

Liberia's Foreign Policy Objectives

"A Comprehensive Overview"

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Abstract: Liberia is considered one of the oldest republics, not only on the African continent but also in the world. Its long-standing statehood, coupled with its participation in global geopolitics, has significantly contributed to its external diplomatic efforts at bilateral and multilateral levels and within international institutions. As a founding member of the now-defunct League of Nations (1920–1944), a founding member of the United Nations (1944), and a leading actor in the Monrovia Group—which led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in 1963, now the African Union since 2002—Liberia has played a remarkable role in representing Africa and the developing world in shaping international institutions during their formative stages. Nevertheless, national debates—particularly among progressive youth and academics—have emerged regarding the socio-economic implications of Liberia's historical role in international politics. While some argue that this influence has been minimal or disappointing, others contend that, despite Liberia's ongoing socio-economic development challenges, its active engagement in global politics has yielded notable outcomes. To understand this clearly, it is essential to examine the foreign policy of the Republic of Liberia, which may serve as a benchmark for assessing the extent to which Liberia has benefited from its deep historical involvement in international politics and its longstanding relations with contemporary civilized states. Based on available research works and analyses, there is a scarcity of academic work addressing Liberia's foreign policy. This article, therefore, seeks to help fill that gap. Consequently, a central question arises in efforts to strengthen Liberia's international relations and enhance its diplomatic engagement—making it more effective, efficient, influential, and aligned with national development programs: **What are the objectives of Liberia's foreign policy, and how could it be applied to maximize the interests of the country?** Clarifying these will support the alignment of foreign policy with national development strategies. The article adopts a qualitative method to draw a conclusion. The study concludes that Liberia needs to diversify the pathways of its diplomatic engagement to better serve its national goals, particularly through economic diplomacy and development diplomacy.

Keywords: Liberia, diplomacy, foreign policy, Africa, liberalism.



الملخص: تُعد ليبيريا واحدة من أقدم الجمهوريات، ليس فقط في إفريقيا بل في العالم – أُعلن عن استقلالها عام 1847م-، وقد أسهمت قدرتها الطويلة على البقاء كدولة، إضافة إلى مشاركتها في الجيو سياسة العالمية مساهمة بشكل كبير في جهودها الدبلوماسية الخارجية على جميع المستويات الثانية والمتعددة المتباينة وعلى مستوى المؤسسات الدولية وذلك بوصفها عضواً مؤسساً في عصبة الأمم (المنحلة 1920-1944م، عضواً مؤسساً في الأمم المتحدة 1944، وقائدة لمجموعة مونروفيا The Monrovia Group) التي أدت إلى تأسيس منظمة الوحدة الإفريقية 1963م، التي أصبحت اليوم الاتحاد الإفريقي 2002م، فقد لعبت ليبيريا دوراً بارزاً في تشكيل القارة الإفريقية والدولة النامية في تشكيل المؤسسات الدولية في مهد تطورها. ومع ذلك، ظهرت نقاشات وطنية خصوصاً في أوساط الشباب التقليديين والأكاديميين وصناع القرارات والسياسة حول الآثار الاجتماعية والاقتصادية لدور ليبيريا في السياسة الدولية التاريخية. وبينما يرى البعض أن هذا الأثر ضعيف أو مخيب للآمال، يجادل آخرون بأنه، على الرغم من استمرار التحديات التنموية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية في ليبيريا، فإن مشاركتها النشطة في السياسة العالمية قد حققت نتائج ملحوظة. ولكن يفهم ذلك جلياً، لا بد من فهم السياسة الخارجية لجمهورية ليبيريا التي يمكن أن تستخدم كمعايير ومقاييس مدى استفادة وتحقق ليبيريا نواتج فوائد من تاريخها العميق في السياسية الدولية وعلاقتها الطويلة مع الدول المدنية المعاصرة. وبحسب البحث والاستقراء، فإن هناك عدداً ضئيلاً من الجهود الأكاديمية في تناول السياسة الخارجية الليبيرية بحثاً. فتسعى هذه المقالة محاولة في ملئ تلك الفجوة. وعليه، يبرز السؤال الجوهري لتعزيز العلاقات الدولية لليبيريا وتفعيل مشاركتها الدبلوماسية – وجعلها أكثر فعالية وكفاءة وتأثيراً واتساقاً مع البرامج الوطنية للتنمية – وهو: ما هي أهداف السياسة الخارجية الليبيرية؟ إن توضيح هذه الأهداف سيسهم في موازنة السياسة الخارجية مع السياسات الوطنية التنموية. والدراسة مبنية منهاجاً كييفياً (نوعياً)، وتحللت إلى أن ليبيريا بحاجة إلى تنويع مسارات انخراطها الدبلوماسي لخدم أهدافها بصورة أفضل، ولا سيما عبر الدبلوماسية الاقتصادية ودبلوماسية التنمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : ليبيريا، الدبلوماسية، السياسة الخارجية، إفريقيا، الليبرالية

Introduction

Foreign policy is the set of goals, strategies, and actions that a state or a non-state actor pursues in its relations with other actors in the international system. Foreign policy reflects the interests, values, and preferences of the actor, and it guides its decisions and behaviours in the global arena. (Jindal Global University, 2024). Foreign policy is the handbook of states' foreign interaction with one another and with other actors of international relations, such as public international organizations, multilateral institutions, transnational cooperation, and others. It is used as a hook to achieve domestic policies and programs, especially in the never-before-seen interconnected, interdependent, and globalized world. The Republic of Liberia is one of the oldest nation-states in the world, perhaps the oldest on the African continent, and the second black-dominated republic after Haiti. It is uniquely positioned in global geopolitics and diplomacy due to its roles in the formation of the world's leading intergovernmental organizations, such as the defunct League of Nations, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union, the ECOWAS, the Minor River Union and others. Liberia has historical ties with the United States of America, where the settlers arrived in the early 18th Century. The Liberian foreign policy goals and objectives are a hybrid collection of historical factors, national and regional security concerns, and

aspirations for social and economic development. This article highlights Liberia's foreign policy objectives, emphasizing its priorities in its two key concentrations: preserving national integrity and devotion to socioeconomic development. The article is aimed at providing recommendations towards an achieved implementation of the foreign policy objectives of Liberia. The process adopts a qualitative method to carry out the research.

Liberia's official foreign policy is firmly rooted in its political ideology of liberalism, democracy and capitalism. This foundation is copied after the pattern adopted by the United States of America, from where the founding fathers of Liberia had come as ex-slaves and free men of colour. The guiding principles of Liberia's foreign policy have been the maintenance of national security and the preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, the promotion of peace and harmony based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and unity in the national community based on the virtues of liberal democracy. The fundamental thrust of Liberia's foreign policy objective before the Tubman era was predominantly the maintenance of national independence. Since the Tubman administration to date, the foreign policy objective of the country, in addition to the maintenance of national independence, has been the devotion to economic, social, and political development.

Liberia's Foreign Policy Ideologies

Based on the above-mentioned policy, it can be inferred that Liberia's foreign policy has the following elements

Political ideology: every country or political system adopts a specific ideology as a foundation to make its laws, policies, rules and regulations, and to execute those laws, including foreign relations policies. Liberia is no exception to this rule; it has categorically made it clear in its foreign policy statement that every international engagement it undertakes, may and will undertake, must be based on three ideologies: liberalism, democracy and capitalism. Below are brief details about and on these three ideologies.

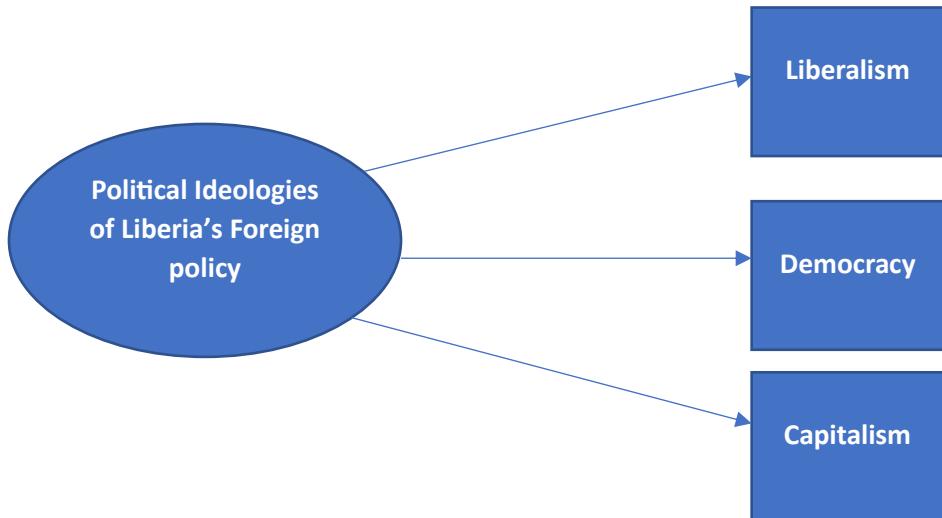


Figure 1 The Three Ideologies of Liberia's foreign Policy

Liberalism is a school of thought within political science in general and international relations and politics in particular; it gyrates and revolves around three interconnected theories. First, rejection of power politics is the only fruit of international politics and international relations. Second, it believes that foreign relations are based and must be premised on mutual benefits and global reciprocal cooperation, and finally, the liberals argue that international organizations and other non-state actors play a pivotal role in shaping states' priorities and policy alternatives. (Shiraev, 2014) According to some scholars, such as Andrew, there are three core assumptions of the liberal theory in the world of politics: basic liberal claims about essential social actors, the relationships between state and civil society and the circumstances under which states develop strategies and make choices in the international system (Moravcsik, 1992) Against the backdrop of the above, Liberia has and continues to be progressively aggressive in different international organizations over the last hundred years; a founding member of the League of Nations (1920) the United Nations (1945), Organization of African Unity (1963), now the AU (1999), the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) 1975, the Mano River Union (1973) and other major regional, continental and global public international institutions.

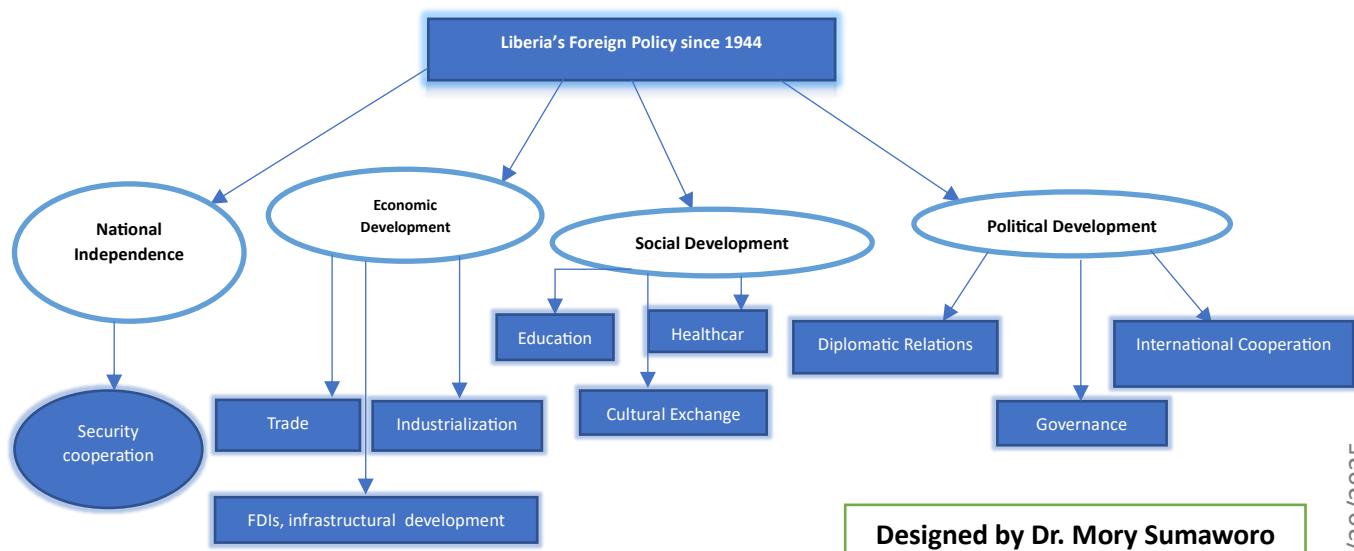
Capitalism: In International Relations (IR) and International Politics (IP), capitalism refers to how international economic and global financial institutions and management influence state attitudes and behavior, power dynamics, international cooperation, and mutual collaboration between states. Capitalism is characterized by private ownership of business, and market competition plays a pivotal role in shaping global geopolitics, trade, and development cooperation among states. It can be argued that Liberia adopts capitalist theory as an ideology in its foreign policy for three reasons. First, globalization is mainly and generally driven by capitalism as compared with other economic theories. Therefore, to easily navigate the global market by exporting its products and importing essential goods and services, capitalism was and is the best choice for now. Second, the global economy is dominated and predominantly by capitalists like the United States of America, the European Union, Japan, and others, a developing country with vast natural resources and opportunities like Liberia would have to be a time --sensitive to be aligned with the dominant economic system in the world until otherwise. Finally, capitalism and neoliberalism are intertwined and interwound. And of course, deregulation, privatization, and free market promulgation have been the key entrance points for capitalist economies that control a vast proportion of the global economy. Thus, alignment with that trend was well calculated by the Liberian foreign policy.

Democracy: The government of the people or the government of the majority, as defined by some scholars (Paula Becker, 2008). It is widely described by the US former President Abraham Lincoln as ‘the government of the people, by the people and for the people’. This form of political governance is the third ideology on which Liberia’s foreign policy is premised. Over the years, despite the many challenges, Liberia has had regular elections, the procedural aspect of democracy or procedural democracy. This was due to the fact that the above two ideologies, liberalism and realism, are predominantly promoted by the United States of America, where Liberia adopts most of its policy, due to historic-political ties between the two nations and based on the global influence of the States. In addition, global geopolitical and economic dominance was widely controlled by Western democratic systems, mainly the United States and Europe, to be aligned with the global order and to easily accommodate investments and socioeconomic and development cooperation. Liberia, perhaps, adopts democracy as one of its main foreign policy ideologies. This does not mean in any way or form that she cannot bilaterally, trilaterally, or multilaterally interact or engage non-democratic regimes as long as those interactions do not categorically uproot the democratic seed, and as

long as those engagements serve the national development agenda and Liberia's influence on the global scene. On the flip side, it can be categorically argued that substantial democracy (the real development and tangibles) has not been achieved in Liberia despite holding democracy as a pillar of its foreign policy and despite holding numerous regular and periodical elections from one president to another (Sumaworo, 2024).

Historical Priorities of the Liberian Foreign Policy

Over the years, there have been two historical priorities of the Liberian foreign policy. They are known as the pre-Tubman regime and from Truman up to the present. In other words, the foreign policy concertation from 1847 to 1945 and from 1945 to date. The pre-Tubman era was mainly characterized by territorial integrity and protection of national sovereignty, especially against the then ongoing British and French colonial and imperialist occupation in Sierra Leone, La Guinea, and La Côte d'Ivoire, respectively. On the other hand, from Tubman's era to date (1945--), Liberia has been striving for new foreign policy objectives and has formulated a new trajectory toward the realization of those aims. Those objectives are found in four files: maintenance of national independence, economic development, social development and political development.



Designed by Dr. Mory Sumaworo

National Independence: This refers to a country's ability, through internal and external efforts and engagement, to gain and maintain its sovereignty and self-governance completely free from any form of colonialism, imperialism, and interventionism. It is a key milestone in a nation's foreign policy objectives and engagement. Liberia has considered and continues to consider this since 1847, when there was an imminent threat from the British colonial expansion and imperialism in neighbouring Sierra Leone and the French colonial authorities in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. This FPO of Liberia (maintenance of National Sovereignty) never changes; it is a static objective, not a dynamic aim of the Liberian foreign policy. To fully achieve this, Liberia formed in the formation of most international organizations to demonstrate to the world then, that it was not only an independent state but also a vibrant and key player in international politics.

Economic Development: In international relations and external diplomatic engagement, the economy is key as it has a direct impact on national development policy; it creates jobs, builds infrastructure, and strengthens the sovereignty and independence of the state because it makes it more self-reliant. In other words, economic development is the process and strategy by which a nation improves the socioeconomic well-being of its people and raises the quality of life therein. It entails establishing manufacturers to process its natural resources for finished products for more value. Liberia, with endowed manifold natural resources and geopolitically and strategically located, must and could take advantage of these privileges to aggressively and progressively engage bilaterally and multilaterally with its diplomatic partners to maximize its international trade, and an influx of foreign direct investments (FDIs) as an economic outcome of its foreign relations.

Social Development: In order to pragmatically reduce the disparity between the different economic classes and the haves and the have-nots, a nation needs to not only rely on its domestic efforts, though it is paramount, the foreign direct investments (FDIs) are essential elements to achieve the targets. Education, healthcare, housing, and social justice could be highly improved with a national effort coupled with international cooperation and an attractive environment for interested investors in these areas. It is also paramount to note that international humanitarian and human rights organizations are *inter alia* key players in fostering

a nation's social development. Finally, cultural diplomacy, through which Liberia's rich cultural deposit and tribal diversification, plus religious plurality, are visibly noticed by everyone, must also be used as a conduit to positively portray the nation to the world and attract tourism and revenue generation.

Political Development refers to the strategic efforts a government carries out to strengthen its parastatals, governance structures, and diplomatic engagement in the global arena. In Liberia, since 1944, political development in foreign policy has concentrated and focused on solidifying Liberia's global position, fostering regional cooperation, and ensuring political stability through international collaboration. Indeed, these have not been satisfactorily achieved by succeeding administrations; however, fostering regional cooperation has been one of Liberia's biggest gains in Africa. For instance, the idea of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Cambridge University Press, 2009) was conceived in Liberia when the trio, President William Tubman, President Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, and Prime Minister Nkwami Nkrumah of Ghana, met between 15-19 July 1959 in the Liberian City of Sanniquellie to discuss the future of African solidarity and socioeconomic cooperation. Years later, the OAU became the African Union (AU).

Afterwards, the Monrovia Group, headed by Liberia, and the Casablanca Group, headed by the Kingdom of Morocco, engaged in a debate on how to run African politics; the former advocated for integration and economic cooperation while maintaining the independence of member states. On the other hand, the latter believed that it was necessary to have a United States of Africa. However, the Monrovia Group received dominance in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where the Charter was signed on May 25, 1963 (Rechner, 2006). In addition, Liberia played a pivotal role in the formation of the ECOWAS, Mano River Union, and other regional bodies for its political development and greater regional cooperation, economically, strategically, and politically.

Besides, at the global level, the Charter of the United Nations was signed by only a few African nations, including Liberia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Union of South Africa. All of these are clear illustrations of Liberia's eagerness to prosper in political development; unfortunately, the process has had a lot of political downs and turmoil, especially in the late 1970s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Those political fluctuations had a greater impact on growth, sustainability, and stability. Therefore, the architects, engineers, and executors of Liberia's foreign policy need to learn the

lessons from the past and craft a new trend and direction for political development focused on regional and global engagement.

The Implementational Challenges of Liberia's Foreign Objectives:

It is a fact that the well-crafted, smartly texted, visually documented Liberia's foreign policy, as discussed *supra*, has not impacted its development and socioeconomic prosperity. Indeed, the implementation and execution of foreign policy is a continued process; it never ends, however, it can be assessed and evaluated to determine its effectiveness and impactfulness from time to time. So, what are the challenges of Liberia not being able to satisfactorily achieve its foreign policy objective, especially its development and sociopolitical component? To answer, the following factors are considered

1- A One-way Direction, over the years, most of Liberia's diplomatic engagement has been categorically focusing on the West, mainly the United States of America and its Western allies. This approach cannot be categorically described as a wrong direction; it has relatively benefited Liberia on different fronts of development and governance. However, due to the longevity of the relations with the USA and other advanced Western nations, it can be argued that there is a need for a broader open-door policy. A pragmatic approach to an effective and more engaging new Open-Door Policy for Liberia is urgently needed.

2- Toward a broader approach of economic diplomacy, the foreign aid approach has never been as sustained, reliable, and effective as it is perceived. It comes with conditionalities that might not be aligned or in line with national development priorities.

3- Inconsistency in succeeding government development priorities. Every administration wants to start afresh in terms of national development programs. The national development agendas are closely linked and to the foreign policy objectives. Over-politicization of development by the regime of the day confuses the proper implementation of foreign policy.

4- Lack of global trust in the government's ability, willingness, and readiness for accountability, fair governance practice, rule of law, and adherence to the best international regulatory frameworks, especially concerning foreign direct investments (FDIs) protection.

5- Lack of diplomatic innovation, creativity, attractiveness, and state-craftiness amidst regional competition with similar foreign policy objectives on scarce global resources in a never-ending global development need and wants

Nexus between Foreign Policy and Domestic Policy

The correlation between foreign policy and national policy is inseparable and closely joined. The former serves as a vehicle to realize the latter. According to some scholars (Fearon, 1988), a significant and growing literature on international relations (IR) argues that domestic politics is typically an important part of the explanation for states' foreign policies, and seeks to understand its influence more precisely. Every nation engages the outside world for a direct or indirect domestic interest. This is becoming paramount in a highly interconnected and globalized world where there is economic and geopolitical competition between nations and regions. Moreover, in seeking to provide a fuller explanation for foreign policy choice, scholars have had to take account of the boundaries between the state's internal or domestic environment and the external environment. (Aran, 2017). For example, since 2005, Liberia has had several domestic and national development policies: the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Agenda for Transformation, [the Propoor Agenda](#) (A short-term Development Program), and, now under the Boakai administration, [the ARREST Agenda](#) (A Short-term Development Program). To fully implement these policies, there must be a craftiness in pushing Liberia's foreign policy, especially the development and economic components of it. For instance, the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development may cost Liberia more than 8.3 billion United States Dollars, which is ten times bigger than the national budget. Therefore, Liberia's current fiscal space will not allow it to raise that money and achieve the agenda, but with a strong, effective and efficient economic and development diplomacy as enshrined in the foreign policy statement of the country, the program might see the light and make an impact.

The following are some correlational nexuses between foreign policy and domestic interest or policy.

1- The domestic economy never grows disjointly from regional, continental and global markets. Therefore, it is pertinent and diplomatic craftiness for the State's foreign relations architects (policymakers at the parliament level and offices of heads of state) and engineers (foreign ministers, ambassadors and special envoys) to engage other countries, multinational corporations and public international organizations such the World Bank, African Development Bank, Islamic Bank for Development, Asian Infrastructure Bank and BRICK financial institutions to make the domestic economic growth a real, competitive and investment opportunities more attracted.

2- Foreign policy is a socioeconomic, geopolitical and strategic tool to market the advantage that it possesses to make the most of those endowed software and hardware opportunities for national growth and development.

3- Every nation's most sensitive and crucial concern is its internal security and safeguarding its territorial integrity. Therefore, foreign policy plays a significant role in the realisation of that internal interest, protecting territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

4- Foreign policy is a tool and means, while domestic policy is the aim and objective.

Conclusion

From 1847 to 1944, Liberia concentrated its foreign policy on territorial integrity and safeguarding its independence; that was due to three different factors. Firstly, the presence of the British Colonial Occupation in neighbouring Sierra Leone at a time when colonialism was a prestige political and economic adventure and venture exercised by powerful empires. Secondly, a similar concern was the case in the French imperialist expansion in the neighbouring La Guine and La Côte d'Ivoire. Thirdly, the League of Nations' attempt and move to declare Liberia under trusteeship due to a violation of an international law instrument regarding the **FANADO PO** force labour case. All of these were threats to the independence and sovereignty of Liberia. These factors have made territorial integrity its main foreign policy objective in Liberia. On the other hand, from 1945 to date, the foreign policy objectives have taken, in addition to territorial integrity, different tracks: social development, economic development and political development. In order to achieve these, the nation prefers three political ideologies as a conduit: liberalism, capitalism and democracy. However, though Liberia has made some achievements on the global scene, the reflection of its foreign policy engagement on the shared national socioeconomic and development is questionable.

Technically, Liberia has had brightened positions in the comity of nations through its direct and progressive involvement in the establishment of public international institutions such as the defunct League of Nations, the United Nations, hosting the Sanniquellie Pledge in 1959 that subsequently gave birth to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU) and other geopolitical well-functioning institutions to date. However, there is discontent about Liberia's achievement in international relations and global politics with regard to its impact on domestic socioeconomic development. It is recommended

for Liberia to place more concentration on economic and trade diplomacy and to diversify its direction in the foreign policy implementation through taking advantage of new economic partners in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait ...), Southeast Asia and within the African continent.

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