

Security, Economy, and Regional Organizations in Nigeria's External Relations: An Appraisal

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Abstract

The study examines Nigeria's economic and security interests in relation to international organisations in the African political space. States within the global system employ the use of multilateral channels to achieve critical national interest objectives, and the manner with which each state uses the mechanism of international organisation in foreign policy-making process is different. This is borne out of endogenous features of a state. Thus, the current research attempts to appraise the place of international organisations in achieving economic and security interests of Nigeria in the African political system. The research is founded on the theory of national interest which assumes the centrality of state in international relations. The research therefore shows that Nigeria, most importantly in the West Africa sub-region, has been employing the mechanism of multilateralism in achieving security and economic interests. In conducting the research, the qualitative content analysis is used to study existing research materials like textbooks, journal articles, internet sources and documents.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; Multilateralism; Nigeria; Security; Economy.

Introduction

The most critical aspect of Nigeria's involvement in international organizations is the issue of territorial integrity. As soon as Nigeria gained its independence in 1960 it occurred to Nigerian nationalist leaders that for Nigeria to be a secure and prosperous state, all other states in Africa must be secured. This position triggered the idea of having a continental organization which Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana had been championing before Nigeria's political independence in 1960. By 1967 Nigeria was plunged into a 30-month civil war. The civil war, in which some African states supported the secessionist Biafra, opened Nigeria to the reality of the need to strengthen the existing regional organization and as well as form another one at the sub-regional level. Akanji (2019) stresses that Nigerian leaders at the time realized the need to ensure that its neighbours are locked in the same organization in order to minimize the influence of external powers in the region. Omotuyi (2020) therefore observes that it was French government that used the francophone territories to support the Biafra region in Nigeria during the civil war. This realization impelled the Major General Yakubu Gowon administration to demand the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from West African leaders. There was resistance from France but in the end Nigeria was able to convince other West African neighbours to sign the treaty that established ECOWAS in 1975. The main rationale for the formation of the organization was to promote security and economic prosperity within the sub-region. Nigeria, being the largest of all the states in the region, shouldered the responsibility of leading the way (Hartmann & Striebinger, 2015; Gowon, 1971). Nigeria

sponsored the establishment of ECOWAS to promote regional economic integration and unified security system. In a way, Nigeria's national interest in economic and security terms were factors in sponsoring the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. Thus, the twin-factors of economy and security dominated the involvement of Nigeria in the continental organisations. The next section of the research has therefore been devoted to the full discussion on security and economic dimensions in Nigeria's involvement in international organisations.

Nigeria's Security Policy and Regional Organisations

Security, as one of the most important national interests of states, has been a driving force in the foreign policy of Nigeria since independence. In order to guarantee the territorial integrity of the state, Nigeria's government uses the mechanism of multilateral diplomacy. Therefore, some relevant literature is reviewed to discuss the importance of the security factor in Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy.

The Nigerian foreign policy, according to Obi (2008, p. 98-112), has responded to transnational security. He links transnational security with a discussion on Nigerian foreign policy towards West Africa within which Nigeria plays a prominent role. As a regional hegemon in West African states, Nigeria has succeeded in putting in place a mechanism that controls incessant conflicts in the region and prevents as much as possible the external interference in the region which may pose a threat to Nigerian security. Alli (2012) also supports this line of reasoning where he considers Nigeria as the sole hegemon in the West African sub-region. Alli asserts that ECOWAS has become an instrument with which Nigeria discharges its responsibility towards its neighbours. Both authors are right in their arguments, but one needs to know that from its incipience, ECOWAS was not meant to be an instrument of conflict resolution. It was established purely for the purpose of economic integration in the West African sub-region. The emerging civil wars in West African countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Central African Republic and most recently in the Sahel Region have shifted the focus of the organization to a mechanism for conflict resolution rather than economic integration. This view is corroborated by Lopez-Lucia (2020) who analyses the role of ECOWAS in the maintenance of conflict resolution in West Africa. He laments that ECOWAS has done better in the area of conflict resolution than in promoting economic prosperity. It should be noted that this scenario is not peculiar to African case. The main purpose of the establishment of European Economic Community in 1957, for example, was for economic purposes, but as time went by the security issue was included. Therefore, the functionality and purpose of any multilateral organization depends on the requirement of time, and in most cases it is very difficult to separate security issues from economic prosperity.

Aluko (1973, p. 165-173)) also supports the security dimension of Nigerian multilateral policy by identifying it as the prime motive of Nigerian government behind the establishment of ECOWAS and other continental organisations. "The realization of regional insecurity experienced by Gowon during the civil war propelled the regime to carry along other West African countries in the region towards the establishment of ECOWAS," Aluko asserts. The Gowon administration was of the conviction that if West African economies are integrated, there will be little time for conflict and no state will be ready to lose its economic benefit by fighting other states. However, unfortunately for Nigeria, such insecurity persists until today in the region. This is a clear failure on the part of Nigerian government. This position is supported by Oladimeji (2019) who is of the view that Nigeria's foreign policy has been very lax to address the imperative of security, political stability and economic problems both within and outside the

West African sub-region. The most cited case is Nigeria's complacency in the Gulf of Guinea region of West Africa where piracy and illegal fishing activities have been reported. According to the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Gulf of Guinea is reported to have contributed 43 percent of all reported piracy incidents in the first three months of 2021 (ICC, 2021).

Conkar (2020) also stresses the fundamental security problems posed to Nigeria by the historical presence of France in West-Central Africa, particularly since 1960. In concrete terms, this problem assumes two main forms: the first is the effect of the French presence in the region threatening Nigeria's national security, and the second is its constraint on the growth of Nigeria's cultural and political interests in the region. It furthers that, in its conventional form, the French involvement in West-Central Africa impeded the natural emergence of Nigeria as a regional power. Thus, there is need for progressive development of a technological base of power by Nigeria in order to become a dominant force in the region. This is extremely important to a strong military force and a self-reliant economy, which will in reality confirm Nigeria's credentials as an alternative regional power to France. It must be stated here that the presence of France in Africa does not itself constitute a threat to Nigerian security, but it is the activities of the French government over years that makes the Nigerian government perceive France as a threat. To buttress this position, Obamamoye (2020) pointed out the recent intervention of the French government in the Sahel region of West Africa where there is growing sentiment against the presence of French military operation. According to BBC (2021), the growing sentiment results from the inability of the French troops to stamp out terrorist attacks in the Sahel region since 2013 which prolongs their stay in the region.

Obamamoye (2020) also agrees on the sub-regional security threat faced by Nigeria from its neighbours. He confirms the existence of security challenges posed by the presence of France in the neighbouring francophone African countries where France has already established security agreements. It is thus argued that if the presence of France is just to ensure the stability of governments in the francophone African countries and to ensure friendly regimes are in power, then Nigeria may benefit from this arrangement in the end. According to the scholar, this will keep the region stable and in this instance, unstable governments in the neighbouring countries will not threaten Nigeria. Obamamoye, therefore, concludes that Nigeria needs to put in place alternative security edifice that will stabilize the sub-region in term of security without which no meaningful economic progress will be achieved. It should be stated that the presence of French military operation in the region is to quell the tides of insecurity which is part of the ECOWAS mandate in the region and such an effort supports the efforts of Nigeria in the region (Lopez-Lucia, 2020). This position is supported by the ECOWAS-France multi-national joint task force operations in Mali and Senegal in 2012 and 2019 respectively (Dieng, 2019).

William and Haacke (2008, 119-136) also note that it has been very difficult for Nigeria to carry along other West African members especially the Lusophone¹ and francophone countries in the quest to maintain peace and stability in the sub-region. The overwhelming power of Nigeria in the region is perceived by many neighbours as a threat which makes them seek defence alliance with France. It is this regional political condition that makes order and stability difficult to be maintained in the sub-region. Dokubo and Joseph (2011, p.562) therefore conclude that as the region is divided by colonial history, personal ambition and greed, it will be very

¹The Lusophone countries are former Portuguese territories in West Africa and they are two in number. These are Equatorial Guinea and Cape Verde.

difficult for a regional power to maintain peace and stability. Despite this regional complexity, Nigeria has been able to utilize the mechanism of multilateral policy, at least relatively, to maintain peace and order in the region.

Kwaghga and Robert (2011, p.1-9) digress a little bit from the above assertion by doubting the capability of Nigeria in utilizing multilateral institutions for maintenance of security. The scholars are of the opinion that Nigeria's internal problem may affect the response of Nigerian government towards African security issues (Kwaghga & Robert, 2011). It seems the scholars hold a realist position, which sees states as the only actors in the global politics. Otherwise, they would have recognized that terrorist groups and insurgency constitute an actor in driving events at the global level. The mere fact that Nigeria experiences insurgency attacks at home does not negate the capacity of Nigeria to maintain stability in West Africa. After all, Nigeria intervened in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts at the most troubled time in Nigerian political history.

In his work, Bach (2007, p.1-21) stresses that it was the hegemonic aspiration and power status of Nigeria that propelled the Nigerian government to sponsor the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975. It states that shortly after the successful conclusion of the civil war, premised on the supports Nigeria received from the members of OAU, the government decided to reciprocate the gesture to West African neighbours by the establishment of ECOWAS. According to Ogunbadejo (1977, pp.37-49) the supports, both military and moral, which the Nigerian government received from members of OAU made the winning of civil war possible. He further stresses that if OAU members had supported the Biafran course, the result of the war would have been different. It was based on this support and the overt enmity displayed by certain African countries like Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire that propelled Nigerian government to strengthen relations with other African countries (Stremlau, 2015).

In a related development, Griffin (2015) identifies territorial dispute, religious violence, terrorism, insurgency, extreme poverty and corruption as the bane confronting Nigeria at home to perform its role effectively at regional level. He stresses that the leadership role of Nigeria in the continent is being affected and hampered by these scourges. For example, the current civilian administration under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari has been reported to give 1 million US dollars to the Afghanistan government (Nwakanma, 2022). This is what most scholars regard as the paradox of foreign policymaking on the part of the Nigerian government when most Nigerians wallow in extreme poverty. Dauda and Bako (2012) and Osuntokun (2005) also delve into the examination of Nigerian foreign policy since independence. In doing this they observe that the role of Nigeria in multilateral organisations started in the 1960s. In their articles, they assess how Nigeria dealt with Rhodesia's issue in 1965. Nigeria, under the leadership of Balewa, was opposed to the apartheid regime which resulted in the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961. According to Folarin (2010), such active participation in the Commonwealth of Nations resulted in the convening of Commonwealth Heads of Government for the first time outside London, in Lagos in 1965. Such a meeting was convened in order to discuss the Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence in Rhodesia. Although the authors are right; but the active participation of Nigeria in the Commonwealth during the early years of independence signified the intention of Nigeria to ward off any form of colonialism or racism. Thus, such active participation is an extension of Nigeria's Africa-centred policy.

In addition, Barika (2014) opines that with the joining of OPEC in 1971 Nigeria was able to increase its oil output in the global market which culminated in giving out aid to needy African states. It should be stated that the membership of Nigeria in the OPEC in the 1971

launched Nigeria into the politics of Middle East. Such a claim came to the fore in 1973 when Nigeria voted in the UN for the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory (Mohammed, 2010). It needs to be stated here that the membership of Nigeria in the OPEC goes beyond what this scholar describes. In OPEC, Nigeria has been an active partner, which resulted in Nigeria's economic boom of 1973. In 1973, the Arab oil embargoes enhanced the bargaining capacity of Nigeria in the global world politics and the oil power was used in punishing and rewarding foes and friends respectively. Nevertheless, Mohammed's work serves as a secondary source in discerning the Nigerian multilateral diplomacy.

From the above, it is clear that multilateral organization is a mechanism the Nigerian government employs to advance its national interest in Africa especially in the area of security. ECOWAS has been significant in this way. Thus, most of these works are relevant to the research. This literature could be used in the course of conducting this research. This research will therefore serve as a compendium to the study of Nigeria's multilateral policy.

Nigeria's Economic Policy and Africa's Organisations

The relative dominant nature of Nigerian economy in Africa is one of the factors that dictates the dynamism of its foreign policy since independence. By the time of Nigerian independence in 1960, its economy, signified by a large population, oil deposits, vast tropical agricultural produce, and significant commodity market, made it easier for the Nigerian government to pursue an aggressive foreign policy. It is therefore possible for the Nigerian government to contribute immensely to multilateral organizations while at the same time using such a medium to pursue certain goals and objectives in its foreign relations.

One of the earliest works written on Nigerian economic position in relation to its external relation is by Angling (1964, p. 137). He posits that the economic diversity and prosperity of Nigeria in the early days of independence was a factor reflected in its decision for joining the non-alignment forum. Nigerian had inherited a vibrant economy from the colonial powers and in this way it was possible to pursue a policy of non-alignment. Although economy may constitute an important factor in the decision of Nigeria to pursue such a policy with certainty, however the political weight of Nigeria in Africa should better explain this more than the economy. Gambari (1975, p. 95) contends that the wealth accrued from the oil enabled the Nigerian government to pursue foreign adventurism with certainty for Nigeria did not need any financial assistance from the developed countries. He therefore concludes that it was the oil wealth, which accrued to Nigeria in the 1970s during the Arab oil embargoes against the West that helped the Nigerian government to initiate the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. This view is contrasted by Fajana's (1978), who asserts that the formation of ECOWAS was not only necessitated by economic prosperity in the country but also to ensure that Nigeria's neighbours are more aligned with Nigeria than with France. Whatever the argument, what is certain is that the formation of ECOWAS has both political and economic undertones.

In a related development, Gambari (2011, p. 136) opines that the multilateral undertaking by Nigeria is borne out of its relative economic advancement in Africa. Otherwise, how would one explain the activity of Nigeria in the UN, OAU/AU, ECOWAS, Commonwealth and OPEC since independence? Gambari therefore concludes that it is the economic viability especially the oil economy that enabled Nigeria to discharge its financial and moral obligation in all its multilateral undertakings most especially in OAU/AU and ECOWAS. This view is also supported by Alo (2013, pp. 296-303) where he narrates how Nigeria's economy dictates its

position in the establishment of NEPAD and APRM. It is clearly stated that it was the economic buoyancy of both South Africa and Nigeria that made the establishment a reality for most African countries who could not meet their financial obligations to the AU. This line of reasoning is in contrast with Jaye's (2008, p. 159), who sees Nigeria as protecting its interests in its contribution to continental institutions. He highlights that the enormous security challenges being faced by the West African countries ordinarily demand the attention of Nigeria.

Moreover, Jaye may be right by this line of argument but one needs to realize that the ECOWAS itself, where Nigeria contributes over 50 percent of the annual budget, is made possible by Nigeria's economic prosperity (Ojeme, 2021). In 2021, the Federal Government of Nigeria reported to have contributed 1,177. billion USD to ECOWAS over the period of 16 years (Ojeme, 2021). It is the Nigerian relative financial stability that has been sustaining the ECOWAS region since inception and no conflict has gone beyond the military and financial capacity of Nigeria. The argument can be complemented with what happened in the East African region in 1994 where close to a million Rwandans and Burundians were violently massacred. This may be attributed to the lack of a clear hegemon to instantaneously contain the situation before the intervention of the UN and other international organizations. Such a scenario might have repeated itself in West Africa but for Nigerian financial largess, it was contained. Ashaver (2014, pp. 6-11) also contributes immensely to the economy and Nigeria's multilateral policy. He states that it was the constant revenue, which Nigeria got from oil in the 1970s and 1980s, that allowed independent policy implementation towards the Southern African issue. He cited the Angola case of 1977 as an example, where Nigeria stood firmly against the interest of the major powers and sponsored a homegrown party that later defeated the western-sponsored one (Agwai, 2010). Financially, Nigeria contributed to the liberation of most Southern African countries and it is in this circumstance, Ashaver and Teryma (2014) note, that Nigeria achieved the status of a frontline state.

Furthermore, Timothy Shaw (1978) comes up with counter-idea where he identifies Nigeria's economic capability and its role in Africa and the global politics. He laments that Nigeria should not be hoodwinked by its economic resources and population; its house needs to be put in order before projecting an aggressive foreign policy. Agbiboa (2011) also displays an opposing view in this case. He sees Nigeria as a "toothless bulldog" in Africa and global politics despite its economic prosperity (Agbiboa, 2011, p.18). He contends that the relative economic prosperity enjoyed by Nigeria has never been adequately and judiciously utilized to better the life of Nigerians and other Africans. He concludes that it was in the spirit of domestic corruption that impelled the Nigerian government to intervene in the Liberian and Sierra Leone crisis. Although he acknowledges the economic factor in the establishment of ECOMOG, he nevertheless proposes that such billions of dollars expended in the crisis was unjustifiable in running multilateral operations. Agbiboa's view is based on the fact that most of these countries where Nigeria has expended most of its oil wealth have not appreciated the gesture, but instead serve as impediments to the ambition and aspiration of Nigeria in both continental and global multilateral diplomacy.

This argument is also supported by Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016) where they stress the competition being faced by Nigeria in its bid for the permanent membership of the UNSC if the restructuring is approved. In the West African sub-region where Nigeria is a clear hegemon, the aspiration of Nigeria in the UNSC may be truncated by the francophone countries while South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt are also in a stiff competition with Nigeria. One thing needs to be cleared at this juncture. Nigeria's bid in the UNSC may be seen by some

African countries as a threat to their cooperative existence. This resistance should not be magnified for such an issue also applies to Europe and Asia. In Europe, for example, German aspiration in the UNSC is being potentially blocked by Italy, Britain, and Spain while China would never allow Japan to ascend to the permanent position in UNSC. This therefore indicates that rivalry is normal between and among nations in any geopolitical calculation.

Findings of the Research

In assessing the extensive literature on the research topic, it is found that economic integration is one of the areas where Nigeria has utilized the use of international organisations. Nigeria's sponsorship of ECOWAS in West Africa is closely linked to promoting economic integration in Africa according to the research. Although the regional economic multilateral institutions have been used as a platform in promoting Nigeria's economic interests in Africa, the bulk of Nigeria's participation in ECOWAS has always been in security and political matters. The regional organization was formerly conceived as economic in nature but some of the areas where successes have been recorded are the maintenance of security and order in Africa. The Sierra Leonean, Liberian, Malian and Ivorian cases are prime examples in this case. Thus, in the area of economic integration, the regional multilateral organization has achieved little when compared to the political issues.

This research also found that there is a nexus between Nigeria's multilateral policy and the protection of its territory from external threats. Such external threats are extra-West African affairs, terrorism, and France's involvement in the region. The engagement with international institutions since independence by Nigeria has been to achieve a measure of security within and outside Nigerian borders. As discussed earlier, Nigeria from the time of its independence discovered that most countries in Africa are too weak to ward off external aggression in the proper sense of it. Some, like Sao Tome and Principe, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo, are very small in terms of population and landmass and they could be used by any external powers to launch an attack on Nigeria which will invariably undermine the security of Nigeria. This hypothesis came to pass during Nigerian civil war where France and other countries used these neighbours to supply arms to Biafran secessionists. In addition, Tella (2018) is of the view that foreign countries may engage in subversion in neighbouring countries which may have a reverberating effect on Nigerian security. All these summed together are the factors that propel Nigeria from employing regional institutions in solving the security problems in Africa, and by extension in Nigeria.

Apart from security, systemic pressure is also found to be one of the factors that dictate Nigeria's employment of regional multilateral institutions. Because of the way external powers pursue their economic and political interest in various regions of the globe, it is possible for a regional hegemon to face pressure and threat to its hegemonic ambition, which is defined in terms of national interests, from external or global powers. This is greatly noticeable by the manner in which France and other powers are involved in the affairs of West Africa where Nigeria establishes its hegemonic influence. Some scholars (i.e. Prys, 2010; Nwoke, 2005; Mulugeta, 2014) are of the view that the fact that regional hegemon is being threatened by external powers and regional members does not nullify the hegemonic position of that regional power. There is always resentment both at the regional level and at the global level to the role of a hegemon in regional politics. From Nigeria's point of view, members of a regional security complex in West Africa do intentionally collaborate with non-regional powers to undermine

Nigeria's dominating influence and this clearly defines the role some francophone countries play with France in the region.

Conclusion

The research established the nexus between Nigeria's foreign policy activities and the need to promote security and economy. Such an attempt has been made possible through the employment of international organisations within the continental space. The government of Nigeria recognized the potent and actual threats neighbouring countries pose to the actualization of security and economy after the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. Such a realization thus impelled the Nigerian government to engage other African countries to establish ECOWAS within the sub-region. The institutional mechanism of both ECOWAS and OAU (now AU) has aided the Nigerian government in the harmonization of security and economic issues on the continent. In addition, the organizational apparatus has been used as a foreign policy tool to promote Nigeria's security and economic interests within the African political space. The research thus observed the need for Nigeria to intensify its effort at both regional and sub-regional levels to arrest the menace of insecurity that has been ravaging the continent for a decade now. In addition, it is observed that Nigeria's employment of international organisations should put into consideration the national economic capacity of Nigeria. This is because overambitious policy can undermine domestic financial capacity to respond to issues of national concerns.

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