



“Guns-a-blazing”: What Trump's Language on Nigeria Reveals About United States (U.S.) Foreign Policy Style

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Abstract

In November 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to intervene “guns-a-blazing” in Nigeria to stop alleged persecution of Christians. This stark rhetoric unprecedented toward a long-standing African partner, provides a revealing case study of the Trump-era U.S. foreign policy style. This article analyses Trump's language and policy posture toward Nigeria, using secondary data and content analysis. The findings indicate that Trump's approach is characterized by aggressive unilateralism and populist signalling, often driven by domestic political considerations rather than nuanced diplomacy. Trump's confrontational rhetoric, from branding Nigeria a “disgraced country” to invoking America's “Department of War,” reflects a “guns-a-blazing” foreign policy style that prioritizes forceful action and moralistic narratives over multilateral engagement. The literature and empirical evidence suggest Trump's style aligns with a Jacksonian populist tradition emphasizing national interests and punitive expeditions in contrast to conventional U.S. foreign policy. The article discusses theoretical frameworks for interpreting this style and examines its implications, including risks of eroding U.S. credibility and straining bilateral ties. It concludes with policy recommendations, urging a recalibration toward respectful partnership and fact-based engagement in U.S.-Nigeria relations.

Keywords: Guns-a-blazing, Foreign policy, Trump, Nigeria, United States

Introduction

The U.S. president made international headlines by declaring on social media that the United States might go into Nigeria “guns-a-blazing” if the Nigerian government failed to stop the killing of Christians. “If we attack, it will be fast, vicious, and sweet,” Trump warned, instructing the “Department of War” (an archaic reference to the Department of Defense) to prepare for possible action. He vowed to completely wipe out the Islamic Terrorists responsible for “horrible atrocities” against Nigeria's “cherished Christians,” even if it meant designating Nigeria a violator of religious freedom and cutting off U.S. aid (Associated Press, 2025). These combative remarks including calling Nigeria a “now disgraced country” prompted immediate reactions in Abuja and across the globe. Nigerian President Bola Tinubu rejected the portrayal of Nigeria as religiously intolerant, insisting on the nation's constitutional protection of all faiths and emphasizing that Nigeria opposes religious persecution (Tinubu, 2025, as cited in Associated

Press). Nigerian officials welcomed U.S. help against Islamist insurgents but pointedly demanded respect for Nigeria's sovereignty (Eboh & Dzirutwe, 2025).

Trump's fiery threat marked a striking departure from diplomatic norms in U.S.-Nigeria relations, which historically have been cooperative in areas like counterterrorism and economic development. Never before had a U.S. leader so bluntly threatened direct military action against Nigeria, a sovereign nation and regional ally, on the basis of its internal security issues. The episode raises important questions about what this rhetoric reveals regarding U.S. foreign policy style under Trump. Trump's presidency (2017–2021) was known for its America First stance and unorthodox communication, but the Nigeria intervention threat of 2025 encapsulates several distinctive elements of his approach: a penchant for muscular unilateral action, an overt appeal to domestic political constituencies, and a stark simplification of complex foreign conflicts into



moralistic, binary narratives. This incident provides a lens to analyze how Trump's language and behavior on the world stage departed from or continued traditional U.S. foreign policy patterns. This article examines what Trump's language on Nigeria reveals about U.S. foreign policy style. Qualitative content analysis of Trump's statements and relevant secondary sources were employed, situating the 2025 Nigeria episode in the broader context of Trump-era foreign policy discourse. First, a literature review surveys existing analyses of Trump's foreign policy style and rhetoric, especially concerning Africa and human rights issues. Next, an empirical review draws on documented statements and policy actions by Trump toward Nigeria (and Africa more broadly) from derogatory private remarks early in his presidency to the 2025 “guns-a-blazing” threat to identify recurring themes and deviations. Finally, we conclude with an insights and offer policy recommendations for U.S. foreign policymakers and Nigerian stakeholders, advocating for a more balanced, partnership-oriented approach. The tone and analysis throughout mirror a policy analysis style, aiming to glean lessons from the Trump Nigeria episode for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Literature Review

Trump's foreign policy defied easy categorization, often eschewing established doctrines in favor of a personal “deal-making” and confrontational style. Scholars and analysts have frequently described Trump's approach as populist nationalism or aligned with the Jacksonian school of American foreign policy thought (Ashford, 2025). Beyond the international relations literature, contemporary public governance scholarship argues that policy effectiveness depends upon institutional accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making, and adherence to established governance principles. Public institutions derive legitimacy when policy choices are informed by objective evidence rather than ideological preferences. Ademeso (2025) argues that governance effectiveness is strengthened where decision-making processes emphasize accountability, transparency, participation, and institutional responsiveness. These governance principles are equally applicable to foreign policy

because international decisions founded on inaccurate narratives may undermine institutional credibility, diplomatic legitimacy, and policy coherence. The broader public policy literature similarly emphasizes that successful policy implementation depends on contextual analysis and institutional learning. According to Ademeso, Sa'id, and Salisu (2025), effective public policy requires continuous adaptation to changing realities through empirical assessment rather than assumptions or political expediency. This perspective reinforces the need for evidence-based foreign policy responses to complex conflicts such as those confronting Nigeria. In Walter Russell Mead's typology, Jacksonianism prioritizes national honor, security, and economic interests, showing willingness to use force decisively when core interests or pride are perceived to be at stake (Mead, 2017; Ashford, 2025). Indeed, Trump's statements and actions suggest a worldview in which the United States should not hesitate to strike fast and vicious blows against enemies (or those portrayed as such), rather than engage in protracted nation-building or multilateral conflict resolution. As Ashford (2025) observes, Trump favored circumscribed but forceful military action to advance U.S. interests... entirely consistent with a Jacksonian worldview.

This translated into a punitive expedition ethos (Ashford, 2025) exemplified by the threat to hit Nigerian insurgents hard, that diverges from the more cautious, alliance-centered approach of prior administrations.

Another hallmark of Trump's foreign policy style was its populist rhetorical dimension. Trump often framed international issues in simplistic, us-vs-them terms that resonated with specific domestic audiences. His administration frequently bypassed traditional diplomatic channels, instead using tweets, rallies, and posts on platforms like “X” (twitter) to speak directly in a brash, uncensored manner. Analysts note that Trump's foreign policy rhetoric was aimed at creating a sense of crisis and mobilizing his political base (Luce, 2017; LSE IDEAS, 2020). By spotlighting certain foreign threats – often tied to themes of terrorism, immigration, or religious persecution. Trump could galvanize support among voters who



perceived him as defending Western (or Christian) civilization. In the Nigeria case, Trump's sudden focus on Christian genocide narratives appears tightly linked to the agenda of U.S. evangelical and conservative groups (Egbejule, 2025; Oladeji, 2025). Mariam Olawunmi Oladeji (2025) observes that Trump's Africa policy in late 2025 was being “steered” by U.S. domestic politics, with Trump responding to a long-running demand of evangelicals in his base by blacklisting Nigeria for religious freedom violations and even threatening military intervention. In other words, Trump's posture toward Nigeria was less about Nigeria per se and more about satisfying a U.S. constituency that views global events through a religious persecution lens.

Trump's communicative style also broke from diplomatic decorum, occasionally employing derogatory or offensive language toward foreign nations. Early in his presidency, reports emerged that Trump had privately disparaged certain African nations (and Haiti) as “shithole countries,” prompting outrage from African Union officials and African leaders who labeled the remarks racist (Stoddard & Mfula, 2018). In the same vein, Trump reportedly complained in 2017 that Nigerian immigrants would never go back to their huts after seeing the United States, implying Nigerians all live in primitive conditions (Kperogi, 2025; Shear, 2017). Although the White House denied the specific wording, the incident reinforced Trump's reputation for using undiplomatic language that offended national sensibilities (Business Insider, 2017). Such remarks signalled a stark departure from the respectful public tone typically maintained by U.S. presidents, and they complicated Washington's relations with African countries. The African Union officially condemned Trump's vulgar characterization of African states, underscoring that “ours is not a shithole continent” (AU Mission, 2018). This pattern of abrasive rhetoric is an important backdrop for understanding Trump's later comments on Nigeria: by 2025, African publics and officials were already primed to view Trump's pronouncements with skepticism or resentment due to his past words.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this rhetoric,

Trump's substantive engagement with sub-Saharan Africa was limited. During his first term, he became the first U.S. president in decades not to visit Africa (Oladeji, 2025). His administration's Africa policy was often described as incoherent or inattentive, focused narrowly on counterterrorism and commercial competition with China, rather than strategic partnerships (Campbell, 2020). When Trump did turn his attention to African issues, it was frequently through the prism of domestic U.S. politics or transnational ideological battles. For instance, Trump garnered applause from right-wing circles for highlighting the plight of white South African farmers, alleging a white genocide in 2018, while showing far less interest in Africa's other humanitarian crises (Businessday, 2025). Similarly, Trump's administration in 2020 designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act – a tool meant to pressure countries over egregious religious persecution – at the urging of evangelical lobbyists (Cruz, 2020). However, this designation was removed by the Biden administration in 2021, which many observers saw as an effort to mend fences with Nigeria (Amaize, 2025). By late 2025, Trump's revived rhetoric on Nigerian Christians suggested a return to that ideologically charged narrative, now amplified by the high stakes of an election campaign and the public platform of a former (and potentially future) president.

Empirical Review

Trump's engagement with Nigeria has oscillated between neglect, transactional dealings, and explosive rhetoric. A review of key episodes reveals how his language evolved:

Reports from within the White House revealed Trump's disdainful view of African nations. In a June 2017 meeting, upon learning that 40,000 Nigerians had received U.S. visas, Trump allegedly fumed that they would never “return to their huts” in Africa (Kperogi, 2025). In the same discussion, he remarked that 15,000 Haitians granted visas all have AIDS. Although Trump's aides denied these specific quotes, the incident (first reported by The New York Times) was widely seen as evidence of Trump's prejudicial mindset toward African (and other developing) countries (Mark, 2017). A few months later, in January 2018,



during an immigration policy meeting, Trump openly questioned why the U.S. should accept immigrants from “shithole countries” in Africa rather than from places like Norway. This comment leaked and sparked international uproar, the African Union and multiple African governments lodged protests, and Trump was forced to deny the phrasing while conceding he used tough language (Stoddard & Mfula, 2018). The damage, however, was done: Trump's name became synonymous with a perceived disrespect for Africa's dignity. Nigerian media and commentators drew a direct line between these racist tropes and any professed concern Trump might later voice about African lives (Kperogi, 2025).

Despite rocky rhetoric, Trump did host Nigeria's then-president Muhammadu Buhari at the White House in April 2018. In a joint press conference, Trump acknowledged the fight against Boko Haram and notably urged the Nigerian government to protect innocent civilians of all faiths, including Christians, from terror attacks. This was a more measured expression of the same concern (Christian security) he would later amplify. However, not long after Buhari's visit, Trump privately derided him as lifeless, according to a report in Financial Times (Cook, 2018). Such comments reinforced the impression that Trump lacked genuine respect for African leaders.

On policy, the Trump administration approved the sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft to Nigeria in 2017 (delivered later) to aid counterinsurgency – a pragmatic move reversing an Obama-era block on such sales (U.S. DoD, 2017). Yet Trump's interest in Nigeria's security remained largely transactional (focused on arms deals) and filtered through his terrorism-centric view of the continent.

In early 2020, the Trump administration added Nigeria to its expanded Travel Ban list (Presidential Proclamation 9983), effectively suspending immigrant visas for Nigerians (Kazeem, 2020). This decision, ostensibly over security and information-sharing concerns, blindsided Nigeria and strained relations. Nigerian diaspora groups in the U.S. protested what they saw as unjust collective punishment. Then, in

December 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (under Trump's direction) designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom, the first time Nigeria had ever been on this U.S. blacklist. The CPC listing was triggered by escalating violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt and northeast, which some U.S. officials and activists characterized as persecution of Christians. However, notably, the designation came in Trump's lame-duck period and was not accompanied by public haranguing of Nigeria. It did reflect how religious freedom had become a politicized foreign policy tool for the Trump administration: Nigeria's inclusion was cheered by evangelicals and some Republicans (e.g., Senator Ted Cruz) as holding Nigeria's officials accountable (Cruz, 2025).

After a relative lull during 2021–2024 (when Trump was out of office and Nigeria was off the CPC list), the issue roared back with Trump's campaign for the 2024 U.S. election and ongoing violence in Nigeria's Plateau and Benue states. Throughout 2025, American conservative media and advocacy groups highlighted attacks on Nigerian Christian communities, often invoking the term “genocide.” By late October, under growing pressure from allies like Ted Cruz, Trump who by this time had mounted legal challenges to the 2024 election results and was effectively maintaining a parallel administration's rhetoric redesignated Nigeria as a CPC on 31 October 2025 (Egbejule, 2025). The very next day, he issued his dramatic threat via Social media. In that post, Trump announced the U.S. would immediately stop all aid and assistance to Nigeria and warned that the U.S. “*may very well go into that... country, 'guns-a-blazing'*” if the Nigerian government did not halt the killings (Trump, 2025, as quoted in Associated Press). He emphasized that any U.S. attack would mirror the ruthlessness of the terrorist thugs and be done to defend “*our cherished Christians*”. On 2 November, Trump doubled down, telling reporters about his plan that U.S. troops or air strikes could be deployed to Nigeria to stop the violence (Eboh & Dzirutwe, 2025). He claimed very large numbers of Christians were being killed and that he had asked the Pentagon for options. Around the same time, a New York Times report revealed that U.S. Africa Command had



indeed drawn up contingency plans at the administration's behest ranging from light involvement (supporting Nigerian forces) to heavy options (direct strikes) (BusinessDay, 2025). In one video message, Trump cautioned, The Nigerian government better move fast... If they don't, there is going to be hell to pay (Trump, 2025, as quoted in BusinessDay).

Patterns in Trump's Foreign Policy Style Revealed

Trump's handling of the Nigeria episode illustrates several broader patterns of his foreign policy style:

1. Unilateralism and Coercive Posturing: Trump favoured threats and bilateral pressure over collaborative solutions. In this case, he unilaterally threatened military action and aid withdrawal, rather than working through the African Union, United Nations, or even engaging Nigeria in quiet diplomacy. A Nigerian lawmaker, Adewumi Adeyemi, described Trump's public threat as “deeply concerning and diplomatically inappropriate,” noting that it violates the spirit of the UN Charter which forbids the threat of force against sovereign states (Adeyemi, 2025). Trump's style thus harkens back to an earlier era of gunboat diplomacy an approach sometimes termed “guns-a-blazing” in itself where might make right. This tendency was seen in other contexts too (e.g., Trump's threats of “fire and fury” toward North Korea in 2017), but applying it to Nigeria, a partner country, was particularly jarring to observers. It reveals a foreign policy that is transactional and pressure-oriented, treating foreign relations like deals where the U.S. must show maximal strength to extract compliance.

2. Domestic Political Calculations in Foreign Policy: The Nigeria intervention threat did not emerge in a vacuum; it was heavily driven by U.S. domestic politics. Trump's language closely mirrored talking points of American evangelical advocacy groups and certain lawmakers (e.g., Ted Cruz) who had been lobbying on Nigeria's religious violence (Oladeji, 2025). By championing the cause of persecuted Christians, Trump shored up support among evangelical Christians in the U.S., a core part of his political base (Egbejule, 2025). This indicates a two-level game at play: Trump's foreign policy moves were

often crafted as messages to domestic constituencies as much as (or more than) to the foreign nations involved. In effect, Nigeria became a stage for Trump to project an image of the strong protector of Christianity, boosting his populist credentials. Former NSC official Cameron Hunter noted that Trump's base “has invested in the narrative of Christians as persecuted... They're applying a parochial worldview” to Nigeria (Hunter, 2025, as cited in Oladeji). The foreign policy style revealed here is one where domestic political theater can overshadow nuanced diplomacy – a hallmark of populist leadership.

3. Moralistic and Identity-Based Framing: Trump's rhetoric on Nigeria was strikingly moralistic. He painted a black-and-white picture of “Islamic Terrorists” vs. “Cherished Christians,” effectively casting the U.S. as a potential crusading savior (Trump, 2025). This absolutist framing is reminiscent of civilizational discourse; it resonates with the idea of a global clash between radical Islam and Christianity. By invoking such terms, Trump tapped into identity politics on an international scale. This style marks a departure from pragmatic or technocratic policy language; instead, it deploys emotive, value-laden language. The risk, as analysts point out, is oversimplification: “It is easy to paint the issue with the brush of religion... but the issue is more complex” (Salako, 2025). Trump's foreign policy style tends to sideline complexity in favor of symbolic grand narratives, which can be powerful politically but problematic practically.

4. Disregard for Expert Advice and Diplomacy: Reports indicated that Trump's Nigeria statements caught many in the U.S. foreign policy establishment off guard. State Department and Pentagon officials appeared bewildered by the abrupt shift of focus to an African crisis framed in religious terms (Gençoğlu, 2025). Traditional Africa specialists and diplomats had been largely sidelined; instead, Trump relied on media reports from conservative outlets and input from non-traditional advisors. Pauline Bax of International Crisis Group noted that Trump's administration sidelined traditional diplomats and took on information funneled by pressure groups, effectively treating evangelical narratives as



gospel (Bax, 2025, as cited in Oladeji). This illustrates a leadership style that often-undervalued professional diplomatic channels and on-the-ground expertise, favoring impulsive decision-making based on ideologically filtered information.

5. Mixed Signals in Implementation: Finally, Trump's style, while aggressive in rhetoric, sometimes showed inconsistency in follow-through. For instance, after threatening Nigeria, Trump mentioned he envisages a lot of things but gave no concrete plan. His own officials, such as Defense Secretary (if any in an acting capacity at the time), offered reassurances of support to Nigeria without endorsing the extreme language (Oladeji, 2025). This gap between Trump's words and the institutional stance is a pattern noted throughout his presidency a rhetoric reality gap (Smith, 2019) that often-left allies confused about actual U.S. policy. In Nigeria's case, while Trump spoke of intervention, U.S. security cooperation continued in the background in conventional ways (training, arms sales). The style, however, was to keep adversaries and even allies off-balance by unpredictable, bold statements a tactic Trump himself touted as the art of strategic unpredictability.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze Trump's foreign policy style as evidenced by his language on Nigeria, it is useful to draw on international relations theories and foreign policy analysis concepts. Three frameworks in particular shed light on Trump's "guns-a-blazing" approach:

- (A) Jacksonian populism
- (B) Domestic politics two-level games,
- (C) Constructivist identity narratives.

Jacksonian Populism:

Walter Russell Mead's typology of American foreign policy traditions Wilsonian, Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, and Jacksonian – has often been invoked to explain Trump. The Jacksonian tradition, named after President Andrew Jackson, is populist, nationalist, and skeptical of global institutions. It prioritizes the physical security and economic well-being of the American people over abstract internationalist goals. Jacksonians are not

inherently expansionist, but they are quick to advocate overwhelming force when they perceive a threat or an insult to U.S. honor (Mead, 2017). Trump's Nigeria stance fits this mold in several ways. He depicted the situation as an affront to American values (Christians being slaughtered) and thus to be met with a "punitive expedition" style response (Ashford, 2025). This is consistent with Jacksonians' preference for military solutions that deliver decisive victory rather than prolonged engagements aimed at reforming other societies. Trump's threat was essentially a punishment directive: wipe out the terrorists, and by extension punish Nigeria's government for failing to protect its people. We can also see echoes of Jacksonian thinking in Trump's emphasis on sovereignty and distrust of multilateral constraints ironically, even as he violated Nigeria's sovereignty rhetorically. Jacksonians view international law and institutions with suspicion, so it is not surprising that Trump showed no compunction in flouting UN norms about non-interference (Adeyemi, 2025). In Trump's worldview, American power answers to its own moral compass and interests, not to global rules. The Jacksonian lens thus helps explain the combination of belligerence and insularity in Trump's style: he championed an aggressive act (intervention) but justified it in terms of defending (Christian) lives, aligning moral righteousness with national assertiveness. It also underscores why Trump's foreign policy alienated many traditional allies – it marked a departure from the Wilsonian liberal internationalism that had long dominated U.S. policy. If Trump's style heralds a resurgence of Jacksonian influence, as some argue (Fontaine & Nagl, 2018), then we can expect more "guns blazing" talk whenever populist leaders perceive core values or prestige at stake abroad, even at the cost of diplomatic fallout.

Domestic Politics and Two-Level Games

Political scientist Robert Putnam's two-level game theory posits that national leaders simultaneously negotiate with foreign counterparts (Level I) and domestic groups (Level II), trying to satisfy both to achieve a deal. In Trump's case, the Nigeria episode illustrates how Level II (domestic) imperatives can effectively hijack Level I (foreign policy) decisions. Trump's actions make sense when viewed as moves in a domestic game: facing



electoral pressures and eager to shore up evangelical voter support, he took a hard line on Nigeria to signal commitment to Christian conservatives. This aligns with theories of populist foreign policy, where a leader uses foreign policy theater to galvanize the people against both external and internal elites (Müller, 2016). By lambasting Nigeria's government and evoking a rescue narrative, Trump portrayed himself as the champion of a cause his base cares about – thereby also distracting from domestic troubles and asserting a strongman image. The content analysis of his Truth Social post and speeches shows frequent use of emotionally charged terms (“horrible atrocities,” “cherished Christians,” “disgraced country”) aimed at resonating with U.S. audiences' values. The theoretical implication is that Trump's foreign policy was often audience-costly in the international arena but audience-rewarding domestically. He was willing to incur diplomatic rifts (e.g., offending Nigeria, worrying allies) to send a message that plays well at home. In traditional realism, domestic politics is a nuisance variable; in Trump's foreign policy, domestic politics often *was* the driver. This underscores the importance of unit-level analysis (looking at internal factors) in understanding seemingly irrational foreign policy behaviours. It also connects to the idea of diversionary foreign policy – using external conflict or posturing to divert attention from domestic issues (e.g., Trump's legal battles and political controversies in 2025). In essence, Trump's Nigeria gambit can be seen as a diversionary tactic wrapped in moral language, aligning with Putnam's concept that a leader will try to maximize domestic win-sets even if it complicates international cooperation.

Constructivist Identity Narratives

Constructivist IR theory emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and discourse in shaping foreign policy. Trump's language on Nigeria reveals a constructed narrative of identity – specifically a religious identity conflict. By characterizing the situation as Christians vs. Islamists, Trump adopted what can be termed a civilizational frame (Huntington, 1996). This is notable because it casts U.S. foreign policy in quasi-religious terms, positioning the U.S. as a defender of a certain cultural-religious identity (Christendom). This

approach differs from purely interest-based or materialist explanations; it suggests Trump (and advisors like Vice President Mike Pence or lobbyists like the Family Research Council) saw the world at least partly through an ideological lens of a cosmic struggle. The narrative of “Christian genocide” in Nigeria is a discourse that was socially constructed by advocacy groups and then amplified by Trump's platform. Constructivists would point out that this discourse doesn't align neatly with objective data (as ACLED data showed, the majority of victims in Nigeria were Muslim and only a small fraction of attacks explicitly target Christians). Governance scholars further observe that policy failures often emerge where political narratives overshadow institutional evidence. Ademeso, Bulus, and Chukwuemeka (2025) maintain that sustainable policy frameworks require continuous stakeholder engagement, contextual adaptation, and evidence-informed implementation processes. These principles are equally relevant for international policy formulation where external interventions depend upon accurate diagnosis of domestic realities. However, the power of the narrative lies in its repetition and the identity it reinforces – in this case, the identity of Trump as a savior of Christians and of Nigeria (or Africa) as a theater of Christian persecution. Theoretical perspectives on “enemy images” and orientalism are also relevant. Trump's depiction of Islamic terrorists in Nigeria dovetails with a broader tendency in his rhetoric to paint Muslim populations as prone to extremism (e.g., the travel ban targeting several Muslim-majority countries, including Nigeria). By constructing Nigeria as a place that allows Christians to be killed, Trump effectively othered the Nigerian state as either incompetent or complicit, necessitating American intervention. This reflects a classic constructivist insight: foreign policy can be driven by ideational motives (in this case, protecting co-religionists) and by constructed threats (the notion of a looming genocide) beyond tangible national interests. The risk of such identity-driven policy is the self-fulfilling prophecy of conflict: Nigeria's government bristled at what it saw as an unjust branding, and some Nigerian Muslim leaders condemned Trump's remarks as divisive, potentially deepening mistrust. Constructivist



theory thus helps explain both Trump's motivations and the normative backlash – many Africans perceived Trump's stance as a form of neo-imperialism cloaked in moral language, clashing with norms of sovereignty and equality. In applying these frameworks, it becomes clear that Trump's foreign policy style is not an anomaly but can be situated at the intersection of longstanding American currents and modern populist dynamics. Jacksonian realism explains the emphasis on military might and skepticism of global policing for altruistic reasons. Populist two-level games explain the domestic calculus overshadowing traditional diplomacy. Constructivist identity framing explains the narrative content and its resonance. Together, they portray Trump's style as a blend of power politics and identity politics – a style of going “guns-a-blazing,” rhetorically and potentially literally, under the banner of protecting American-defined values, even if doing so disrupts conventional policy process.

While Constructivism explains how identities and political narratives shape foreign policy behaviour, governance scholarship emphasizes that institutions have an obligation to subject political narratives to empirical verification before translating them into public policy. Ademeso (2025) argues that accountability mechanisms function effectively only when governance institutions prioritize factual evidence over politically attractive assumptions. This governance perspective complements constructivist explanations by highlighting institutional responsibility in policy formulation.

Conclusion

Donald Trump's language and stance toward Nigeria in late 2025 offer a vivid illustration of how his foreign policy style diverges from traditional U.S. approaches. The guns-a-blazing threat was more than a one-off outburst; it epitomized a consistent pattern in Trump's diplomacy aggressive, unilateral, domestically-driven, and framed in stark moral terms. Through content analysis of Trump's statements and the reactions they provoked, this study finds that Trump's foreign policy style is characterized by a readiness to use or threaten force in a highly public manner,

often to address issues defined by ideological narratives (such as religious freedom or terrorism) that resonate with his political base. This style represents a convergence of populist politics and foreign policy, where decisions are heavily influenced by the perceived demands of core supporters and where complex international problems are distilled into rallying cries.

One key revelation is how domestic politics and foreign policy fused in Trump's decision-making. In the Nigeria case, U.S. foreign policy was effectively being used as an instrument of domestic electioneering. This blurring of lines can undermine the credibility of U.S. commitments: allies and adversaries may question whether U.S. actions are driven by strategic logic or by transient internal politics. Indeed, Nigeria's government carefully calibrated its response – asserting sovereignty but also seeking dialogue – precisely because it recognized the unique nature of Trump's motivations (Oladeji, 2025). For observers of U.S. foreign policy, the episode underscores the importance of understanding leadership style. Trump's personal style, rooted in confrontation and showmanship, became U.S. policy style during his tenure and beyond. This has implications for America's global image: while some constituencies applaud the tough talk, others see it as a sign of unpredictability and disrespect for international norms.

From a governance perspective, policy legitimacy depends not merely on political intention but also on procedural accountability and evidence-based justification. Ademeso (2025) argues that transparent decision-making strengthens institutional legitimacy by ensuring that public actions correspond with verifiable evidence. Applying this reasoning to foreign policy suggests that interventionist rhetoric unsupported by empirical evidence may weaken diplomatic credibility and international cooperation.

Similar concerns have been raised within governance literature regarding policy decisions influenced by political expediency rather than institutional analysis. Ademeso et al. (2025) observe that governance reforms succeed where decision-makers employ objective performance information and stakeholder consultation rather



than ideologically driven assumptions.

Recommendations

The U.S. should address human rights and security concerns abroad through robust diplomacy rather than social media ultimatums. In the Nigeria case, a recommended approach would have been for the U.S. to work with Nigeria's government and regional bodies (e.g., African Union, ECOWAS) to support conflict resolution and humanitarian relief. Future administrations must avoid the appearance (or reality) of dictating to sovereign countries.

Institutionalizing evidence-based policy review mechanisms before major foreign policy decisions would strengthen both domestic accountability and international legitimacy. Governance scholars recommend integrating systematic policy evaluation, stakeholder consultation, and institutional learning into decision-making processes to improve policy outcomes (Ademeso, 2025).

While the U.S. has legitimate interests in preventing terrorism and atrocity crimes, these should be pursued with respect for the sovereignty and agency of partner nations. The “guns-a-blazing” approach should be categorically replaced with a “support-and-strengthen” approach. In practice, this means continuing security cooperation programs such as training for Nigerian forces, intelligence sharing, and equipment transfers but under the framework of Nigeria's requests and in coordination with its leadership. Any consideration of military action in another country (even limited strikes) must involve consultation with that country and ideally authorization from international bodies. Unilateral military interventions, especially in complex intrastate conflicts, have a poor track record (as seen in Libya, which has struggled with chaos post-intervention a caution Adeyemi noted). U.S. policymakers should heed that lesson and prioritize capacity-building over coercion.

Public sector governance literature further recommends collaborative governance approaches that emphasize partnership, institutional coordination, and shared responsibility among stakeholders. Such collaborative mechanisms are equally appropriate for addressing transnational security challenges requiring sustained cooperation between the

United States and Nigeria (Ademeso et al., 2025).

The Nigeria episode revealed how misleading narratives can capture policy. It is recommended that U.S. foreign policy decisions be grounded in rigorous intelligence and on-the-ground analysis. For example, claims of “genocide” or one-sided persecution should be vetted against data from impartial sources like the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) or human rights organizations. In this case, ACLED's finding that only 50 of 1,923 attacks in 2025 explicitly targeted victims for being Christian underscores the need for nuance. Policy pronouncements should reflect this complexity (e.g., acknowledging that both Christians and Muslims are suffering) to avoid alienating local communities and to craft more effective solutions. The State Department's human rights and religious freedom reports should inform public statements, rather than politically charged media narratives. Instituting an internal reality check mechanism where career experts review and comment on proposed high-level statements involving foreign conflicts could prevent situations where rhetoric gets far ahead of reality. Nigeria should take Trump's controversial comments as a wake-up call to double down on resolving the internal issues that gave rise to such criticism. This means intensifying efforts to reform its security sector, improving protection for vulnerable communities, and prosecuting perpetrators of violence regardless of religion or ethnicity.

Nigeria (and other African nations) should not underestimate the power of narrative in shaping foreign intervention debates. It is imperative to actively engage in the global information space to tell Nigeria's full story. This could involve regularly briefing foreign embassies, international media, and forums like the UN about the real situation and the multifaceted nature of the conflicts.

In face of unilateral threats, Nigeria should continue to lean on regional solidarity. ECOWAS and the African Union can be platforms to collectively assert that Africa's security issues require partnership, not coercion. The AU, for example, has a mechanism for peer review and conflict oversight; Nigeria could work through the



AU to invite U.S. support in a multilateral framework, turning a potential intervention into a cooperative mission with African leadership.

Nigerian diplomacy might also benefit from engaging not just with the U.S. government, but with U.S. societal actors that influence policy – including the religious groups and lobbyists who have driven the Nigeria narrative. Constructive dialogue with American evangelical organizations, for instance, could help channel their concern into support for peacebuilding initiatives rather than calls for military strikes. If Nigerian religious leaders (Christian and Muslim) jointly reach out to counterparts in the U.S., it could humanize the issue and perhaps shift the approach from confrontation to collaboration (e.g., church partnerships providing relief to victims of violence).

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