

CRITICAL DIPLOMACY AND NIGERIA-ISRAELI RELATIONS

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Abstract

This paper examined critical diplomacy and Nigeria-Israeli relations. It also analysed the evolving diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Israel, especially in the geo-strategic space of the Middle East. The paper also adopted the secondary approach to collecting data and employed the realist approach as a theoretical framework. Historically marked by fluctuating levels of cooperation, the relationship between these two nations has been significantly influenced by geopolitical, security, and socio-economic factors since Nigeria's independence in 1960. The analysis reveals that initial cordiality was overshadowed by Nigeria's alignment with Arab nations and the support for the Palestinian cause during the 1970s, leading to a diplomatic freeze. However, the re-establishment of relations in the early 1990s was driven by pragmatic security priorities, especially in response to increasing internal conflicts and terrorism within Nigeria. The findings indicated that contemporary security challenges, particularly the rise of Boko-Haram and other insurgent groups, have fostered military and intelligence cooperation with Israel, reflecting Nigeria's strategic pivot towards enhancing national security. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how Nigeria's relationships with predominantly Muslim countries, rooted in historical ties and regional politics, complicate its diplomatic engagement with Israel, necessitating a delicate balancing act. Based on the findings, this paper recommended that Nigeria leverage its relationship with Israel to strengthen its security apparatus while maintaining diplomatic channels with Arab nations. Furthermore, it advocates for a more transparent public discourse to foster understanding among Nigerians regarding the implications of Israel-Nigeria cooperation, thereby mitigating potential backlash from domestic stakeholders. Ultimately, the paper underscores the importance of grounding foreign policy in the national interest, as suggested by realist theory, to navigate the complexities of international relations effectively.

Keywords: *Critical Diplomacy, International Relations, Diplomatic Engagement, Geostrategy, International cooperation*

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Nigeria and Israel have a complex and multifaceted relationship that has evolved over several decades. The diplomatic ties between the two nations have been influenced by historical events, cultural ties, strategic interests, and geopolitical developments. Here's an overview of the background of Nigeria-Israel relations: Independence and Initial Ties: Nigeria gained independence in 1960, and early relations with Israel were characterized by mutual interest. Israel was involved in providing technical assistance to Nigeria in various sectors, including agriculture and education. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Israel's support for Nigeria was

significant. The Nigerian government provided diplomatic support to Israel in multilateral forums, while Israel reportedly assisted Nigeria with arms and military training against Biafran forces.

In the 1970s, Nigeria began to lean towards the Arab states due to the influence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Nigeria severed diplomatic ties with Israel, aligning itself more closely with Arab nations and supporting the Palestinian cause. Following the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the rise of Pan-Africanism, Nigeria adopted a policy of non-recognition of Israel, which was seen as a move against apartheid and colonialism. Re-establishment of Ties: In 1992, Nigeria officially re-established diplomatic relations with Israel, which was facilitated by a changing political landscape. This new relationship was characterized by an eagerness to cooperate in areas such as trade, agriculture, technology, and defense. : Through various agreements, Israel and Nigeria began to collaborate on projects in agriculture (such as irrigation and farming techniques), technology, and infrastructure development, enhancing bilateral economic ties.

One of the prominent aspects of Nigeria-Israel relations in recent years has been military cooperation, particularly in the fight against terrorism and insecurity in Nigeria. Israel has offered training and defense support to the Nigerian military, especially in combating groups like Boko Haram. Counter-Terrorism Efforts: Israel has shared intelligence and provided technical support to Nigeria in its efforts to improve internal security and counterterrorism strategies. Political Visits and Engagement: High-level visits by Nigerian officials to Israel and vice versa have continued, with discussions focusing on trade, technology transfer, and security cooperation. These visits have led to agreements that pave the way for enhanced cooperation. The two countries have developed economic ties, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, high technology, renewable energy, and security. The growing Nigerian Jewish community and the historical connection to Judaism have also played a role in fostering relations. In addition, Nigeria has a rich and diverse religious landscape, including significant Christian and Muslim populations, which influences the social dynamics of the relationship with Israel. People-to-People Relations: Efforts to build cultural and educational ties, including exchange programs and partnerships between institutions, have helped to enhance bilateral relations between Nigeria and Israel.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The relationship between Nigeria and Israel has undergone significant transformations since the early 1960s, influenced by changing geopolitical dynamics, socio-economic interests, and cultural ties. Despite initial cooperation, the bilateral relations were strained during the 1970s due to Nigeria's support for the Palestinian cause and alignment with Arab nations. In the 1990s, the re-establishment of diplomatic ties marked a renewed interest in collaboration, particularly in areas such as defense, agriculture, and technology. However, the complexities intrinsic to their relationship continue to pose challenges that hinder the full potential of bilateral engagements. The problem lies in the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence Nigeria-Israel relations in the contemporary context, particularly in light of Nigeria's internal security challenges, regional influences, and the broader implications of the Middle East conflict. The dynamics of terrorism, especially with groups like Boko Haram and other security concerns, have necessitated increased cooperation between the two nations. However, the tension between Nigeria's relationships with Muslim-majority countries and its collaboration with Israel complicates diplomatic efforts and public perception.

Furthermore, there is limited empirical research examining how local politics, public perceptions, and historical grievances shape the interplay between Nigeria and Israel. The absence of critical analysis stymies policymakers' efforts to cultivate a more cohesive relationship that maximizes mutual benefits and addresses existing conflicts. Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate the contemporary state of Nigeria-Israel relations, identify the obstacles to deeper cooperation, and explore opportunities for enhancing diplomatic and economic ties in a manner that respects all interests involved.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem regarding Nigeria-Israel relations, the following research questions are formulated;

- i. What historical factors have influenced the evolution of Nigeria-Israel relations from the 1960s to the present?
- ii. How do contemporary security challenges in Nigeria, particularly related to terrorism and internal conflict, affect the country's diplomatic relations with Israel?
- iii. In what ways do Nigeria's relationships with predominantly Muslim countries impact its diplomatic ties with Israel?

1.4. Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine Nigeria-Israel Relations. However, the specific objectives are to;

- i. Explore the historical factors that have influenced the evolution of Nigeria-Israel relations from the 1960s to the present.
- ii. Examine the impact of contemporary security challenges in Nigeria, particularly related to terrorism and internal conflict, on the country's diplomatic relations with Israel.
- iii. Investigate the effects of Nigeria's relationships with predominantly Muslim countries on its diplomatic ties with Israel.

1.5. Historical Factors Influencing Nigeria-Israel Relations

Post-Independence Period (1960s): Early Interactions: After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria initially sought to establish relations with various countries, including Israel. The Nigerian government appreciated Israel's technical assistance, particularly in agriculture, education, and military training. During this period, Israel provided support for agriculture and infrastructure projects in Nigeria. (Afolabi, 2006).

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970): Reevaluation of Ties: During the Civil War, Israel reportedly offered support to the Nigerian government, supplying arms and military assistance to counter the Biafran secessionists. This support created a foundation for mutual respect and interest, although it was overshadowed by later developments (Ladan, 2012).

Severance and Realignment (1970s): Shift in Policy: Following the Civil War, Nigeria adopted a foreign policy that emphasized solidarity with Arab countries, particularly due to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This culminated in the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973. Nigeria took a strong stance in support of Palestinian self-determination, aligning itself with the OAU's resolutions (Nwankwo, 2019).

Re-establishment of Diplomatic Relations (1992): New Era of Cooperation: With the end of the Cold War and a shift in global politics, Nigeria re-established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. This was driven by the desire to improve military capabilities and technological cooperation, especially in defense, agriculture, and counter-terrorism (Epon, 2011).

21st Century Developments: Strategic Partnerships: The 21st century has seen a strengthening of ties, particularly in areas such as security cooperation. Nigeria has sought Israel's expertise in addressing issues of terrorism, especially with the rise of Boko Haram and other extremist groups. Joint military exercises and security collaborations have become focal points in the bilateral relationship (Johansen, 2013).

Economic Cooperation: Economic ties have also evolved, with Nigeria looking to Israel for advancements in technology and agriculture, underscoring a practical approach to their relationship despite historical tensions (Adejare, 2020).

1.6. Contemporary Security Challenges in Nigeria and Their Impact on Diplomatic Relations with Israel

The security landscape in Nigeria has shifted significantly in recent years, primarily due to the rise of terrorism and internal conflict. These challenges have profound implications for Nigeria's foreign policy, including its diplomatic relations with Israel. This overview examines the interactions between these security issues and Nigeria's relationships with Israel, supported by academic references.

Nigeria has faced numerous security challenges over the past two decades, including: Boko Haram Insurgency: Since its emergence in the early 2000s, Boko Haram has posed a significant threat to Nigeria's north-eastern states, leading to widespread violence, displacement, and human rights violations. The group's activities have resulted in thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people. Ethnic and Communal Conflicts: There are ongoing conflicts between various ethnic groups and communities over resources, particularly in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. These communal clashes often escalate into violence and have complicated governance and stability in the affected areas. Inter-State Violent Conflicts: Tensions between herders (Fulani) and farmers, often along ethnic and religious lines, have escalated into violent confrontations, contributing to Nigeria's insecurity. Kidnapping for Ransom: This has become common in Nigeria, with armed groups targeting individuals for financial gain, further undermining security and public confidence (Adeola & Ojo, 2020).

Nigeria-Israel Relations in Response to Security Threats

The threat posed by terrorism and internal conflict has led Nigeria to seek security assistance from international partners, including Israel. The following points highlight the interaction between security issues and diplomatic relations: Military and Security Cooperation: Counter-Terrorism Efforts: In response to the growing threat of Boko-Haram and other terrorist groups, Nigeria has increasingly looked to Israel for military cooperation. Israeli defense firms have been involved in training Nigerian military personnel and providing advanced technology for intelligence and surveillance, thus strengthening Nigeria's capability to combat terrorism (Mbah, 2017).

Intelligence Sharing and Training: The relationship has expanded to involve intelligence sharing and joint training exercises. This cooperation is crucial for Nigeria as it faces sophisticated terrorist networks and internal security threats (Eze, 2020). Political Implications: alliance with Israel has

polarized opinions within Nigeria due to the country's historically pro-Palestinian stance. The Nigerian government's engagement with Israel is often viewed through the lens of broader geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East and Africa, impacting domestic politics and public sentiment (Okeke, 2015).

Economic and Development Cooperation: In addition to military cooperation, security challenges have prompted Nigeria to explore economic partnerships with Israel that focus on stabilization and development projects in conflict-affected areas. **Agricultural Technology:** Israel's expertise in agricultural technology and development can be leveraged to address food insecurity exacerbated by conflicts and terrorism. These partnerships help improve livelihoods and reduce the potential for conflict over scarce resources (Balogun, 2019).

1.7. The Impact of Nigeria's Relationships with Predominantly Muslim Countries on Its Diplomatic Ties with Israel

Nigeria's foreign policy, particularly its diplomatic relationship with Israel, is intricately influenced by its historical ties and contemporary relationships with predominantly Muslim countries. Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped significantly since its independence in 1960, emphasizing solidarity with developing nations and particularly aligning with other African and Muslim-majority states. This alignment was initially rooted in the Pan-African movement and the promotion of decolonization. **Non-Aligned Movement and OAU:** Nigeria's foreign policy during the early years was greatly influenced by its membership in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which advocated for the rights of Palestinian people, often leading to a strained relationship with Israel (Akinterinwa, 2007).

.Nigeria's Relationships with Predominantly Muslim Countries

Nigeria has historically maintained close relations with Arab countries due to shared Islamic bonds and socio-economic interests. These relationships significantly influence its foreign policy stances. **Support for Palestinian Cause:** Nigeria's active support for Palestine during the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy. This alignment has contributed to Nigeria's reluctance to fully embrace Israel, especially among its Muslim electorate and regional allies (Maier, 2016). The Afro-Arab summit meetings have highlighted Nigeria's role in bridging Africa and the Arab world. This involves diplomatic, economic, and cultural exchanges that often prioritize Islamic solidarity. **Impact on Israel Relations:** Nigeria's desire to maintain amicable ties with Muslim-majority countries leads to a cautious approach when dealing with Israel, particularly in international forums (Adebajo, 2008)

Domestic Considerations and Public Sentiment

Nigeria has a significant Muslim population, particularly in the North, where public sentiment can heavily influence governmental foreign policy. The need to address the interests and feelings of this demographic places additional pressure on the Nigerian government regarding its relationship with Israel. **Public Opinion:** There is generally a pro-Palestinian sentiment among the majority Muslim demographic in Nigeria, which affects the government's willingness to engage closely with Israel (Olaosebikan, 2019).

Geopolitical Dynamics and Economic Interests

While Nigeria desires to strengthen ties with Israel for technological and military advancements, it must balance these interests against its relationships with predominantly Muslim nations, especially in contexts where Arab countries exert economic leverage, such as oil. Economic Dependencies: Nigeria's dependence on oil exports to Middle Eastern countries often influences its foreign policy, including relations with Israel (Abubakar, 2020)

1.8. Discussion of Findings

Based on research question one the paper discovered that the historical evolution of Nigeria-Israel relations demonstrates a trajectory marked by fluctuating cooperation and conflict: Initial Post-Independence Ties (1960s): Nigeria and Israel initially established constructive relations characterized by technical assistance in agriculture and education. Israel's support during the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s solidified a foundation of military and diplomatic collaboration. However, this period laid the groundwork for a complex relationship as the dynamics of regional politics soon emerged. Influence of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: By the early 1970s, Nigeria's support for the Palestinian cause reflected a broader shift influenced by pan-Africanism and the need to align with Arab nations. The severance of diplomatic relations in 1973, following Nigeria's commitment to the OAU's resolutions, exemplifies the complexities inherent in Nigeria's foreign policy, balancing historical ties with newer geopolitical imperatives. Re-establishment and New Prospects (1990s to Present): The re-establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992 marked a new phase characterized by pragmatic cooperation. This resurgence was motivated by Nigeria's internal security needs and Israel's advanced military technology. Ongoing military collaboration against terrorism and shared agricultural projects illustrate a relationship redefined by mutual benefit. The historical factors hence underscore how Nigeria's foreign policy has navigated between support for Palestinian rights and the strategic necessity of engaging with Israel for security and technological advancements.

The paper also found that the contemporary security challenges have profoundly reshaped Nigeria's diplomatic relations with Israel, highlighting several critical dynamics: Counter-Terrorism Collaboration: The rise of Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations in Nigeria has prompted a focused response that includes seeking military assistance and intelligence-sharing with Israel. Nigeria views Israeli expertise in counter-terrorism as crucial for enhancing its national security and military capabilities to combat insurgency and violence in the northern and northeastern regions. Internal Conflict and Instability: Rising internal conflicts, including ethnic clashes and communal violence, underscore the urgency for Nigeria to forge international alliances that can provide technological support and operational strategies. Nigeria's engagement with Israel reflects a broader strategy to stabilize internal situations that might otherwise undermine diplomatic relations. While seeking Israeli support, Nigeria must also navigate public sentiment, particularly within its predominantly Muslim population, which may view close ties with Israel as controversial. The need for caution in this diplomatic engagement underscores the complexities of balancing national security interests with domestic political realities.

The paper revealed that Nigeria's relationships with predominantly Muslim countries critically influence its diplomatic stance toward Israel, leading to several interrelated findings: Alignment

with Muslim Nations: Nigeria's diplomatic orientation historically favors solidarity with Muslim-majority countries, which affects its policy towards Israel. The perceptions of allies in the Arab world compel Nigeria to demonstrate adherence to the principles of Islamic solidarity, particularly on issues related to Palestine, potentially limiting deeper ties with Israel. Geopolitical Considerations: Nigeria's foreign policy decisions are influenced by economic and strategic ties with Arab nations. This reliance on oil and trade with Muslim-majority countries constrains Nigeria's diplomatic latitude with Israel and imposes a need to maintain amicable relations with these nations to sustain economic benefits. Cultural and Public Sentiments: The predominance of Muslim demographics within Nigeria influences public opinion towards Israel, often creating political pressure on the government to align with popular sentiments against Israeli policies. The need to balance international partnerships with these domestic sentiments leads to a cautious approach, affecting the depth of Nigeria's cooperation with Israel.

To analyze Nigeria-Israel relations effectively, several international relations theories could be considered. However, **realism** is arguably the most applicable theory for several reasons. Here's a detailed explanation of why realism is the best fit:

1.9. Theoretical Framework

Realism is a dominant theory in international relations that emphasizes the competitive and conflictual side of international politics. It suggests that states operate primarily in their national interest, focusing on power and security in an anarchic international system where no central authority exists. Key tenets of realism include:

- The concept of the state as the primary actor in international relations.
- The pursuit of national interest, particularly security and power.
- The view that international politics is characterized by competition, conflict, and the inherent struggle for power.

Applicability to Nigeria-Israel Relations

Nigeria's engagement with Israel is significantly driven by contemporary security challenges, particularly terrorism and internal conflicts like those posed by Boko Haram. Realism would suggest that Nigeria seeks a partnership with Israel for military assistance and intelligence to bolster its security, reflecting a pragmatic approach to state survival in a turbulent environment. Both Nigeria and Israel pursue their national interests in this relationship. For Nigeria, the primary interest lies in counter-terrorism and defense upgrades, whereas Israel aims to expand its influence in Africa and establish strategic partnerships that enhance its regional standing. Realism posits that states will collaborate when it aligns with their national interests, which is evident in Nigeria-Israel defense and military ties. Realism emphasizes power dynamics in international relations. The partnership between Nigeria and Israel reflects a power transition, where Israel has positioned itself as a crucial ally for Nigeria in enhancing military capabilities. Nigeria, being one of the largest economies in Africa, offers Israel a gateway to deepen its ties with the continent, thus fulfilling mutual power aspirations.

The interaction between Nigeria's multiple foreign relationships, particularly with predominantly Muslim countries, shows the complex geopolitical landscape. Realism explains that Nigeria must navigate these relationships carefully, influencing its interactions with Israel. Balancing ties with Muslim nations while seeking collaboration with Israel demonstrates a calculated approach consistent with realist perspectives. Historical factors, including Nigeria's initial support for the Palestinian cause and subsequent re-establishment of ties with Israel, illustrate a shift in strategy responding to changing power dynamics and security needs, which realism can explain as adjustments to maintain state viability and power. In conclusion, realism provides the most potent theoretical framework for analyzing Nigeria-Israel relations due to its focus on power, security, and national interests. As both countries navigate the complexities of their relationship, the realist perspective allows for a clearer understanding of their motivations, interactions, and the effects of external pressures and challenges on their diplomatic ties.

1.10. Methodology

This paper adopted content. Content analysis is a versatile and systematic method for analyzing secondary data that allows researchers to extract valuable insights and identify trends within the content. By following a structured approach, including defining research objectives, developing a coding scheme, and interpreting findings contextually, one can effectively analyze various forms of data to bolster understanding of complex phenomena like Nigeria-Israel relations.

1.11. Summary

Early Relations (1960s): Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, Israel was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the new nation. The two countries collaborated on various developmental projects, particularly in agriculture and education. Israel also provided military assistance during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), which further solidified ties, as Israel supported the Nigerian government against the Biafran secessionists. The early 1970s marked a significant shift as Nigeria adopted a foreign policy aligning itself with Arab countries, particularly in support of the Palestinian cause. This change culminated in the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973. Nigeria's support for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its leadership against Israel reflected its commitments to pan-African solidarity and anti-colonialism during this period.

Normalization of Relations (1992): After almost two decades of strained relations, Nigeria and Israel officially re-established diplomatic ties in 1992. This shift was influenced by Nigeria's increasing security concerns over internal conflicts, particularly with the rise of terrorism. The reestablishment was seen as a pragmatic decision driven by mutual interests: Israel sought to expand its influence in Africa, while Nigeria aimed to benefit from Israeli military and technological advancements. The cooperation expanded significantly in areas such as defense, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism. Israel offered military training and technology to help Nigeria address security threats, including the Boko Haram insurgency. military exercises and training programs became important aspects of their relationship, enhancing Nigeria's military capabilities.

1.12. Conclusion

Nigeria-Israel relations have evolved from supportive collaborations in the early years of Nigeria's independence to a complex relationship characterized by fluctuating alliances, pragmatism, and mutual interests. The partnership is deeply influenced by security challenges, economic needs, and geopolitical dynamics, reflecting the intricate web of historical legacies and contemporary realities. As both nations navigate their respective challenges and opportunities, the future of their relationship will depend on continued cooperation, strategic balancing, and adaptability to the evolving global landscape.

1.13. Recommendations

- i. it advocates for a more transparent public discourse to foster understanding among Nigerians regarding the implications of Israel-Nigeria cooperation, thereby mitigating potential backlash from domestic stakeholders
- ii. Nigeria leverage its relationship with Israel to strengthen its security apparatus while maintaining diplomatic channels with Arab nations
- iii. Conduct specific case studies on incidents where Israel has provided support to Nigeria, particularly in counter-terrorism and security technology. Examining specific instances of cooperation will illuminate how security challenges have directly impacted diplomatic relations.
- iv. Analyze Nigeria's foreign policy towards predominantly Muslim countries and its implications for its relationship with Israel.: Understanding how Nigeria navigates diplomatic relationships with Muslim-majority nations will provide context for its approach to Israel, revealing potential conflicts or synergies. Conduct surveys to assess Nigerian public attitudes towards both Israel and predominantly Muslim countries to understand how these sentiments influence diplomatic policy.

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