The Nigerian-Commonwealth and UN relations: Nigeria, from Pariah state to exporter of democracy since 1999

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to offer a theoretical and methodological investigation into the character of Nigerian foreign policy within the Commonwealth and the United Nations and how it has been able to use its military to advance democracy, peace, and security following its return to the civilian rule in 1999. Following the return of Nigeria to democracy and its subsequent reintegration into the international community in 1999, Nigeria, through its military, has consistently used the Commonwealth and UN, via ECOWAS and AU as a strategic platform in the pursuance of its national interests concerning challenges of security, and democratisation at home and across Africa. However, the major obstacle to Nigeria’s commitment to fully democratising the African continent has been an unhealthy rivalry between Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa. Consequently, for the African objectives at the level of the Commonwealth and the UN to be achieved, therefore, the two regional powers must pitch their tents together to accommodating their divergent interests towards the total realisation of African objectives. This paper delves into Nigeria’s strategic relations with the Commonwealth and the UN since 1999. It also investigates how it has used its military power in ECOWAS

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
The beginning of the civilian administration of the Fourth Republic (1999) witnessed a strategic shift in the country’s domestic and international politics after nineteen years of military governance. This paper demonstrates that one notable and distinctive feature of the Nigerian foreign policy from the inception of the Fourth Republic (1999) has been its promotion of African stability through the democratisation process. To tackle these challenges of democratisation, peace, and security in Africa, this paper argues that Nigeria has exerted a leading role at all levels of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including through its engagements and membership Commonwealth and the UN. The analysis in this paper further shows that one of the major obstacles militating against Nigeria’s commitment and efforts in regional peace and security has been an unhealthy hegemonic rivalry between Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa.
and AU to partner with these organisations to export democracy, particularly in West African sub-region.

Subjects: Civilian Administration; International Community; Afrocentric Foreign Policy; International Political System; Harare Declaration; Anti-democratic Role; Formative Era

Keywords: Commonwealth; democratisation; security; Harare principles; Foreign policy; Nigeria; UN

1. Introduction

Historically, the Federal Republic of Nigeria was one of seventeen African nations that attained independence in 1960 (Aluko, 1981, p. 1). Nigeria was a former British colony and is currently a member of the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Nigeria is Africa’s and the world’s most populous black nation (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 223). Since the time of independence in 1960, the country’s strategic location, size, resources and the manpower at its disposal have been focussed towards achieving her stated Afrocentric foreign policy objectives, including peacekeeping operations in and outside sub-Saharan Africa under the auspices of the OAU (now African Union), ECOWAS/ECOMOG, NATO and the United Nations (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 223). Other international organisations include the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the Sahelo-Saharan Community—Communauté des Etats Sahélo-Sahariens (Cen-SAD) (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 223). Arguably, over the years, Nigeria has pledged to support and has actively participated in a series of these organisations’ initiatives, particularly since the transition to democratic rule in 1999.

During the early 1960s, the country was acknowledged to have played a relatively hesitant and minimal role in foreign relations because it was new and inexperienced in the art of international relations. Since the early 1970s, however, Nigeria has assumed a more active and vigorous role in world affairs (Aluko, 1981, p. 1), largely because of increasing wealth from oil revenues, and perhaps, its success after the civil war (1967–1970). Nigeria’s victory in the civil war and its enormous oil wealth in this formative era of its foreign policy earned the country golden opportunity to proclaim Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy (Ibrahim, 1989; Izah, 2011, p. 349).

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, which also followed the end of colonialism in Southern Africa, peacekeeping and conflict resolution became the major instruments of Nigeria’s African foreign policy thrust. In the 1990s, Nigeria became a leading sub-regional African nation (Izah, 2011, p. 349), a period which also witnessed the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and Sani Abacha (1993–1998), marred by domestic instabilities resulting from the annulment of the June 12 general election, disregard for human rights, political assassination and intimidation of opposition parties in Nigeria and the extra-judicial killings of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a human rights activist, and eight other Ogoni leaders in 1994 (Agbu & Ogaba, 2011, p. 350).

The Nigerian domestic political realities in these periods sent negative signals to the international community, which led to its suspension from and heavy sanctions by the Commonwealth, the European Union, and the United Nations until the return to civilian rule in 1999. An argument by Bola Akinterinwa has rightly described Nigeria before 1999, “... as a non-conformist and a threat to efforts at globalisation, democratisation and maintenance of world peace and security” (Akinterinwa, 2004, p. 360). The return to a democratically elected government in 1999, however, opened a new page in Nigerian diplomatic engagements and a renewed approach to its Afrocentric foreign policy thrust in world politics. This paper examines the strategic shift in Nigeria’s foreign relations with the Commonwealth and the UN following its return to the civilian government since 1999. It investigates the salient features and direction of the country’s diplomatic relations with the global actors—the Commonwealth and the UN—towards the advancement of its national interests in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Moreover, the paper further examines the dynamics of the Nigerian regional military power towards the enthronement of democratic democracy, peace, and security in Africa.
2. Theoretical clarifications

2.1. Neo-realism

Neo-realism is credited to the work of Berridge (2001, p. 12), who argued that the international system as the third image of the international political system is inherently conflictual and anarchical. The international system constitutes the basic unit of analysis in relation to state behaviour within the system. The state also constitutes the basic black box in the international system in which internal or domestic factors such as the role of individual and social actors affect foreign policy outcomes (Dougherty & Robert, 2001, p. 64). The structure of the international environment affects all foreign policy decisions and the distribution of material capability (Lamy, 2008, p. 126). As previously pointed out by the classical realists, the causes of war or conflicts among states in the international system may be attributed to human nature; Waltz argued that the causes of war among the states within the system could be found in the state system and not the nature of man (Waltz, 1959, p. 6).

Keohane and Nye supported Waltz’s arguments that there are three basic assumptions which define states’ behaviour in the systemic level. First, states are predominant actors and they behave as coherent units within the anarchical system; second, that force is a usable and effective strategy and instrument of foreign policy; third, the “high politics” of military security dominates the “low politics” of economic and social interactions amongst state actors in the international system (Keohane & Nye, 1987, p. 310). Based on this view, Waltz noted that the use of force and violence characterises the relations between states in the systemic level. All statesmen depend on the effective use of the military instrument and capability to pursue their national interests, and the recurrent use of force and threats of violence differentiate the systemic structure from national politics (Kenneth, 1979, p. 102). The lack of an overarching or sovereign body to regulate states’ behaviour in the international system usually leads to anarchy. Given this, the state, as its judge inevitably rely on and make use of violence or threats of violence to implement its policies (Waltz, 1959, p. 160). Ultimately, this often leads to a security dilemma between states in the system (Viotti & Kauppi 1987, p. 49).

Applying this to Nigerian foreign policy, the intervention of Nigerian-led AU/ECOMOG in Cote d’Ivoire to restore Alassane Ouattara in 2010 through its military power reflects the argument of Machiavelli, that for states to safeguard their security or national interests in the dark world, where fear and self-interests of leaders prevail, all treaties with other states in the system must be broken if the community is under threat (Dume & Schmidt, 2008, p. 98; Berridge, 2001, pp. 539–556). He further noted that the international political system (external environment) where a state operates contained adversaries that are capable of truncating the liberties of the state, while the foreign policy and strategies it employed to operate and cope with the external threats have many consequences on its domestic politics. In such environment, Machiavelli argued that “the best external posture for a state to adopt is to make itself sufficiently strong to deter any predatory attack but not so strong as to provoke a pre-emptive one” (Berridge, 2001, p. 542). However, the “community” as described in the context of this analysis could be located in the ECOWAS and AU, which stand as the major platforms for the realisation of Nigeria’s foreign policy objectives.

As previously argued, realists believe that three basic features underline states’ behaviour in the international system. First, states are predominant actors in the anarchical environment; second, that force is a usable and effective instrument of foreign policy, and third, the “high politic” of military statecraft dominates the “low politics” of socio-economic interactions among states (Keohane & Nye, 1987, p. 310). With the use of force and power, Nigeria, supported by other states, intervened in the crisis because its national interests were under threat. Similarly, Nigeria, in concert with ECOMOG and the AU during the Gambian post-election impasse, used its military capability to return the country to a constitutional order when Yahya Jammeh refused to hand over power to the opposition candidate, Adama Barrow, who had won the presidential election.
Ultimately, neo-realism accounts for Nigerian foreign policy behaviour, which underlines its military instrument as an instrument of statecraft to pursue peace, security, and democracy within the Commonwealth and the United Nations following its return to democracy in 1999.

2.2. Nigeria's relations with the Commonwealth

After the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigerian leaders soon realised the need to align the country's foreign policy with the culture of diplomatic representation across the world to achieve and promote African interests for rapid development (Saliu, 2014, p. 313). Given this, Nigeria became a member of the Commonwealth in 1960 under the tutelage of the British imperial power. In 1963, however, Nigeria became a sovereign state (a republic) under the rubric of the Commonwealth of Nations, a historical and diplomatic representation credited to the idea of Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 235). The historical and diplomatic relationships between the Commonwealth and Nigeria owed their emergence to Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Nigerian Prime Minister during the Nigerian First Republic in 1963–1966. Nigeria's relationship with the organisation since 1963 has been described as a strategic platform for achieving its national interests in line with the organisation's principles and objectives (Ogwu, 1986, p. 258; cited in Omole, 2011).

Following the ratification and adoption of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration at the meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government, held in Harare, Zimbabwe on 20 October 1990 (SOAS), which also coincided with the end of the Cold War in 1990, Nigeria's diplomatic relations with the Commonwealth deteriorated. The Harare Declaration was aimed at the alleviation of poverty, promotion of democracy and re-affirmation of the commitments of Commonwealth nations to the principles first outlined by the Commonwealth during a meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Singapore in 1971 (The Commonwealth, 2016). The treaty also served as a catalyst for new platforms of friendship and co-operation with member states, in line with the Charter of the United Nations (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 239). Accordingly, “one of the key areas or issues facing the Commonwealth is whether it can continue to build on the Harare Declaration and, in so doing, become a standard bearer of democracy, good government, and human rights in the world at large” (Hossain, 1998, p. 78). Given this, there were three measures in support of the Harare Declaration among the Commonwealth nations. These measures include (a) measures in support of processes and institutions for the practice of the Harare principles; (b) measures in response to a violation of Harare principles; and (c) mechanisms for the implementation of these measures (Hossain, 1998, p. 78).

Consequent to the above, two years after the official declaration of the Harare Declaration by the Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in 1990, in Harare, Nigeria was at loggerheads with the Commonwealth over non-compliance to the Harare principles (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 239). This crisis came to a head over General Ibrahim Babangida's annulment of the June 12th presidential election. The presidential election was won by Moshood Abiola and was adjudged the freest and fair general election in Nigeria's political history (Onasanya, 2009, p. 89). After the annulment, however, General Ibrahim Babangida later handed over to an interim government to Ernest Shonekan, which was hijacked by General Sani Abacha on December 1993. Following the cancellation of the polls and the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni activists in the Niger Delta by Abacha in December 1994, Nigeria became a pariah within the international community. The failure of Nigerian military regimes under Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha to hand over to a democratically elected government, and their continuing poor domestic human rights records compromised Nigeria's African leadership and capacity to fulfill its obligations, under the Harare principles, to “human rights, good government and democracy” (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 239) to which it was signatory in 1990 as a Commonwealth nation.

These failures led the Commonwealth to suspend and sanction Nigeria during the 1995 CHOGM in Auckland, New Zealand (CNN, 1995). After four years of Nigeria's suspension and sanctions by the Commonwealth, however, neither the dialogue nor the threat of sanctions had produced any
positive outcomes for Nigerian-Commonwealth relations (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 240), and this continued until after the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998, and subsequent assumption of office by General Abdulsalaam Abubakar. However, Nigeria’s perception of the organisation as a platform and instrument to advance its national interests was indisputable during the tenure (1990–2000) of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku (Margaret, Lawrence, William, Georges & James., 2001, p. 155). Anyaoku’s impressive and constructive engagements with the organisation led to the normalisation of Nigerian relations with the Commonwealth after the release of Nigerian political detainees on 20 July 1998 (Azikiwe, 2013, p. 133). The emergence of Abubakar in 1998 paved the way for a rapprochement between Nigeria and the Commonwealth, after the successful conduct of a transition process that eventually led to the return of Nigeria to civilian rule on May 29th, 1999 (Uhomoibhi, 2008, p. 240).

2.3. **Nigeria and the Commonwealth relations: an experience of democratic privilege**

The re-admission and re-activation of Nigeria’s membership within the Commonwealth after its democratic transition in 1999 reopened and improved Nigeria’s sub-regional influence in Africa as well as its relations with other member states within the organisation (Alli, 2010, p. 151). Its election highlighted the successful re-integration of Nigeria into the Commonwealth in 2000 into the eight-member Committee Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) for the first time in Nigerian political history (Alli, 2010, p. 151). The urgent need to regain international recognition and to win the sympathy of its largest international donor encouraged President Olusegun Obasanjo’s administration (1999–2007) to cultivate close relations with Britain and attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1999 (Iliffe, 2011, p. 219). Nigeria successfully hosted a CHOGM in December 2003. Obasanjo also took the chair of the Commonwealth until he was succeeded by the Prime Minister of Malta in November 2005 (Alli, 2010, p. 151).

The above suggests that the international community now has strong confidence in Nigeria’s democratic government, which also has a very positive multiplier effect for the country, particularly in the promotion of socio-economic, bilateral and multilateral relations, for both the short term and in the long run.

2.4. **Nigeria and the Commonwealth: sustaining regional democracy**

Since 1999, Nigeria has become a promoter of democracy, particularly within the West African sub-region (Ogundiya, Olutayo, & Amzat., 2011, p. 389). Within the African Commonwealth countries, Nigeria has consistently used its regional power to advance its national interests and the Harare Principles. For example, the case of the Gambia and Zimbabwe’s political impasses remained contemporary developments in Nigeria’s efforts towards the actualisation of the Harare principles among the Commonwealth nations.

For the Gambia, Nigeria as a member of the Commonwealth strongly believes in the promotion of democracy, security, democracy in Africa. The ECOWAS’ intervention in the restoration of democracy in The Gambia has been a success story. This is a claim which was associated with the long-accumulated wealth of experience of the regional bloc, which proved valuable in successfully mediating The Gambia’s post-election impasse (Khadiagala 2018, p. 15). The Gambia’s post-election crisis presented Nigeria an ample opportunity to convince the Commonwealth and international community of its regional influence to mediate in political and security issues after eighteen years of stable internal. The disputed December 2016 presidential elections in The Gambia, for example, was the first case where Nigerian-led ECOWAS intervention successfully managed to “restore democracy” in the country by using the threat of force but without any use of direct physical violence (Hartmann, 2017, p. 85).

President Yahya Jammeh’s reluctance to accept defeat in the presidential elections of December 2016 led to ECOWAS’ intervention to restore the legitimate mandate of the people of Gambia. A general expectation emerged after the polls that President Yahya Jammeh’s administration has come to an end after twenty-six years in power. It took everyone by surprise when on
2 December 2016 The Gambia Electoral Commission announced opposition candidate Adama Barrow as the winner of the presidential election (Hartmann, 2017, p. 85). Jammeh’s initial speech in a television address to the people of The Gambia after the release of the results was to accept defeat and congratulated Barrow on his electoral victory (Hartmann, 2017, p. 85). On December 9, however, Yahya Jammeh changed his mind and reiterated that he would challenge the results of the elections, citing “serious and unacceptable abnormalities.” Following his refusal to hand over power, on 12 and 17 December 2016, the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the ECOWAS Heads of States resolved to a common position in strictly enforcing the results of the 1 December 2016 elections (Williams, 2017).

Similarly, on 21 December 2016, the United Nations Security Council backed and endorsed the AU’s and ECOWAS’ stand to promote legitimate order in the Gambia (Williams, 2017). ECOWAS, led by the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, responded forcefully and quickly, demanding that Jammeh step aside by the constitutional inauguration day of 19 January 2017. After much diplomatic persuasion, negotiation, and mediation failed, ECOWAS opted for a military intervention as a last resort and mechanism to restore democracy in the Gambia (Thurston, 2017). On January 18, Nigeria sent its military aircraft and personnel to Senegal to reinforce any military efforts. Nigeria also sent a warship off the coast to evacuate Nigerians (John, 2017).

Despite all the persuasions and threats mounted by the ECOWAS, the AU and the international community, Jammeh held firm, and ECOWAS organised the inauguration of Barrow at the Gambian Embassy in Senegal and recognised Barrow as The Gambia’s president. ECOWAS began to send Senegalese troops into The Gambia and secured the backing and mandate of the African Union and the United Nations Security Council. In the face of tense military surveillance of ECOWAS in Banjul, Jammeh finally agreed to accept exile and left The Gambia on 21 January 2017 (Thurston, 2017). Ultimately, Nigeria’s influence and regional status within ECOWAS accorded it to continue to champion the Commonwealth objectives which sought to promote the democratisation process within the Commonwealth nations.

Similarly, the role played by Nigeria in Zimbabwe’s political impasse during the formal President, Robert Mugabe, was indispensable in the history of African political development and conflict resolution. In 2003 Nigeria hosted a group of Commonwealth ministers from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Malaysia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe to discuss Zimbabwe’s political crisis. The group had earlier met in both Abuja and Harare in 2001 over the refusal of Harare’s Government to implement the decision, to the constitutional and democratic system of government, which led to its suspension from the Commonwealth in 2002 (Ade, 2004, p. 404). In July 2003, after the suspension of Zimbabwe, however, President George W. Bush visited South Africa to pressurize Thabo Mbeki to find a lasting solution to Zimbabwe’s crisis. After a December 2003 meeting at which the Commonwealth members voted for the suspension of Zimbabwe, Thabo Mbeki organised the other members of the Commonwealth from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to oppose the decision, citing Mugabe’s liberation struggles and commitments to resolving the crisis (Grove, 2007, pp. 88–89). The suspension was further reviewed by Abuja and CHOGM, however, and the Zimbabwe government reacted by withdrawing from the organisation in 2002 (Adefuye, 2004, p. 404).

It is valid to argue that the role of the Republic of South Africa and its “back door” foreign policy objectives towards the Zimbabwe crisis may be described as contradictory to the Harare Declaration and the Protocol Relating to the Promotion of Peace and Security of the African Union (AU). Pretoria’s anti-democratic role in Zimbabwe’s crisis and other countries in Africa called for a renewed approach in its foreign policy to embrace common African and Commonwealth objectives, particularly in the promotion of peace, security and democracy in Africa. For example, after its transition to civilian rule in 1994, South Africa’s took on a leading role in regional conflict mediation, and demonstrated its resolve to play a lead role in providing logistics and financial support to a number of regional organisations, particularly the Peace and Security Council (PSC) (Ogunnubi & Amoo, 2016, p. 310), which seeks to promote peace, security and stability in Africa.
Following the post-apartheid and post-1994, the South African democratic transition acknowledged itself as a sub-regional hegemon with a strong commitment to human rights and democratisation in Africa (Smith, 2016, p. 18). South Africa was a strong architect and advocate of the African Peer Review mechanism, which is part of the offshoot of its NEPAD initiative; hence, it pioneered the review process (Welz, 2013, p. 130).

Besides, Nigeria’s unwavering efforts towards the advancement of peace, security, and democracy (the Harare principles) in Africa were not limited to the Commonwealth nations, but also the non-Commonwealth African nations. For example, during the second Liberian civil war (2002–2005), the deployment of Nigerian troops in Monrovia was supported by the U.S. Navy and Marines. Led by Nigeria, the peacekeeping operations were carried out in close co-operation (multilateralism) with the UN, France and the U.S. (Ulriksen, 2010, p. 370). In this case, it may be valid to assert that the regional dimension was stronger in both mandates and operational practices (Ulriksen, 2010, p. 370). Unlike the two previous Nigerian-led ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone (1990–1997) which were marred with rivalries, poor logistics, financial constraints, corruption of Nigerian troops, and lack of joint command and control, Nigeria, led by the UN, successfully restored peace, security and democety to Liberia. For example, the Nigerian-led ECOWAS peace initiative eventually led to the emergence of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 8 August 2003, signed by the warring factions and other major stakeholders in Liberia. The peace agreement represented major elements of the supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, freedom of association and credible democratic elections (Adejumobi, 2016, pp. 222–223). While ensuring the need for a peaceful transition to democracy was guaranteed, a special mediator, General Abdulsalaam Abubakar, former military president of Nigeria, was appointed to mediate in the Liberian peace agreement. His role was significant in negotiating peace during the Liberian general elections of October and November 2005, respectively (Adejumobi, 2016, p. 223).

Similarly, the Nigerian government under President Obasanjo resisted regime changes through coup d’état in Sao Tome and Principe in 2003. The Nigerian ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo, being the chairperson of the Commonwealth at the time of the coup, sent a strong message to the military adventurists to hand over to a democratically elected government (BCC, 2003). The Nigerian government promised and subsequently achieved the return of Frederique de Menezes to power in 2003 (Ogundiya et al., 2011, p. 389), a role played in upholding the Harare Declaration towards the promotion and strengthening of democracy across the Commonwealth of Nations.

Another instance where the Nigerian government has demonstrated its commitment to the promotion of the Commonwealth objectives has been the case of Guinea-Bissau, where the government of Kuma Yala was overthrown in 2012. Although the government of Kuma Yala was not in compliance with the Harare Declaration, which seeks to promote democracy and respect for the human rights, Nigeria and other members of the Commonwealth intervened and ensured the immediate commencement of a transition to a democratically elected government in Guinea-Bissau (Ogundiya et al., 2011, p. 390).

2.5. Nigerian-UN relations

On the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria was immediately absorbed into the United Nations on 7 October 1960 as the 99th substantive member (Fred, 2011, p. 289). As a world organisation, the United Nations has occupied a central place in the conduct of the country’s foreign policy from that date onwards. Through the UN, Nigeria has been committed to the principle of multilateralism (Adeniji, 2005, p. 1), and, since 1960, Nigeria has consistently involved in the UN’s peacekeeping and other joint-multilateral peacekeeping missions and commitments to world peace and security (Juma, 2005, p. 11). The role of Nigeria in the UN Peacekeeping Operation dates to 1960 in the Congo, a few days after her independence. Nigeria’s role in the Congo peacekeeping mission was not limited to the supply of troops and other logistics since Nigeria also commanded the UNOC operation (Juma, 2005, p. 11). Shortly after its independence, Nigeria also vigorously supported liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde, and in Rhodesia, South
Africa and West Africa (Lord-Mallam, 2016, p. 93). The Organisation of African Unity, however, became the preferred platform for Nigeria to advance its diplomatic and foreign policy objectives in the promotion of decolonisation of African states that were not independent at the time of its UN membership. The country’s foreign policy objective at the UN was not aimed at promoting democratisation, but rather the promotion of African unity and development. The return of the country to civilian rule in 1999 accorded it the opportunity to use the UN to project its foreign policy objectives towards the promotion of democracy in Africa.

2.6. Re-assessing Nigerian-UN peacekeeping and the promotion of democracy in Africa

In the 1980s, the Nigerian state was the largest volunteer and supplier of troops to UN peacekeeping missions around the world (Oluwaseun, 2015, p. 43). It has participated in UN peacekeeping missions in the Congo, Lebanon, Chad, Angola, Namibia, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan (Darfur), Liberia and Sierra Leone (Alli, 2012, p. 49). At the sub-regional level, the (partial) success of the Nigerian-led ECOMOG interventions in the Liberian and Sierra Leonian conflicts underscored the imperative of using the military as an instrument of foreign policy to deter acts that threaten security, peace, and development in its sub-region (Alli, 2012, p. 49).

It can be argued that lack of a clear mission and clear strategic objectives in Nigerian-led ECOMOG missions did not justify the resources spent on its various peacekeeping operations in Africa, particularly the case of the Liberian and Sierra Leonian civil wars. Fierce domestic pressures from the national population, poor military co-operation and lack of coordination among the ECOWAS nations led to the partial success of the operations. The heavy financial toll of Nigerian military operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone was about $1 million per day, an amount incurred on peacekeeping when the country was facing serious economic stagnation (Bello & Hassan, 2015, p. 231). As a result, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, on his assumption of duty in the early years of his reign (1999–2007), lamented that the cost of the UN peacekeeping missions was unevenly allocated in Western Africa and that Nigeria’s burden was “unacceptably draining Nigeria financially. For our economy to take off and transform, this bleeding has to stop” (Brosig, 2015, p. 144).

Consequently, based on this concern and partial success of ECOMOG in Liberia, the UN authorised the formation of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) on 22 October 1999 under UN Security Council Resolution 1270. The resolution authorised the deployment of a maximum of a 6000-strong military contingent including 260 military observers. This number was later reviewed upward to 17,500 in response to unforeseen circumstances. The troops’ contributing countries (TCC) included Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Zambia, making UNAMSIL a truly multilateral force (Bello & Hassan, 2015, p. 231).

The experience in Liberia and Sierra Leone convinced Nigeria to take a keen interest in convincing the UN to take over peacekeeping missions from ECOWAS (Brosig, 2015, p. 144); and a renewed approach to sub-regional security initiatives became the guiding principle of the Nigerian state. The new approach to regional peacekeeping during this period underpinned the new regime’s policy and the recognition that crises have roots, and therefore the best way to tackle them is to attack their roots in maladministration and poverty. On this premise, the Nigerian government obtained a mandate at the Algiers Summit of the OAU in 1999 for a new code of conduct for African leaders (Hassan, 2000, p. 114).

Former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, in his address to the UN General Assembly in 2011, maintained the position of his predecessor on Nigeria’s stance on a multilateral approach to conflict resolution. He argued that “too much efforts and resources on military aspects of peace and security” have been spent at the expense of intervention and preventive diplomacy. Against this shift, in the last ten years, Nigeria’s peacekeeping approach and strategies at the level of the UN have somewhat tilted towards an Afrocentric and pro-interventionist foreign policy, guided by the principles of multilateralism (Brosig, 2015, p. 144).
In addition, Nigeria foreign policy decision on military intervention in the resolution of African conflicts since 1999 at the level of the UN was also more evident in the Malian crisis (2012–2013), when in November 2012 the UN Security Council authorised ECOWAS, with the support of the AU, to deploy a co-ordinated intervention force to recapture northern Mali from the Islamist jihadists and their allies (Francis, 2013, p. 3). ECOWAS failed to react speedily, planning to deploy troops by July 2013. In the absence of Nigerian troops in Mali, Paris deployed its troops and intervened in the Malian crisis in 2012, which led to normalcy in Mali and restoration of the democratically elected government on July 7th, 2013 (Brosig, 2015, p. 143). Leadership is central and critical to successful conflict management and the security policy of ECOWAS. Senegal and Guinea tried to intervene in Guinea Bissau but ended up complicating an already complex situation. The non-participation of Nigeria in the resolution of Guinea Bissau’s conflicts therefore ultimately led to its premature termination of the peacekeeping mission (Alli, 2012, p. 145). Ultimately, Nigeria’s unwillingness to intervene in the Malian crisis 2012 may be credited to its previous experience during the ECOMOG peacekeeping mission in Liberia before the return to the civilian rulership in 1999.

The pre-eminence of Nigeria’s shift and redirection in security architecture in Africa at the level of the UN and other regional peacekeeping organisations cannot be divorced from its internal (domestic) contradictions and challenges in the last eighteen years since the return to civilian rule. A logical reason thus underlies Nigeria’s sudden change in the UN’s regional peacekeeping missions and being out-performed by French troops may not have been only the result of existing military deficiencies in comparison with France (Brosig, 2015, p. 143). Adeniji argued that excessive idealism and restrained optimism often underpins Nigeria’s political behaviour at the UN; there is a constant belief in Nigeria, and indeed over the world, that if the UN is to continue to maintain its relevance in the changing international environment, it must be the subject of reform itself (Adeniji, 2005, p. 1).

2.7. UN reform and Nigeria’s Bid for a permanent seat on the UN security council

The January 2005 AU summit in Abuja ratified the decision made by the Executive Council of African foreign ministers on the quest for Africa to be represented in the UNSC. The council further examined the high-level panel’s report and set up a committee of 15 members to form a common African position on this question (Gambari, 2006, p. 82). As a result, the meeting of the committee in Swaziland in February 2005 produced the “Ezulwini Consensus” (Gambari, 2006, p. 82). The “Ezulwini Consensus” calls for the need to expand the size of the council from 15 to 26 members, with equal and fair representation of Africa (Namibia Economist, 2016). The then president, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former AU Chairman, and African leaders at the AU summit, agreed on a common position to support a bid for Nigeria to hold a permanent seat on the UNSC, which was sequel to the US interest for Egypt or South Africa to hold such a seat (Agbebaku & Apkotor, 2010, p. 52).

Perhaps Nigeria may find it difficult to lobby and win the seat based on the orchestrated power politics in the international system under the influence of the US’s hegemony. In March 2005, the AU’s committee submitted its report to the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for adoption and inclusion in his report and memoir to the UN for consideration. The African group of states was the only regional group in the UN to reach a common position on UNSC reform (Gambari, 2006, p. 82).

Considering Nigeria and other African contestants (Egypt, South Africa, and Senegal) for the UN seat, Egypt, although it does not have a clean human rights record, is favoured by the US. South Africa is richer and more technologically advanced than Nigeria (Lord-Mallam, 2016, p. 94). Nigeria has been sidelined due to a poor human rights record and rampant corruption. Compared with other key contestants (Egypt and South Africa) in sub-Saharan Africa, however, Nigeria’s role and commitment in the global arena cannot be overemphasised. According to Lord-Mallam (2016), “no state in the international system has contributed as much as Nigeria in UN peacekeeping operations; not even the US per capita, but the internal political constraints of the Nigerian state will continue to hinder Nigeria from aspiring to an African leadership position at the UN.
Nigeria’s intent and aspirations to be considered were greeted with serious consultation, lobbying, and compromises which served as a catalyst for the UN General Assembly to embrace the proposal by the African Heads of State and Government. On July 2005, the former Foreign Affair Minister, Olu Adeniji, coupled with a host of other foreign ministers from South Africa, Libya and Egypt, as well other interest groups, convened a meeting in London with members of the G4: Brazil, Germany, Japan and India (Agbebaku & Apkotor, 2010, p. 52). The central challenge facing Nigeria, however, is that power politics undermines the common position of the African group of states in their quest for UNSC reform. This is because Nigeria and South Africa are often locked in hegemonic battles and egoism which inherently risks fragmenting consensus on the African agenda for UNSC reform (Maseng, 2013).

Aside from the power politics of the African Union negating Nigeria’s quest for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, however, two questions must be asked if Nigeria is to be supported by the other African states and voted for by the five permanent members for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. One, on what conditions will Nigeria be able to influence other members at the UN Security Council on vital world issues, considering its internal problems such as terrorism, ethno-religious crisis, militia crisis, poverty and the abuse of human rights? It is doubtful if Nigeria will be able to influence the UN Security Council based on the various domestic challenges, given its neo-conservatism and foreign policy goals in Africa. Second, what would constitute, and how does Nigeria determine and promote, Africa’s priority objectives and goals before the UN Security Council? Nigeria may find it difficult to know what may constitute Africa’s priority objectives at the UN Security Council. For instance, a speech delivered on 19 September 2017 by the Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, at the General Debate of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, cast doubt on Nigeria’s ability to proffer solutions to African socio-economic and political crises at the global level. According to the Daily Trust, in the speech, President Buhari failed to assert the need for urgent global attention to and assistance in solving Africa’s problems. The focus of his address was on the need for the Security Council to address the Middle East crisis and North Korea’s weapons development. President Buhari’s speech missed some vital regional and national security challenges and regime change actions in Libya, Syria, and Sudan which ended up channeling deadly weapons and determined terrorists into the African continent (Daily Trust, 2018).

3. Conclusion

This paper argued that following the return of Nigeria to the civilian rule in 1999, it has consistently used its regional military power to advance democracy, peace, and security in Africa. The paper also noted that Nigeria’s relations with the Commonwealth have further strengthened its regional power and neo-conservative foreign policy objectives in the African Union (AU) and the ECOWAS. Nigeria has also consistently and vigorously pursued its African policy objectives within the Commonwealth through the Harare Declaration, particularly in promoting democracy in Africa. For example, as argued in the chapter, Nigeria used its regional status and, as the chair of the Commonwealth (2003–2005), resisted the military coup carried out in Sao Tome and Principe in 2003 and subsequently restored President Frederique de Menezes to power (BCC, 2003). Similarly, Nigeria also used its position in the AU, ECOWAS and Commonwealth chair and hosted a group of Commonwealth ministers in 2003, in Abuja to discuss the suspension of Zimbabwe, during the CHOGM in 2002 (Adefuye, 2004, p. 402–417). It is argued that the Republic of South Africa has not helped Nigeria in relation to advancing its African neo-conservative foreign policy objectives within the Commonwealth, however, especially in Southern Africa-Zimbabwe. The hegemonic rivalries between Pretoria and Abuja within the AU might not allow Nigeria easy access to represent Africa in the UN. Pretoria has always worked against Nigeria’s interests on African issues within the AU and UN, hence obtaining a place as Africa’s global representation in the UN Security Council might be a difficult task. It is doubtful whether, in the future, South Africa’s national interests of regime stability would change to suit the AU objectives on democracy and human rights or not.
Also, it is also unclear if its national interest will further complement Nigeria’s national interests in regional peace, security, and democracy. Even after the fall of the apartheid regime and the transfer from white minority rule to majority rule in 1994, South Africa’s imperative to become the dominant regional power actor regarding relative power did not change. It is also doubtful if South Africa has the ambition to become a medium power, but it does want to preserve and enhance its position within the region, regardless of whether that serves the purpose of the AU, the organisation which it co-founded with Nigeria and Libya and which it is officially a signatory.

Second, the paper has argued that Nigerian-UN relations since 1999 also point to the unassailable role of Nigeria in the enforcement of the UN’s resolutions on regional conflicts and promotion of democracy, although the chapter pointed out that Nigeria now realises the need for the use of multilateral approaches to resolving conflicts through the UN. Its commitment to the realisation of Africa’s neo-conservatism also underlined its efforts and advocacy towards the UN reforms for fair and equal representation of Africa in the UN Security Council (Brosig, 2015, Namibia Economist, 2016). In effect, Nigeria realises that for Africa to attain peace, security, and development through the UN, it must be given an important, fair and equal representation in the global body—the UN. Nonetheless, attaining this objective also depends on resolving the damaging rivalries between African states, particularly South Africa.

Finally, the analysis presented in this paper appears that Nigeria’s commitment to the promotion and advancement of democracy, peace, and security since 1999 at the level of the Commonwealth have always been reinforced by the use of a military instrument to achieving its national interest. Though Nigeria often used its uncontested hegemonic power and position within the West African region to pursue its foreign policy objectives, such scenario has always been counter-productive, particularly outside the traditional spheres of its influence (Southern Africa), where Pretoria also wields the prominent regional power. The case of Zimbabwe as argued in the preceding section validates this assertion. Ultimately, Nigeria’s continuous efforts in upholding the Commonwealth’s principles which stress good governance, the rule of law and democratisation in Africa will continue to accord it an indisputable status as a promoter of democracy in the Commonwealth nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it must be stressed that for Nigeria to fully realise its African neo-conservative objectives, there was a need for both countries to unite towards the realisation of the AU mandate, to which they were signatories in 2001.

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