
**NIGERIAN-SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL-STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
IN THE AFRICAN UNION: HARMONY OR DISSENT?**

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of the Twenty-first century marked a strategic shift in the conduct of Nigerian and South African foreign policies. Following the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002, it is evident that the cardinal objectives of both Nigeria's and South Africa's foreign policies have been to strengthen common African goals at the level of the African Union. But in recent times, leadership supremacy within the AU and Pretoria's lack of commitment to the core objective and mandate of the Union in respect to regional peace and security have become one of the challenges facing Nigeria and the AU. However, using selected case studies and historical method, this paper examines the role of Nigeria and South Africa and the unhealthy rivalries that underlie their political-strategic partnership within the African Union. Also, within the West Africa region and other parts of Africa, this paper notes that, Nigeria has always used its regional power to promoting democracy, peace, and security, but 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. The paper concludes that if the Republic of South Africa continues to pursue its self-interests and an egoist agenda rooted in quiet diplomacy to achieving the corollary of regime security and economic expansionism in the Southern African region, then the AU could become a victim of an ideological clash and hegemonic rivalries, which may continue to undermine the institutional capacity of the AU and Nigeria's efforts towards strengthening and advancing democracy, peace and security in Africa.

Keywords: African Union, Foreign Policy, Nigeria, National Interest, South Africa, Regional Democracy.

Introduction

According to the dictum, “*in order for a concert of powers’ strategy to be successful, political-strategic relationships are of paramount importance*”;¹ the emergence of the African Union (AU) in July 2002 has generated what many scholars and commentators would describe as an unlikely continental enterprise, incapable of promoting pan-Africanist objectives, and plagued by political and realpolitik difficulties. The realpolitik difficulties in the African Union may be described as a clash of strategic interests bothering on the foreign policy postures of both Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa as major hegemonic actors within the Union.² However, after the creation of the AU in 2002, these two regional powers - Nigeria and South Africa - have always pursued what may be called the “asymmetric foreign policy objectives” at the level of the AU, and this has been a significant factor militating against the organisation from performing its core objectives more efficiently. Given this condition, the deferring foreign policy objectives of both Nigeria and South Africa within the AU rests on the notion as put forward by the realist scholars that the international political system is inherently conflictual, and characterized by lack of trust. Therefore, this paper notes that the condition of anarchy, as explained by the realist scholars, underscored why states tend to pursue self-seeking goals motivated by the passion for power defined on the basis for the protection of national interests or security.

The analysis in this study proceeds in three stages. The first segment examines the background to Nigerian-South African foreign relations at the level of the African Union. The analysis in the first section is further sub-divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section delivers an assessment of the first phase of their strategic relations from 1960-1994. The second sub-section highlights the second phase of their relations from 1994-1998, while the third sub-section examines the character of both countries’ foreign policies trajectories within the OAU/AU from 1999-2017. The second section examines the trajectory of South African-Nigerian relations since 1999 vis-à-vis the idea that drove the AU process in the actualisation of its strategic objectives and the unhealthy political strategic rivalries between both countries. It also examines South Africa’s wavering role of quiet diplomacy towards its neighbours in resolution conflict and the promotion of democracy in the Southern African region. The arguments in this section focus on three basic case studies - Cote d’Ivoire, Libya and Zimbabwe - to synthesise Nigeria’s commitment and role in regional democracy vis-à-vis the South Africa’s quiet diplomacy and regime security in the AU. The third section in this paper offers some concluding remarks.

¹ Scalapino, Robert cited in Chris Landsberg, ‘An African ‘concert of powers’? Nigeria and South Africa’s Construction of the AU and NEPAD,’ in Adekeye, Adebajo and Mustapha, Abdul R. (eds.), *Gulliver’s Troubles: Nigeria’s Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (South Africa, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), p. 204.

² David Francis J., *Uniting Africa: Building Regional Peace and Security Systems* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, 2006), p. 25.

The First Phase of Nigerian-South African Relations, 1960-1994

The first phase of Nigerian-South African relations covers the period 1960-1994. From 1960, Nigeria has held diplomatic ties with the Republic of South Africa, especially in the struggle against the apartheid regime, which have placed the country in the front burner of the contemporary global international system. Immediately after the inauguration of the new government in 1994, South Africa was admitted as the 53rd member of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union), in whose deliberations Nigeria had previously actively supported the African National Congress (ANC) in its fight against the apartheid regime.³

South Africa and Nigeria are arguably militarily and politically powerful relative to other sub-regional states, but lack the cohesion, capacity and legitimacy to convince other states to follow their steps towards a common approach to vital African political, security and economic issues. *Pax Pretoriana* has to contend with Southern Africa's neighbours like Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, while *Pax Nigeriana* contends with the West African sub-regional "bargainers" such as Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Liberia and Burkina Faso⁴ in the actualisation of continental unity.

Since independence in 1960, Africa has remained the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy.⁵ The first time Nigeria expressed this foreign policy on anti-colonialism was the case of the Sharpeville massacre of 21st March 1960, when the white South African police force attacked South African blacks protesting against racial discrimination and domination.⁶ This struggle and other anti-colonial diplomatic confrontations against South Africa saw Nigeria spearheading the fight against apartheid South Africa in the international community. As a regional power in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria also championed the struggle that led to the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth of Nations during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference of March 1961.⁷ After the transition to a democratic and majority rule in South Africa in 1994, however, relations between the two states again deteriorated over the poor human rights record of Nigeria. As a result, South Africa as an emerging power and the toast of the

³ Banjo, 'South Africa-Nigeria Diplomatic and Economic Relations, 1994 to 2004,' pp. 81-82.

⁴ Adekeye Adebajo and Christopher Landsberg 'South Africa and Nigeria as regional Hegemons,' in Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg (eds.). *From Cape to Congo Southern Africa's evolving Security challenges*. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., London, 2003), p. 172.

⁵ Joseph Ebegbulem, 'An Evaluation of Nigeria-South Africa Bilateral Relations,' *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy* 1, 1 (2013), p. 32.

⁶ Onouha, quoted in Joseph Ebegbulem, 'Nigeria and Conflict Resolution in Africa: The Darfur Experience,' *Transcience* 3, 2 (2012), p. 32.

⁷ Osita Agbu, et al. (2013) 'The Foreign Policy Environment in Nigeria and Implications for Nigeria-South Africa Relations: Baseline Study,' *South African Foreign Policy Initiative* 54 (2013), p. 1.

continent campaigned for the suspension of the Nigerian military regime during the Commonwealth Summit in Auckland in 1996.⁸

Second Phase of Nigerian-South African Relations, 1994-1998

The 1994 democratic transition in South Africa ushered in a fundamentally transformative foreign policy from its original level as an isolated, politically belligerent, regionally militaristic, and globally defensive agenda to one that aimed to be supportive of multilateralism, capable of engendering and promoting political partnership and global engagement.⁹ From 1994, Pretoria's relationship with Nigeria has been a mixture of rivalry, tension and co-operation. Diplomatic relations between the two countries came to a halt, particularly due to Mandela's principled aversion against the personality of General Sani Abacha's dictatorial leadership at the peak of 1990s.¹⁰ Relations between the two countries worsened after the hanging of the human rights activist and environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and other eight Ogoni campaigners during the Commonwealth summit in New Zealand in November 1995. Following the incidents, Nelson Mandela sought oil sanctions against Nigeria and expulsion from the Commonwealth.¹¹ It is argued that Mandela's call for oil sanctions, however, failed to yield any regional and international support against Abacha's regime.¹² The call yielded a partly positive result, however, as Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth.¹³ This period also witnessed a reversal of the international image for both countries, with the Republic of South Africa becoming the saint and Nigeria the pariah.¹⁴ This pariah status under General Sani Abacha lasted until his death in June 1998.

General Sani Abacha's sudden death greatly offered a chance for the Nigerian state to reposition itself when the reformist General Abdulsalaam Abubakar took over power in 1998. General Abdulsalaam Abubakar successfully handed over power to a democratically elected government

⁸ Onouha, quoted in Ebegbulem, 'An Evaluation of Nigeria-South Africa Bilateral Relations,' p. 33.

⁹ Habib Adam, 'South Africa's Foreign Policy: Hegemonic Aspirations, Neoliberal Orientations and Global Transformation,' *South African Journal of International Affairs* 16, 2 (2009), p. 143.

¹⁰ Alfredo Hengari and Oladiran Bello, 'Revamping Nigeria-South Africa Relations key to Continental Progress,' South African Institute of International Affairs, (2013).

¹¹ Adekeye Adebajo, 'Nigeria and South Africa: rivalries, rows and reconciliations,' *Centre for Conflict Resolutions* 68, 7 (2012).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Olusola Ogunnubi and Lere Amusan, 'Nigeria's Attitude towards South Africa's Perceived Xenophobia: Exploring a Shared Hegemonic Power for Africa's Development,' in Adeoye A. Akinola, (ed.), *The Political Economy of Xenophobia in Africa*. (Springer Nature, Switzerland, 2018), p. 59.

¹⁴ Adebajo, cited in Ogunnubi and Amusan, 'Nigeria's Attitude towards South Africa's Perceived Xenophobia: Exploring a Shared Hegemonic Power for Africa's Development,' p. 59.

under President Olusegun Obasanjo on 29 May 1999.¹⁵ The democratic transition led to the re-admission of Nigeria into the community of nations in 1999.

Third Phase of Nigerian-South African Relations, 1999-2008

The third phase of Nigerian-South African relations witnessed the governments of Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa respectively. This period further witnessed the revival and reformation of the defunct OAU into the African Union in July 2002, through NEPAD, which sought to lay a strong socio-economic and political foundation for the African continent in the 21st Century.¹⁶ This period ushered in political and economic collaboration between both states. The period may also further be described as a moment of hegemonic and political rivalry between the two states, particularly within the African Union.

At the domestic level, the two leaders, Obasanjo and Mbeki, focused on strengthening their fragile democracies and designing strategies to close the massive socio-economic and political underdevelopment unleashed on the countries by a long period of military rule in Nigeria and long decades of white supremacy and apartheid rule in South Africa. At the foreign level, Mbeki and Obasanjo collaborated in managing and resolving African conflicts through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and ECOWAS respectively.¹⁷ The socio-economic foundation of the AU in 2002 is credited to Mbeki's economic vision of an African Renaissance which fundamentally informed the policies and content of NEPAD,¹⁸ aimed at resuscitating pan-Africanism and formulating a broad road-map for sustainable African economic growth and development.¹⁹

On the other hand, Obasanjo's own vision and plan for a Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA) largely underscored and influenced the formation of the African Union.²⁰ The foreign policy ideas of Obasanjo for regional security, stability, development and co-operation in Africa manifested themselves clearly in both the institutional legal framework of the Peace and Security Council and its Protocol, as well as

¹⁵ Adebajo and Landsberg, 'South Africa and Nigeria as regional Hegemons,' pp. 177-178.

¹⁶ Ogunnubi and Amusan, 'Nigeria's Attitude towards South Africa's Perceived Xenophobia: Exploring a Shared Hegemonic Power for Africa's Development,' p. 59.

¹⁷ Adebajo and Landsberg, 'South Africa and Nigeria as regional Hegemons,' p. 178.

¹⁸ Landsberg, 'An African "concert of powers": Nigeria and South Africa's construction of the AU and NEPAD,' p. 209.

¹⁹ Akinola Adeoye O. and Ndawonde Nompumelelo, 'NEPAD: Talking from the South, Governing from the West,' *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinary* 11, 2 (2016), p. 39.

²⁰ Landsberg 'An African "concert of powers": Nigeria and South Africa's construction of the AU and NEPAD,' p. 209.

Article 4h, which empowers the AU with the right to intervene in internal affairs on humanitarian grounds.²¹

From 26th June-28th July 2002, African Heads of State gathered in Kananaskis, Canada and endorsed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).²² Both NEPAD and the CSSDCA have promoted the idea of democratic peace in Africa and sought to strengthen and spread democracy on the continent in the belief that democracies do not go war with each other. Both plans unveil the need for conflict resolution and mediation. Both Mbeki and Obasanjo formed their foreign policies according to principles of multilateralism, particularly in matters relating to peacekeeping and democratisation on the continent.²³ The two countries have served under the auspices of the AU and UN in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).²⁴

Obasanjo has obviously promoted democracy and security in the West African countries and participated in the mediation processes in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d' Ivoire. Similarly, Mbeki of South Africa was energetically involved in conflict resolution in DRC, Burundi, Lesotho, Comoros, Angola and Zimbabwe.²⁵ The collaborative efforts of the two leaders in regional peace and security underpinned Obasanjo's assistance to Mbeki's peace-making efforts in Zimbabwe in 2001, though Obasanjo's efforts at resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe were unsuccessful.

Beginning in 2006, however, major diplomatic rivalries surfaced between Nigeria and South Africa over AU policies. Conflicting foreign policies and the positions of the two countries in international issues relating to regime security and human security as the case in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya's political impasse in 2011²⁶ and Zimbabwe in 2001 became more evident in Nigerian-South African relations within the African Union. The struggle for supremacy and the chair for the AU Commission,²⁷ and South African courting of other allies such as Angola and Zimbabwe, further aggravated by its membership of the BRICS and G20,²⁸ highlight the unhealthy rivalries

²¹ Thomas K. Tiekou, 'Explaining the Clash and Accommodation of Interests of major Actors in the Creation of the African Union,' *African Affairs* 103, 411 (2004), p. 257.

²² Bridges News, 'Africa Establishes Union, Solidifies NEPAD,' *Bridges* 6 26 (2002). At: <https://www.ictsd.org/bridges-news/bridges/news/africa-establishes-union-solidifies-nepad> [accessed 13/03/2018].

²³ Landsberg 'An African "concert of powers": Nigeria and South Africa's construction of the AU and NEPAD,' p. 209.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁵ Adebajo and Landsberg, 'South Africa and Nigeria as regional Hegemons,' p. 181.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁷ Mehari T. Maru, (2012) 'Rethinking and Reforming the African Union Commission Elections,' *African Security Review* 21, 4 (2012), p. 65.

²⁸ Adebajo and Landsberg, 'South Africa and Nigeria as regional Hegemons,' p. 181.

between the two states. The diplomatic rivalries would, for the foreseeable future, remain an impediment for the actualisation of African unity. The next section presents case studies which demonstrate this diplomatic rivalry between Pretoria and Abuja at the level of the AU.

Diplomatic Conflict to Rapprochement: Diplomatic Hostility, Democratisation Hiccups, and Efforts at Mediation

The Republic of South Africa's relative economic and military powers and human resources, are increasingly making it the 'preferred' choice in the resolution of Africa's conflict.²⁹ 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),³⁰ which seeks to promote peace, security and stability in Africa.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³

In contrast to the African Union vision on collective security and economic development in the 21st Century, however, South Africa's pan-African vision and its emphasis on African renaissance (NEPAD) have been dropped, and 'economic diplomacy' and regime security have been acknowledged as top priorities of Pretoria's foreign policy.³⁴ Pretoria's membership in the BRICS remains a contentious issue within Nigeria-South African relations. For example, while the BRICS states, and in particular China, wanted to add an African state (Nigeria) in the economic bloc, in order to make the grouping more representative of the developing world, the Republic of South Africa opposed this and thus considered only its membership as a means to

²⁹ Kwesi Aning, 'Healer or Hegemon: Assessing Perceptions of South Africa's Role in African Mediation,' in: Kurt Shillinger (ed.), *Africa's Peacemaker? Lessons from South African Conflict Mediation* (Jacana Media, Cape Town, 2009), p. 54.

³⁰ Olusola Ogunnubi and O. Babatunde Amao, 'South Africa's Emerging "Soft Power" Influence in Africa and Its Impending Limitations: Will the Giant Be Able to Weather the Storm?' *African Security* 9, 4 (2016), p. 310.

³¹ African Union, Peace and Security Council. Available at: <http://www.peaceau.org/en/page/38-peace-and-security-council> [accessed 14/03/2018].

³² Karen Smith, 'South Africa's Past, Present and Future Foreign Human Rights Policy and Diplomacy' in Doutje Lettinga and Lars Van Troost (eds.), *Shifting Power and Human Rights Diplomacy South Africa*. (Amnesty International, Netherland, 2016), p. 18.

³³ Martin Welz, *Integrating Africa: Decolonization's Legacies, Sovereignty and the African Union*. Routledge, London, 2013), p. 130.

³⁴ Arrigo Pallotti and Lorenzo Zambernardi (2016) 'Twenty Years after: Post-Apartheid South Africa, the BRICS and Southern Africa,' in Arrigo Pallotti and Ulf Engel (eds.), *South Africa after Apartheid: Policies and Challenges of the Democratic Transition* (Brill Rodopodi and Hotei Publishing, the Netherlands, 2016), p. 224.

tackle its own economic challenges³⁵ in the Southern African region. As has been argued by Pallotti and Zambarnardi, the resultant tensions between the policy agenda of the BRICS and the global reformist agenda of South Africa should not be taken for granted as it could potentially constrain and undermine Pretoria's regional efforts to promote democracy, security and development in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁶

The contradictions of South Africa's relations with Nigeria and other African states raise fundamental doubts, divisions and questions within the African continent and the West regarding the legitimacy, commitment and effectiveness of Pretoria towards regional peace, security and development. Nigeria has sometimes acted as a counterbalance to South Africa's political influence and hegemony, particularly in the possibility of securing a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.³⁷

In contrast to global expectations of a joint South African-Nigerian intention to promote security and development in Africa,³⁸ for example, Mbeki's diplomatic intervention in Côte d'Ivoire's political crisis in 2011, the recent proposal of South Africa concerning the adoption of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC),³⁹ and the nomination of Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, South Africa's Minister of Home Affairs, as the chairperson of the AU Commission, against Nigeria's favourite candidate, Gabon's Jean Ping.⁴⁰

Taking another perspective, in contrast to Nigeria's commitment to democratic stability, security and development in the West African region, the controversy over Pretoria's voting position at the UN was seen by some members as a retreat from a human rights-based foreign policy, as well as uncertainty and weariness about long-term commitment to peace, security, stability and democratic transition in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.⁴¹ For example, during the Burundian conflict, in 2003 South Africa supplied 1,600 troops to the 2,860-strong African Union Peacekeeping mission in Burundi, however South African involvement in Burundian conflict helped to halt the conflict that had claimed over

³⁵ Ibid., p. 224.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 224.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

³⁸ Adebajo and Landsberg, cited in Pallotti and Zambarnardi, 'Twenty Years after: Post-Apartheid South Africa, the BRICS and Southern Africa,' p. 226.

³⁹ Pallotti and Zambarnardi, 'Twenty Years after: Post-Apartheid South Africa, the BRICS and Southern Africa,' p. 226.

⁴⁰ Adibe Ideofor, 'Nigeria: Dr. Zuma's Emergence as Chairperson of the AU Commission,' *Daily Trust*. 19 July 2012. At: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201207190283.html> (accessed 01/03/2016).

⁴¹ Chris Landsberg, 'Towards a Post-Apartheid South Africa Foreign Policy Review,' in Chris Landsberg and, J. Van Wyk (eds.), *South African Foreign Policy Review*. (1st edn.) (The Africa Institute of South, Africa South Africa, 2012), pp. 1-17.

200,000 lives but was unable to halt continued low intensity violence and insecurity and persistent autocratic acts being employed by the Burundian government under Pierre Nkurunziza after his election in 2005. It is argued that the failure of the quiet diplomacy of South Africa in the Burundi conflicts in 2005 highlighted the limits and constraints to an externally driven peacekeeping mission and Pretoria's unwillingness to commit to a long-term process of peacekeeping, which it initiated in Burundi.⁴² While considering the frustrating role and unwillingness or inability of South Africa to deliver effective regional peacekeeping vis-à-vis Nigeria's regional commitment to peace, stability, security and democracy, the issues that played out during the Cote d'Ivoire's conflict, Libya and Zimbabwe are critical to the success of African Union in the 21st Century. The section below demonstrates some specific aspects of the diplomatic relations between these two powers in Africa.

The Cases of Cote d'Ivoire

The 2010 political impasse in Cote d'Ivoire's highlighted South Africa's handicap as an impartial peacemaker and peace enforcer in Africa.⁴³ The 2010 political dispute resulted from the refusal of the incumbent Laurent Gbagbo to concede defeat in the election which was presumed to have been won by the opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara. This resulted in a violent political conflict as well as the killing of over 1000 civilians and roughly 500,000 Ivoirians fleeing to neighbouring countries.⁴⁴

It is argued that South African unilateral and biased stance in mediating in the crisis was Pretoria's deployment of a frigate off the West African coast, the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria's traditional area of influence, in January 2011. South Africa's role to conflict resolution was viewed by ECOWAS as undermining the AU high-level panel's work and also a potential sign of Pretoria's military support to Gbagbo.⁴⁵ Pretoria, supported by Angola, the Gambia and Uganda, challenged ECOWAS's legal recognition and backing of Alassane Ouattara and also opted for a power-sharing system, which infuriated ECOWAS and Nigeria.⁴⁶ In the midst of the crisis, however, the AU, ECOWAS and the UN endorsed and upheld the results of the election for

⁴² Devon E. A. Curtis, 'South Africa's peacekeeping Efforts in Africa: Ideas, Interests and Influence,' in, Adekeye Adebajo and Kudrat Virk (eds.), *Foreign Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Security, Diplomacy and Trade* (I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, London, 2017).

⁴³ Daniela Krosiak, 'South Africa's Implementation of its Own Peacekeeping Model in Africa: A Reality check,' in Kurt Shillinger (ed.), *Africa's Peacemaker? Lessons from South African Conflict Mediation* (Jacana Media, Cape Town, 2009), p. 44.

⁴⁴ International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, 'The Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire,' At: <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/crises/crisis-in-ivory-coast> (accessed 14/03/2018).

⁴⁵ Nicolas Cook 'Cote d'Ivoire Post-Gbagbo: Crisis Recovery' (Congressional Research Service, 2011) <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21989.pdf> (accessed 21/07/2017).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

Alassane Ouattara.⁴⁷ Landsberg stressed that “the fall-out over Cote d’Ivoire was a far cry from the days when Nigeria and South Africa acted more or less like a concert of powers, and underlined the divisions in the relationship between these two African Gullivers.”⁴⁸

The Case of Libya and Sudan

Libya is a country situated in the northern part of Africa. Commenting on what has been said about South Africa’s wavering and asymmetrical support for regional security and democracy vis-a-vis Nigeria’s commitment to regional stability, some critics have pointed to the role played by Pretoria in the passing of the United Nations Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973 on Libya in 2011. South Africa’s response to the political impasse in Libya suggests that Pretoria prioritised regime security over democracy promotion in Africa.⁴⁹ Also, it is doubtful whether Pretoria would continue to prioritise democracy, peace and security, or whether it would yield to the temptation to pursue utilitarian economic self-interest through the BRICS,⁵⁰ in undermining the dictate and mandate of the Peace and Security Council of the AU, which was signatory.

On 10 March 2011, South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon had initially voted for a “no fly zone” over Libya. South Africa under Jacob Zuma later renounced its decision, citing the view that NATO’s overstepped the bounds of the relevant UN resolution.⁵¹ Zuma’s back-peddalling on the Libya crisis raised doubts about policy consistency with regard to Pretoria’s commitment to democratisation on the continent.⁵² The inconsistency of Pretoria in respect to regional democracy, peace and security is what Khadiagala and Nganje describe as “South Africa squandered the opportunity provided by the Arab Spring to reassert its leadership on democracy promotion, particularly since Libya and most of North Africa had for a long time remained strongholds of authoritarianism in Africa.”⁵³ It may however be valid to assert that South Africa, which has a greater influence in the Southern African region and the AU, has failed and contradicted the collective decision of the African Union in Libya’s political crisis. This may

⁴⁷ Abatan Ella and Spies Yolanda, ‘African Solutions to African Problems? The AU, R2P and Côte d’Ivoire’ (University of South, South Africa, 2016): https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/52585/Abatan_African_2016.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed 14/03/2018).

⁴⁸ Landsberg, ‘An African “concert of powers”’: Nigeria and South Africa’s construction of the AU and NEPAD,’ p. 209.

⁴⁹ Gilbert M. Khadiagala and Fritz Nganje, ‘The Evolution of South Africa’s Democracy promotion in Africa: from Idealism to Pragmatism,’ *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, 4 (2016), p. 1572.

⁵⁰ Landsberg, ‘Towards a Post-Apartheid South Africa Foreign Policy Review,’ p. 5.

⁵¹ Khadiagala and Nganje ‘The Evolution of South Africa’s Democracy promotion in Africa: from Idealism to Pragmatism,’ p. 1572.

⁵² Ibid., p. 1572.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1572.

further frustrate the efforts of sub-regional actors such as Nigeria based on regional peace, security and democratisation, particularly within the AU in which both countries are stakeholders.

Furthermore, a disturbing feature of Pretoria's diplomatic approach to conflict resolution stems from its preference for short-cut approaches to conflict mediation, greeted with a disposition to empathise with, even shield the autocratic leaders in the name of "African solidarity."⁵⁴ Furthermore, Pretoria under President Jacob Zuma has been globally condemned for its failure to hand over Sudan's Omar al-Bashir to the ICC during his visit to Pretoria in 2015 for an AU Heads of state summit.⁵⁵ Omar al-Bashir had committed war crimes against humanity in Sudan. Pretoria was a signatory to the Treaty of Rome; as noted by Jeremy Sarkin, Al-Bashir's arrival tested the nation's (South Africa's) resolve to uphold international criminal justice, while juggling its desire to be a major role player in Africa and in the African Union."⁵⁶

The Case of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is another example of South Africa's difficulty in taking an impartial role in conflict resolution vis-à-vis the African Union. Nigeria's involvement, through the African Union, in Zimbabwe's political impasse may be described as an inter-sub-regional mediator and promoter of democracy in the Southern African region. The role of South Africa in Zimbabwean political conflicts can be viewed within the context of the 1976 Organisation of African Unity decision that places regional organisations at the centre of conflict management and resolution in member states, through the principle of non-interference.⁵⁷ The political crisis in Zimbabwe had its roots in three basic issues, which encompass the disputed land reform, the disputed constitutional referendum held in 2000 and the hard-fought presidential election of 2002.⁵⁸

On the land reform question, the foreign policy issue in Zimbabwe resonates deeply with the domestic populations of neighbouring states, all of which have been politically dispossessed of their lands in favour of white commercial farming interests at some time during their history.

⁵⁴ D. Geldenhuys, 'South Africa: The idea-driven foreign policy of a regional power,' in Flandes D. (ed.), *Regional leadership in the global system: Ideas, interests and strategies* (Ashgate, Surrey, 2010), p. 166.

⁵⁵ John Campbell, 'From Africa in Transition AU ICC Withdrawal Recommendation Means little,' *Council on Foreign Relations*. 2 February 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/au-icc-withdrawal-recommendation-means-little> (accessed 18/03/2018).

⁵⁶ Jeremy Sarkin, 'South Africa's (past, present and future) relationship to the International Criminal Court and international criminal justice,' in Doutje Lettinga and, Lars Van Troost (eds.), *Shifting Power and Human Rights Diplomacy South Africa* (Amnesty International, the Netherlands, 2016), p. 81.

⁵⁷ Lawrence Mhandara and Andrew Poole, 'Introduction,' in Doutje Lettinga and Lars Van Troost (eds.), *Shifting Power and Human Rights Diplomacy South Africa* (Amnesty International, Netherlands, 2016), pp. 1-3.

⁵⁸ Martin Rupaya, 'Zimbabwe in South Africa's Foreign Policy: A Zimbabwean View,' *International Affairs* (2002/03), pp. 161-170.

Harare's government has had to thread its path with an unusual degree of care in resolving the crisis.⁵⁹ Mugabe argued that Zimbabwe's economic, social and political conflicts had their antecedents in the country's land distribution pattern. Rural violence and security brutalities, while deployed, were important for an equitable land distribution programme. Mugabe further maintained that Western powers and media had portrayed Zimbabwe's political problems with the intention of unsettling his government over seizure of white property, which found international support in the Abuja Agreement of 6 September 2001.⁶⁰ The Abuja Agreement recognised that land remains the key factor in Zimbabwe's crisis and the need for land reform is important to the resolution of the crisis.⁶¹

On the other hand, the disputed Zimbabwean presidential election of the 9-10 March 2002, signalled for the first time that the national liberation movement had encountered political uncertainty since it lost popularity at all three levels of government: local government, parliamentary and presidential.⁶² Significantly, in the disputed election run-off that followed, the security agencies played a decisive, violent and partisan role to prevent democratic transition – a position that was strongly objected to by the AU, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the SADC Parliamentary Forum – that led to the evolution of the Government of National Unity in February 2009. Both the AU and SADC understood the complexity of the political impasse over the destiny of Zimbabwe, including the agenda of the AU to remove Robert Mugabe.⁶³

The African Union had expected South Africa to play a formidable role in the disputed election of 2002, and South Africa's ANC party publicly called for Zimbabwe to adhere strictly to the electoral standards. Also, In March 2004, a group of Southern countries allied with Asian states to prevent the EU's resolution outlawing Zimbabwe in the UN Commission for Human Rights (UNCHR); in the face of such condemnation, the EU dropped the resolution in 2005, sending a

⁵⁹ Chris Alden and Anseeuw, *Ward Land, Liberation and Compromise in Southern Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009), p. 6.

⁶⁰ Blessing-Miles Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* (International Academic Publishers, Bern, Switzerland, 2010), p. 97.

⁶¹ Text of Abuja Agreement of the Committee of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers on Zimbabwe, 2001, cited in Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media.*, p. 97.

⁶² Rupaya R. Martin, 'Introduction,' in R. Rupaya R. Martin (ed.), *Zimbabwe's Military: Examining its Veto Power in the Transition to Democracy, 2003-2008* (The African Public Policy and Research Institute, Pretoria, 2013), pp. 1-8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

negative signal following the rigged presidential election. Thabo Mbeki and the ANC tolerated Mugabe and accepted the results of the rigged election to be free and fair.⁶⁴

The relationship between South Africa and Zimbabwe has, from the external dimension, appeared one of unconditional support from Zimbabwe's southern neighbour, with Pretoria prioritising economic stability above regional or neighbouring political stability. Economically, Pretoria benefited from Zimbabwe's economic crisis.⁶⁵ The location of South Africa's economic interest in the continuous destabilisation and quiet diplomacy towards the Southern African region, particularly Harare, points to South Africa's self-centred concern with regional economic domination starkly contrasting with its self-avowed claim of an African renaissance through NEPAD.

At an earlier stage of Zimbabwe's crisis in 2002, Nigeria, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, organised a group of Commonwealth ministers to discuss a lasting solution to the crisis. After the Commonwealth ministers' meeting in both Abuja and Harare in 2001, the Harare government refused to implement the decision, which led to Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth.⁶⁶ In July 2003, as Zimbabwe's political impasse continued to unfold, President W. Bush visited South Africa as a way to put pressure on the country to assume a leadership role in the resolution of the political crisis rocking Zimbabwe.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, South Africa served as one of the three mediators (with Nigeria and Australia) on the political crisis in Zimbabwe. Events at this forum suggested that South Africa continued to side with Zimbabwe while working behind the political scenes to find a solution.⁶⁸ For example, following the suspension of Zimbabwe in 2001 and after the December 2003 Commonwealth summit at which members voted to maintain the suspension, Mbeki rallied and organised SADC members to oppose the resolution.⁶⁹ Unlike Nigeria's avowed commitment to regional peace, security and democracy in the West African region, South Africa's peace missions, particularly about the genuineness of its intention in Africa, have continued to attract criticisms.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Knox Chitiyo and Steve Kibble, 'Zimbabwe's International Re-engagement the long Haul to Recovery,' (Chatham House Report, 2014), p. 26.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁶ Ade Adefuye, 'Obasanjo: Commonwealth Chairperson- Challenge and Strategy, 2004-2005,' in Bola Akinterinwa A. (ed.) *Nigeria's New Foreign Policy Thrust: Essays in Honour of Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji*, CON (Vantage Publishers, Ibadan, 2004), p. 404.

⁶⁷ Andrea K. Grove, *Political Leadership in Foreign Policy: Manipulating Support across Borders* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007), p. 88.

⁶⁸ Martin 'Zimbabwe in South Africa's Foreign Policy: A Zimbabwean View,' p. 168.

⁶⁹ Grove, *Political Leadership in Foreign Policy: Manipulating Support across Borders*, p. 89.

⁷⁰ Ogunnubi and Amao, 'South Africa's Emerging "Soft Power" Influence in Africa and Its Impending Limitations: Will the Giant Be Able to Weather the Storm?' p. 313.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Nigerian-South African relations within the African Union. It illustrated both countries' commitments and leadership roles in the AU. It examined Nigeria's and South Africa's claims in carving a united and common vision for Africa. It also highlighted the countries' willingness, capacity and acceptance in assuming the mantle of leadership in Africa via the AU. The two giant African leaders – former president Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa – catalysed the emergence of the AU in 2002. These two regional rivals and hegemonies were the central architects of the AU's ideological foundations. According to Ochieng-Sprinter,⁷¹ the adoption and inclusion of conflict resolution and management in the AU's Charter was spearheaded by Nigeria. This inclusion in its Charter was to curb pervasive human rights abuses and threats to human security in Africa. The AU's institutional design and legal structures were strengthened by Nigeria. This is evident in the Peace and Security Council and its Protocol, and in Article 4h, which empowers the AU with the right to intervene in the internal affairs of member states on humanitarian grounds. Nigeria also remains one of the four major pillars and financiers (Algeria, Egypt, and South Africa) of the AU operating budget.⁷² As a regional hegemon in Africa, Nigeria has taken part in AU's capacity-building exercises for the military, policy and civilian components for the African Union Standby Force (ASF) and the ECOWAS Standby Force,⁷³ While Pretoria's efforts led also led to the foundation of NEPAD – an economic ideology devised to eradicate poverty and economic inequality in Africa

Similarly, another major emphasis considered in the paper is underscored by the rivalry of South Africa and Nigeria within the AU's leadership. This has been illustrated, for example, by Mills Soko and Neil Balchin,⁷⁴ who stated that the two countries have held competing aspirations for continental leadership and a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. The two countries, based on their political and economic powers, geo-political locations and their leadership roles in the international community, continue to inhibit the African Union's ability to speak with one voice within the international community and organisations like the UN.

⁷¹ Sandra Ochieng'-Springer, *Interrelationship between the African Union and Nigeria* (University of the West Indies, West Indies, Department of Government, Sociology and Social Work, 2011), p. 8.

⁷² Samuel M. Makinda, et al., *The African Union: Addressing the Challenges of Peace, Security, and Governance* (2nd edn) (Routledge, New York, 2016), p. 53.

⁷³ Goddy. U. Osimen, et al., 'Peace Keeping Role of Nigeria in Sub-Sahara Africa,' *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies* 2, 10 (2015), p. 26, <http://www.ijrhss.org/pdf/v2-i10/4.pdf> (accessed 01/03/2016).

⁷⁴ Mills Soko and Neil Balchin, 'South Africa's Quest for Leadership in Africa: Achievements, Constraints and Dilemmas,' in Stephen Kingali and Cintia Quiliconi (eds.) *Global and Regional Leadership in BRICS Countries* (Springer International Publishing, Switzerland, 2016), pp. 367-392.

In addition, the membership of South Africa in key multilateral institutions like G20 and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)⁷⁵ group further constitutes a source of discontent in Abuja. In 2011, Nigeria and South-Africa reached conflicting positions in the UN Security Council and the AU on how to deal with the military intervention by France and UN troops in the Ivory Coast. The two countries also clashed on whether or not to recognise the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the legitimate government in Libya following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime.⁷⁶ The relationship between the two African giants was further strained by a spate of xenophobic attacks against Nigerian immigrants and other Africans in South Africa.⁷⁷ In this case, the level of the unhealthy rivalries and polarisations between the two major countries remains a problem for AU-Nigerian relations, and thus poses a serious challenge for the AU's institutional framework of strategic partnerships in Africa.

More worrisome is the issue of South Africa's approach of quiet diplomacy towards political crises in Africa. Nigeria's commitment to Africa's democratisation has not been complemented by Pretoria. Pretoria has resolved to consider its national economic and regime security as a top priority over regional stability. However, for the AU to achieve its stated objectives, such as peace, security and democracy in Africa, South Africa must be willing to prove its capacity to translate AU objectives into reality to the world. To achieve this, South Africa needs to do more to convince its neighbours, notably Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe.⁷⁸

Consequently, smooth AU-Nigerian relations in these circumstances may not be realistic, as relations between Nigeria and South Africa were further strained by Nigeria's tactical opposition to Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's appointment as chairperson of the AU in 2012.⁷⁹ Both Nigeria and Algeria, the regional hegemons, feared that their strategic interests would not have been protected in South Africa's emergence as the chairperson of the AU and were strongly in support of Ping in 2012. It was also the fear of Nigeria and other members of the AU that if South Africa emerged as the chair of the AU, it might use its economic might or influence to secure a

⁷⁵ Hannatu Musawa, 'The Battle for Supremacy between Nigeria and South Africa,' *Premium Times*. 20 December 2013, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/151803-battle-supremacy-nigeria-south-africa-hannatu-musawa.html> (accessed 15/03/2016).

⁷⁶ Nagar and Paterson, cited in Soko and Balchin, 'South Africa's Quest for Leadership in Africa: Achievements, Constraints and Dilemmas,' p. 238.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁷⁸ Ogunnubi and Amao, 'South Africa's Emerging "Soft Power" Influence in Africa and Its Impending Limitations: Will the Giant Be Able to Weather the Storm?' p. 314.

⁷⁹ Soko and Balchin, 'South Africa's Quest for Leadership in Africa: Achievements, Constraints and Dilemmas,' p. 238.

permanent African seat on an expanded UN Security Council.⁸⁰ This has become a strong source of disharmony, particularly between Nigeria and South Africa.

In the final analysis, the inability of South Africa to strengthen human rights and democracy in its region constrains its regional influence and international prestige, and thus serve as a “spoiler” against Nigeria’s commitment to peace, security and democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the relationship between Nigeria and Nigeria at the level of the AU and efforts at ensuring common African objectives have been a dissent one. The two countries often pursue their self-interests (national interests), which sometimes inhibits the collective and common objectives of the AU. However, for the African continent to progress and speak with one voice at the global level, states’ parochial interests and skirmishes within the AU leadership, particularly between Nigeria and South Africa, must be overcome.

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⁸⁰ Elissa Jobson, ‘African Union chooses first female leader,’ *The Guardian*. 16 July 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/16/african-union-first-female-leader> (accessed 20/03/2018).

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