where it was the natural leader of Africa and cynosure of the global community,⁹⁸ it had now become a pariah state.

In reaction to the global pressure for the return of democracy, General Abacha in 1996 announced a programme of transition to civil rule, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) and proposed phased elections starting from Local Government Areas. It soon became obvious that the transition programme was just a process to convert Abacha from a military ruler to a civilian leader, using the pretext of elections.⁹⁹ He had influenced the five political parties to endorse him as the sole presidential candidate, in addition to various political groups and mass mobilization movements like Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha.¹⁰⁰ Despite the huge resources spent for such mobilization, the opposition against the self-succession was manifestly overwhelming,¹⁰¹ making the proponents ineffective.

⁹³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁹⁴ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'; Akinola and Makombe, 'Rethinking the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa'; Shaw, 'Transition Without End'; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

⁹⁵ E. Ngwuta Okorie, 'Annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question for Democracy in Nigeria', *SOUTH EAST JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE* 5, no. 1 (2020), <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SEJPS/article/view/1334>; Shaw, 'Transition Without End'.

⁹⁶ Clark, 'Non-Governmental Organizations and Their Influence on International Society'; Okorie, 'Annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question for Democracy in Nigeria'.

⁹⁷ Okorie, 'Annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question for Democracy in Nigeria'; Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

⁹⁸ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Okorie, 'Annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question for Democracy in Nigeria'.

⁹⁹ Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

¹⁰⁰ Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*.

¹⁰¹ Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton University Press, 1963), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183q1zx>.

The international reaction to the Abacha regime presents the most potent evidence of the limits of normative action when it clashes with vital economic interests. The annulment of the 1993 election and Abacha's brutal dictatorship finally triggered widespread condemnation and tangible sanctions, including suspensions from the Commonwealth and visa bans. However, the one sanction that could have crippled the regime—an oil export embargo, was conspicuously absent. This critical omission, driven by the economic interests of international oil companies and their home governments, allowed the regime to survive and even thrive through rampant corruption. Consequently, while the international community was willing to punish egregious anti-democratic behaviour symbolically, its refusal to enact the most effective economic measure revealed that strategic commercial interests ultimately trumped its professed egalitarian commitment to democracy.

Transition to the Fourth Republic, 1998-1999

In June 1998, General Sani Abacha died suddenly and was immediately succeeded by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who quickly announced a transition programme to last for a year. Despite this announcement, the international community responded with cautious optimism, drawn from the precedence with his predecessors.¹⁰² However, they began gradual diplomatic engagements with Nigeria, reducing the sanctions and opening communication with the new Military Government. The United States, under the Clinton Presidency dispatched high-level delegations to the country to ascertain the true state of things.¹⁰³ In fact, one of such visits has been steeped in unresolved controversy, relating to the sudden death of Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, who was put in detention by the Abacha administration.¹⁰⁴ The Commonwealth on their part also suspected the sincerity of the Military towards the transition programme, combining pressure and engagement, in their relationship with the country. They established a special advisory group to monitor the progress of the transition and monitor the elections.¹⁰⁵ International financial institutions prepared packages that were direct linkage to specific performances in the areas of democratic transition and economic reforms, thereby creating material incentives for the return of democracy.¹⁰⁶

A new constitution under which the new democratic regime was to operate was promulgated and elections conducted at all levels. The international community used many election observer groups to pay close attention to the procedure and outcome of the elections and were satisfied that substantive compliance had been met, though there were still obvious gaps and setbacks.¹⁰⁷ Former military Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, who had just been released from prison, contested under the platform of the People's Democratic Party and won as the President. He was sworn in on May 29, 1999, effectively marking the commencement of the fourth republic. This election was well received within the continent and beyond.

As a follow-up from the elections, and drawing from lessons of the past, the international community felt a sense of responsibility¹⁰⁸ to guide and guard the newfound democracy to survive. Many countries who had completely withdrawn or significantly restricted their diplomatic channels

¹⁰² Akinola and Makombe, 'Rethinking the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa'; Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*.

¹⁰³ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

¹⁰⁴ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'.

¹⁰⁵ Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

¹⁰⁶ Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

¹⁰⁷ Okorie, 'Annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question for Democracy in Nigeria'; Said Adejumobi, ed., *Democratic Renewal in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137484345>; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

¹⁰⁸ Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

with Nigeria, immediately reopened the channels, and offered their support for the country. The united states lifted its embargo, and the Commonwealth restored the country's membership.¹⁰⁹

The successful transition to the Fourth Republic in 1999 underscores that international influence is most effective when it is strategically applied and linked to clear material incentives. Following Abacha's death, the international community, burned by previous deceptions, engaged with General Abubakar's transition program through a combination of cautious diplomatic re-engagement and conditional offers of financial support from institutions like the IMF. This created a direct linkage between democratic progress and economic reward. The deployment of election observers to give legitimacy to the process further cemented this conditional support. This final transition, therefore, was not solely a product of internal pressure but was significantly facilitated by an international strategy that manages both normative support and pragmatic interest, ensuring that the return to democracy also served the international community's interest in a stable and cooperative regional partner.

CONCLUSION

The study of the international response to Nigeria's democratic practice reveals the tension that occurs when the normative drive for democratisation clashes with the primary economy national interests of some countries.¹¹⁰ It shows that no solution is automatic and must be very well analysed before implementation. The role and influence of the international community can be seen throughout the entire chronological scope of the work, the difference however lies in the strategy, intensity and severity, because during second republic, which coincided with the global democratization waves, they applied subtle pressure, advocating democracy as a normative disposition that aligned with human rights protection, economic advancement etc. During the military interregnum led by Buhari and Babangida, the global community exerted influence, by open condemnation, but did not sever diplomatic relations or issue sanctions, but during the Abacha regime, the full range of sanctions were issued, save oil export ban. From the study, it is obvious that away from the democratization promotion, their strategic national or global interest were determinant of the degree of influence that they exerted on Nigeria, during the various attempts at democracy.

Interestingly, the Nigerian scenario offers important insights into the potentials, challenges and limitations of external influence in achieving democratisation. During the Abacha era, despite the massive economic and diplomatic sanctions issued against Nigeria, the impact was more on the citizens than the ruling elite-who continued as though everything was normal,¹¹¹ in fact the administration used the period to corruptly enrich themselves and save the ill-acquired resources in Europe, as later events have revealed.¹¹² It is obvious that without the local civil society organisations like NANS, NADECO, the press community etc, the international pressure would have been almost ineffective in giving the needed discomfort to the military.

Finally, as Nigeria continues its democratic journey in the twenty-first century, the lessons from this formative period remain relevant. International engagement with Nigerian democracy continues to balance normative principles against strategic interests, with energy security and regional stability often competing with democracy promotion goals. Understanding the patterns established during this crucial period provides important context for analysing contemporary international responses to Nigeria's ongoing democratic challenges.

¹⁰⁹ Oni and Taiwo, 'Re-Thinking Nigeria's Foreign Policy Beyond "Big Brotherism" Towards Economic Diplomacy'; Wyss, 'THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA'.

¹¹⁰ Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*.

¹¹¹ Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*.

¹¹² Falode, *The Military and Political Development in Nigeria*.

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