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An Assessment of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the African Union Security Architecture: Neo-conservative Perspectives

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The beginning of the 21st century witnessed a strategic shift in Nigeria's foreign policy. After the return of Nigeria to civilian rule in 1999, new multilateral diplomacy had to be embarked upon towards the promotion of democracy, peace, and security in Africa. One notable and distinctive feature of the country's foreign policy from the inception of the Fourth Republic (1999) has been its promotion of African stability through the democratisation process. Nigeria has consistently used the African Union (AU) to pursue an agenda which can be described as neo-conservative, in restoring democracy, peace, and security, in Africa. Given this, this paper examines the neo-conservative foreign policy objectives and the role of the Nigerian state within the African Union security architecture towards the nurturing and advancement of democracy, peace, and security since the return to the civilian rule in 1999.

Keywords: Nigeria, national interests, neo-conservatism foreign policy, democracy, security, democratic peace theory

Introduction

Following the return to civilian government in 1999, Nigeria has undertaken its foreign policy measures consistent with the policy objectives of the African Union (AU). The policy ramifications of Nigeria's role in the AU since 1999 include her commitment to peace, security, integration, and sustainable democracy in Africa (Okereke, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, the West African sub-region as Nigeria's sphere of influence, gives the country a place as a natural leader in Africa, underscored by its enormous contribution to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), AU, and peace in the region, and strongly affirms that Nigeria's continued stability, economic resources, and active role will be unmatched and central to African peace and security (Obi, 2011, p. 63). Nigeria's neo-conservatism and commitment to promoting a democratic ethos in Africa have been subsumed under certain guidelines, under the Constitutive Act of the AU. Among these are, on the one hand, a strong repudiation of unconstitutional changes of governments, and, on the other hand, financial and technical assistance to transitional states, and a commitment to peace and conflict management in Africa (Omotola, 2008, p. 38).

Nigeria has associated itself closely with this agenda—neo-conservative foreign policy. For example, in May 2000, Nigeria hosted the first Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSCDCA), which provided a forum for the development of policies aimed at

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promoting the common values of the AU and the African Economic Community (AEC) in the areas of democracy, peace, and security (Europa Publications, 2004, p. 1311). Accordingly, on July 9-10 2002, the African Heads of State, meeting in Durban, South Africa, inaugurated and adopted the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of Peace and Security Council (PSC). On December 26, 2003, Nigeria became the 27th AU state to endorse its instruments for ratification, thereby bringing the Protocol into operation (Lansford, 2017, p. 1738). However, this paper examines the role of Nigeria in the AU's security architecture towards the nurturing and promotion of democracy, security, and peace in Africa since 1999. Furthermore, given the West African region as a traditional sphere of Nigeria's influence, the paper looks at Nigeria's foreign policy and the implications of the AU's Constitutive Act on its national security towards the promotion of its national interests in Africa, following the return to civilian rule in 1999.

Conceptual Discourse

Neo-conservatism

The beginning of the 21st century witnessed a strategic shift in Nigeria's foreign policy and its quest to democratise sub-Saharan Africa. This strategic shift in its foreign policy approach, after the return to the civilian government in 1999 (Fourth Republic), was underpinned by the need to reposition itself and re-affirm its commitment to the advancement of democracy, peace, and security on the African continent. This paper draws on the neo-conservative principles of Irving Kristol (2011), to investigate the character of Nigeria's foreign policy and related security policy behaviour since 1999, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The principle of neo-conservatism "emphasizes strong commitment to Western democratic values" (Acar & Altunok, 2013, p. 14). In other words, neo-conservatism is an offshoot of both the liberal institutionalist and democratic peace theories of IR. It is a political ideology that developed as an outgrowth of the radicalism of the Sixties, following the civil rights and anti-war movements targeted at making the liberal society cease to act illiberally (Steinfels, 2013, p. 3). Bradley Thompson (2010, p. 173) stressed that neo-conservatism is a political idea that focuses on political formalism against the criticisms dominated by the foreign policy "realism" of the 1990s. Neo-conservatives argue that foreign policy "realism" is imbued with a narrow description of national interest, "in which only tangible, immediate threats to American security warranted military action" (Thompson, 2010, p. 173).

In Thompson's view, neoconservatives believe that realism cannot predict long-range disasters and the appeasement to deter future real threats that may culminate into full-fledged global threats or catastrophe (Thompson, 2010, p. 173). For example, in place of realism, neo-conservatism advocates what is called "benevolent hegemony". Benevolent hegemony in the realm of foreign policy has two goals. First, to provide a state with security (a realist foreign policy rooted in self-interest), second, to propagate democracy across the world (idealist foreign policy objective rooted in altruism) (Thompson, 2010, p. 174) through democratic internationalism. Hegemonic neo-conservatives believe that the world can be made peaceful through the democratisation of undemocratic regimes and denuclearization of regimes that are possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) (Ritchie & Rogers, 2007, p. 145). Similarly, Clarke and Halper observed that for the US to advance its national interest in exporting democracy and making the world a safer place, "neo-conservatives advocate active measures and actions with other states to achieve the fundamental objective of spreading and advancing democracy, peace and security" (Clarke and Halper, cited in Ritchie & Rogers, 2007, p. 145).

Hegemonic neo-conservatives, like realists, believe that the use of military power is vital to America's foreign policy and national security, and argue that the US foreign policy must be imbued with total military statecraft and possibly, the alignment or coalition of states to advance democracy and fight dictatorial regimes (Ritchie & Rogers, 2007, p. 145). For example, the pressure that led to the removal of Saddam Hussain in Iraq was underpinned by the enduring principles of neo-conservatism to advance democracy, peace, and security in the Middle East (Ritchie & Rogers, 2007, pp. 146-147). This regime change was based on neo-conservative idea of "go it alone" (Pearson, 2008, p. 242) and was described by Francis Fukuyama as "American exceptionalism—the implicit judgement that the U.S. is different from other countries and can be trusted to use its military power justly and wisely in the ways that others could not" (Fukuyama, cited in Pearson, 2008, p. 242). Ultimately, the U.S. national interest in ensuring global democracy and security is underlined by its global military capability. Furthermore, neo-conservatism stresses that advancement of democracy abroad is possible via a purposeful foreign policy action (Ritchie & Rogers, 2007, p. 145).

Conversely, Nigeria's national interest in the advancement of democracy, peace, and security in Africa, through its military power and diplomacy following its return to democracy since 1999, may be compared with the US military statecraft towards the spread of global democracy. Therefore, drawing upon the idea of Bradley Thompson's conception of neo-conservatism as "benevolent hegemony", which seeks to pursue security and promote democracy through democratic formalism or institutionalism (Thompson, 2010, p. 173), the focus of this paper will be on African neo-conservatism as exhibited in Nigerian foreign policy and the strategies it has adopted in the promotion of democracy, peace, and security in sub-Saharan Africa since 1999.

Democratic Peace Theory

Democratic peace theory is an offshoot of a liberal theory of international relations, which aims at promoting peace and security through an established democratic and institutional order (neo-conservatism). Immanuel Kant's liberal political ideal of the *Perpetual Peace* of a just world order highlighted his theoretical exposition of democratic peace on the assumption that democratic states do not wage war against one another. Kant's democratic ideals demonstrate that a condition of harmony among humans based on political facts is an indispensable condition of lasting peace (Kant, 1992, p. vii). International reforms are imperative to ensuring justice *qua* justice in a global political environment inhabited by infinite human beings and imperfect sovereign states (Franceschet, 2002, p. 3). The main objective of foreign policy is to help create a democratic society and well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and abide by the rules and regulations of the international political system (Rice, 2005, p. 2). For Kant, the need to achieve democratic government and well-governed states required a total transformation of human consciousness, republican constitutionalism, and federal contracts between states to eradicate war rather than regulate it as argued by the realist scholars (Dunne, 2008, p. 112). However, Kant's democratic ideals for perpetual peace based on the eradication of conflicts and war among nations as explained above is good, but unrealistic as conflicts and war will continue to reflect the deep national interest of states in the international system.

Foreign Policy and National Interest

Joseph Frankel conceives of foreign policy as a unique interplay between domestic and foreign environments. The persons involved in this interplay usually occupy certain official positions of trust and importance that empower them to act on behalf of their society (Frankel, 1969, p. 81). Frankel's assertion on

foreign policy depicts a critical illustration of state leadership in the management of a country's foreign policy in a manner that reflects an objective reality of societal interest. In short, foreign policy is a decision made on behalf of the masses by a state actor aimed at achieving specified national interests. The national interests serve as guiding principles in the conduct of foreign policy in the international environment. Ultimately, this paper examines the objectives of Nigerian foreign policy and national interests since its return to democracy in 1999. The analysis is concerned with the projection of Nigeria's foreign policy in the promotion of peace, security, and democracy through its membership in the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and participation in and interaction with multilateral institutional bodies such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Commonwealth.

National Security

Security is an important concept used both in domestic and international politics. The logic of security rests on how states or individuals relate to each other regarding threats and vulnerabilities. From the perspective of this paper, security is based on the realist notion of traditional military power in international politics. Arnold Wolfers reminds us that "security, in any objective sense, measures the absence of threat to acquired values, and in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such value will be attacked" (Wolfers, 2001, p. 6). Given this, the levels of response to threats to an individual or state depending on the objective sense that such threats pose a danger to their security. Wolfers goes on to say that "security rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter attack or to defeat it" (Wolfers, 2001, p. 6). Also, in the view of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, security is about state survival and the ability of a state to mobilise power or resources to deter existential threats (Buzan, Wavers, & Wilde, 1998, p. 21). They noted that an issue becomes an international security issue when such a reference object traditionally poses threats to the state (Buzan, Wavers, & Wilde, 1998, p. 21). For example, the incessant and continuous attacks posed by the Islamist terrorist group, popularly known as the "Boko Haram", in Northeast Nigeria, could be described as existential threats, and which continue to pose serious danger to the Nigeria's territorial integrity and the international community, particularly its neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.

Similarly, the activities and attacks by the militants in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region constitute other security threats, which have adversely affected its oil production's levels and the GDP. The core objective of every state in the international system, therefore, is for the protection of their national interests against any existential threats that may thwart their survival. After the end of the Cold War, however, security issues have expanded to a whole gamut of economic, social, ecological, and demographic issues which now confront us. After this period, it is no longer possible to limit security discourse to only traditional military threats to the territorial integrity of a state (Garnett, 1996, p. 12). Economic instability, climate change, social problems, and population explosion may also constitute threats to a state's security or survival.

As we can deduce from this discussion of competing claims of security, and despite the different perspectives of security issues as outlined above, it remains logical that the combination of traditional and non-traditional security issues have direct implications for the role of the nation-state in the realm of security. This paper focuses, however, on how national security impacts on a state's foreign policy behaviour and its survival in the international system. As noted by Barry Buzan, "at the system level the state is also central to security, and its domestic characteristics cannot be disentangled from the character of the security problem in the international system as a whole" (Buzan, 1991, p. 57). Given this, the security of a state in the international

system is dependent on the relative national powers (military and economical) it possesses and how these national powers are maneuvered for its survival in the anarchical system. In the view of John Garnett, national security is about a state's vital interests, particularly the physical survival of the state and its people, including their wellbeing (Garnett, 1996, p. 13). National security is central to a sovereign state which is the ultimate unitary actor in the international system and the defender of the security of the people (Booth, 2007, p. 34). Ultimately, for a state to achieve its vital or national interests, military and economic powers are crucial.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the AU Security Architecture: Promotion of Democracy, Peace, and Security

The Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, became the first Chairman of the AU (Okereke, 2012, p. 8). In this capacity, in July 2006, Nigeria initiated and submitted a comprehensive blueprint entitled "A Study of African Union Government: Towards the United States of Africa" to the 7th Ordinary Assembly in Banjul, the Gambia (Biswaro, 2012, p. 347). The central theme of the report was the fact that Africa is over-dependent on the north, especially with regards to technicians, expatriates, and technology. Other themes of the report include continental integration, education, peace, and security (Biswaro, 2012, p. 347). Furthermore, in a personal interview with the author, the Director of Policy and Planning Division at the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted: "Nigeria hosted two African countries—Western Sahara and Morocco—that have constantly opposed each other in relations to the AU membership"[1]. The respondent noted that although Nigeria had fought for and achieved decolonisation of Africa before the return to civilian government in 1999, Western Sahara is yet to be fully decolonised and Nigeria, in partnership with the AU, is trying to achieve this objective.[2]

On the other hand, in an interview with the Director of the African Union Division, the Ministry of Nigerian Foreign Affairs, it was noted that the democratisation process within the African Union constitutes the basic objective of the Union's Charter and this remains the core foreign policy objective of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Consequently, after the return to a civilian government in 1999, Nigeria realigned its foreign policy in support of democratic transition in other African states by resisting coups and ordering elections to be conducted.[3] Similarly, in an interview with one of the staff at the West African Division, the Ministry of Nigerian Foreign Affairs, it was noted that it has consistently championed the need to broker peace between warring parties and assisted in the conduct of presidential elections,[4] especially in the West African region, its traditional area of influence.

Nevertheless, to understand Nigeria's power projection and neo-conservative high foreign policy in the AU since the return to civilian rule in 1999, a critical demonstration and examination of its neo-conservative leadership towards democratisation, peace, and security across some key countries in sub-Saharan Africa is essential. The next section looks at Nigeria's power projection in nurturing and advancing democratisation, peace, and security in partnership with the AU in West Africa from 1999.

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[1] Interview with the Director of Policy and Planning Division, at the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 21st February 2017, Abuja.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Interview with the Director of the African Union Division, the Ministry of Nigerian Foreign Affairs, the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 21st February 2017, Abuja.
[4] Interview with a Staff at the West African Division, the Ministry of Nigerian Foreign Affairs, the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 21st February 2017, Abuja.

The West African Sub-region

Among West African states, Nigeria appears to be the local superpower. Socio-economic stability and the quest for political stability in West African nations depend largely on Nigeria's effective leadership. Nigeria's effective contributions and commitment to regional political order, peace, and security regarding workforce, economic resources, and military capability, cannot be over-emphasised (Abegunrin, 2009, p. 41). Nigeria was one of the strong advocates for the criminalisation of forceful seizure of power during the 35th summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999 (Omotola, 2008, p. 38). Below selected case studies discuss Nigeria's neo-conservative foreign policy in the West African region.

The Côte d'Ivoire (2010/11)

Arising from the West African sub-region and and in reference to Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU, the first litmus test that Nigeria battled with under its nascent democracy (Omotola, 2008, p. 38) was the 2010/11 constitutional crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (Hartman, 2017, p. 86). Furthermore, the Ivorian conflict is unique in that it represents a test case for Nigeria's diplomatic and military engagements with ECOWAS and the AU in dealing with conflicts, peace and security, democracy and good governance in Africa (Kode, 2016, p. 6). As earlier stated, Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act stated "the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity" (Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Article 4(h)), thus presented an opportunity for the AU to intervene on humanitarian in the crisis that erupted after the 2010 elections in Côte d'Ivoire (Ella & Yolanda, 2016, p. 22), which marked new security and democratic challenges for Nigeria's neo-conservativism leadership under the ECOWAS and the AU (Yabi, 2012, p. 1). Endorsing the legitimate authority after the election, on 7 December 2010, an Extraordinary Session of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in Abuja, Nigeria, issued a communiqué on Côte d'Ivoire recognizing the result by Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) and Mr. Alassane Ouattara as the President-Elect of Côte d'Ivoire (African Union, 2010, Para. 3).

Similarly, relevant to the AU instruments, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), on 9 December 2010, also adopted the decision to suspend Cote d'Ivoire from all AU activities, until the democratically-elected President effectively assumed the state's power (African Union, 2010, Para. 4). ECOWAS, under the leadership of the Nigerian state, had intervened to shape the international community's perception of the winner of the 2010 presidential election (Hartmann, 2017, p. 86). The AU rose to the challenge, however; it was, in accordance to Article 4(h) of its Constitutive Act and the subsidiarity stipulations of the global Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework, the most suitable political actor to take leadership in the crisis. Indeed, it failed; the wider international community, specifically France with UN Security Council (UNSC) backing, was at the forefront of the 2011 humanitarian intervention that ended the conflict (Ella & Yolanda, 2016, p. 23). On the other hand, it has been noted that ECOWAS, championed by Nigeria, took a stance and clear position on the issue of declaring who had won the election in December 2010 (Yabi, 2012, p. 4).

Besides ECOWAS's clear response to the crisis, certain factors accounted for undermining Nigeria's strategic interests in the AU's intervention in Côte d'Ivoire. First, both the AU and the UN had subscribed to

the possibility of power-sharing in early 2011 between Gbagbo and Ouattara. Second, the UN Security Council's tenacity was hampered by opposition from Russia, South Africa, and Brazil for much of the crisis (Yabi, 2012, p. 4). Third, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire betrayed a lack of coherent strategy within the rank and file of the AU Panel. The AU sent Thabo Mbeki for conflict mediation between Gbagbo and Ouattara, who did not support and combine efforts with ECOWAS (Africa Briefing Report Brussels, 2011). Ultimately, this underlines Nigeria's role as a corporate representative of the AU, with regards to upholding the AU Charter on Democracy, Governance, and Election in West Africa.

The Gambia (2016-2017)

Following the disputed December 2016 presidential elections in the Gambia, the AU and ECOWAS, backed by Nigeria, managed to restore democracy in the country through the threat of force but without resorting to direct physical violence (Hartmann, 2017, p. 86). Reaffirming Nigeria's commitments to democratic norms, the United Nations Security Council at its 7866th meeting, on 19 January 2017, adopted "Article 23(4) of the AU's Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. The resolution also included to the adoption of the provisions of the Supplementary Protocol of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Democracy and Good Governance"[5]. The adoption was to promote a peaceful and transparent transfer of power after the presidential election on 1 December 2016.[6] The United Nations Security Council promptly authorised Senegal, on behalf of ECOWAS, to intervene in the crisis; thus the decision of the UNSC invoked authorisation of ECOWAS's supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance, which affirms "zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means" (Nantulya, 2017, p. 1). It also invoked Article 25 of ECOWAS's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, which authorizes military intervention in the event that "democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means or where there is a massive violation of human rights in a member state" (Nantulya, 2017, p. 1). As part of ECOWAS's decision to uphold the result of the election, held in the Gambia on December 1, 2016, Nigeria deployed military personnel to the Gambia as part of an AU and ECOWAS Standby Force to protect the people and maintain sub-regional peace and security (Dan-Ali, 2017).

Four main factors account for the behaviour and success of ECOWAS in the Gambia. The first factor stresses that ECOWAS' success in the restoration of democracy in the Gambia was dependent on ECOWAS' clear legal mandate to enforce its will and actions, with the use of force and sanctions. The second factor emphasises the relatively small size of the Gambian army, compared with the ECOWAS force. Third, the failure by the Gambian president to secure alliance from the West African sub-region and other powerful countries outside Africa. Fourth, Nigeria and Senegal's stance repudiating an unconstitutional change of government (Hartman, 2017, p. 68), which is sacrosanct as enshrined in the AU Constitute Act.

Togo (2005)

In the Togolese political impasse of 2005, Nigeria's neo-conservative strategic approach, under the framework of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), remains very significant in the promotion of democracy in Africa. When President Gnassingbe Eyadema died in February 2005, after 38 years of autocratic rule, his son, Faure, was installed as the new president by the Togolese army generals (El-Khawas & Ndumbe, 2007, p. 58). Nigeria stood firm as a regional leader in West Africa (Abegunrin, 2009, p. 41),

[5] United Nations' S/RES/2337 (2017) at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53304 [accessed 11/01/2017].
[6] Ibid.

opposing the government of Faure, and demanded that a democratic election must be held to return the country back to constitutional rule. Former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, then Chairman of the African Union (AU), advised very strongly that the Togolese army "retrace their steps to the positions of the constitution, to hold a free and fair election" (Abegunrin, 2009, p. 41), following the decision of the National Assembly to remove from the constitution any clauses for the speaker becoming an interim president prior to the conduct of elections in 60 days (Abegunrin, 2009, p. 41). Under the weight of international pressure against the succession of Faure (Omotola, 2008, p. 39), Nigeria effectively invoked ECOWAS economic sanctions, with the support of the African Union, UN, European Union, and the United States of America, to make Togo submit (Abegunrin, 2009, p. 41) to the PSC Protocol signed by Togo in February 2004 (Omorogbe, 2011, p. 140). Nigeria remained unbending and stressed that the AU and ECOWAS were determined to restore constitutional government to Togo within 60 days (Omotola, 2008, p. 40). It may be argued that the political impasse that befell Togo after its general election has since given a general reflection to the global community that elections in Africa are a mere shadow of democratic exercise devoid of legitimacy (Omotola, 2008, p. 41).

Overall, Nigeria has also been committed to conflict management and peace-building in some volatile places in Africa. Some of these countries include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan (Darfur), Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Omotola, 2008, p. 41). For example, Nigeria not only championed but single-handedly bore the huge cost of ECOMOG's mission in Liberia that led to the restoration of "peace" to the war-torn country after nearly two decades of civil war. Meanwhile, as part of Nigeria's neo-conservative foreign policy objective towards democratic peace and security in Africa, it bore the costs of Charles Taylor's exit from Liberia, a scenario and development that led to success in the transition to democracy in 2005, which ushered in President Helen Johnson-Sirleaf (Omotola, 2008, p. 41), as the first female president elected in Africa.

The Case of Sudan (Darfur Region)

Darfur is a region in South Western Sudan. The crisis in Darfur began in February 2003, when two militia groups emerged to challenge the National Islamic Front (NIF) government in Sudan. During the upsurge of this great calamity in Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) alleged that the government of Sudan discriminated against Muslim African ethnic groups in Darfur (Ted, 2005). The crisis has claimed roughly 300,000 lives, with an estimated figure of 1.9 million people being displaced and dispersed across neighbouring countries (Ted, 2005). For example, Chad had hosted roughly 110,000 refugees from Darfur (Refugees International Reports, 2004). Following the refusal of the international community to protect civilian population and bring peace to the Darfur region (Nick, 2006, pp. 621-631), however, the African Union in 2004 took the challenge upon itself and created a Cease-Fire Monitoring force in the region, comprising 60 observers and 300 troops at the initial stage (Nick, 2006, pp. 621-631).

That said, two factors account for Nigeria's strategic role in the Darfur crisis: first, the primary national and secondary national interests (Ngwube, 2013, pp. 83-84); the primary national interest of Nigeria's role in Darfur peace mediation and military intervention was based on state survival, security, power, and economic reasons (Ngwube, 2013, p. 83). For example, the primary national interest of Nigeria in Darfur was premised on the possible threat to its survival and security of its territorial integrity caused by the influx of refugees from Darfur into Nigeria (Ray, 2009, p. 173; Ngwube, 2013, p. 83). The invasion of Chad, one of Nigeria's neighbours, by the anti-government rebels whose intention was to overthrow the government of Idris Deby and

the possibility of the Democratic Republic of the Congo backing the Government of Sudan to attack Chad (Ngwube, 2013, p. 83), posed serious threats to Nigeria, which shares a border with Chad to the southwest, hence the need for Nigerian intervention in the Darfur region. For example, The BBC noted that during the crisis, over 20,000 refugees had crossed Darfur into Chad and 3,000 sought refuge in Nigeria (The BCC, 2008).

The secondary national interest relates to Nigeria as a guarantor of peace and security in Africa (Ngwube, 2013, p. 83). Nigeria's peace engagements in Darfur could be categorised under two initiatives: the Abuja peace talks (2004-2005) held between the Government of Sudan and SLM/A and the deployment of Nigerian troops as part of an AU force in the AU Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur in 2005 (Ray, 2009, p. 173). The formidable task to bring peace to the Darfur region at the initial stage of the crisis was a challenge to Nigeria, both as a regional hegemon and a power to be reckoned with in Africa and beyond the continent. On the other hand, the international community was still undecided about the nature of the crisis in Darfur, Nigeria, having been signatory to the Constitutive Act of AU, Article 4(h), in 2003, which affirms the "right of the Union to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity" (The Constitutive Act of the AU, 2000, Article 4(h)) waded into the Darfur crisis using the African Union as a credible platform in search of peace between the warring parties in the region (Ebegbulem, 2012, p. 20). Also, Nigeria, having been a signatory to the ECOWAS treaty on democracy and good governance in 2002, provided the normative and legal basis as well as the locus standing for it to demonstrate its neo-conservative role towards the promotion of peace and security in Darfur (Ngwube, 2013, p. 84). Having realised the dynamics of the civil war and its negative impacts on international peace and security, especially on the African continent, the United Nations Peace and Security Council, through its resolution 1590, later established the United Nations Mission (UNMIS) on 24 March 2005 to facilitate the enforcement of the Peace Agreement signed between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) (Langholtz, Kondoch, & Wells, 2006, p. 317), which served to complement Nigerian/AU efforts in the enforcement of peace and security in Darfur.

In July 2005, Nigerian President and then Chairman of the AU, Olusegun Obasanjo, hosted peace talks in Abuja between the rebels and Sudan Government.[7] The Peace Agreement hosted by the Federal Government of Nigeria between the two warring parties, which was supported and embraced by international organizations, such as the United Nations, led to the endorsement of the Darfur Peace Agreement between the rebels and the Sudan Government on 5 May 2006 (Engel & Porto, 2010, p. 23). The August agreement later facilitated the emergence of the Addis Ababa of 22 August 2011, which subsequently led to the Cease-Fire Monitoring Commission in Darfur (Bellamy, Williams, & Griffin, 2010, p. 207).

Finally, Nigeria took the lead in the AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur. For example, the deployment of the AU Standby Force was initiated by Nigeria, followed by Rwanda, with about 300 troops (Ngwube, 2013, p. 82). The most prominent supporter of AU military intervention in Darfur was the Nigerian state, under the former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the former AU chairman respectively. Obasanjo sought to attract and impress the US and picture Nigeria as a sub-imperial power in Africa (Funk & Fake, 2009, p. 132). Nigeria had championed the peacekeeping operation in Darfur, but the process was marred by a dispute over who should lead the operation. This position was maintained between Nigeria and Rwanda, which contributed

[7] Sudan: Obasanjo meets with Darfur rebels to try to unblock peace talks. At: https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-obasanjo-meets-darfur-rebels-try-unblock-peace-talks [09/06/2018].

the largest number of troops to the peacekeeping mission.

The second problem was how the Peace Security Council of the AU would deal with the protection of the civilian population (Bellamy, Williams, & Griffin, 2010, p. 208). Third, in respect to human rights in Darfur, it is valid to argue that, Nigeria as a pivotal state and regional power in the AU seems to have been incapable of enforcing compliance and thus gives an erroneous signal to the international community about the AU's commitment to the protection of human rights under international laws. For example, the Constitutive Act of the AU as stipulated in Article 3(h) strongly affirms the commitment of the AU to the protection of human rights; however, the situation in Darfur has put this mandate into the test, and the results have been accompanied with mixed results (Keith, 2007, p. 154).

Though African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has been given some credit for improving a grim security situation in Darfur, AMIS's peace efforts have fallen short of expectations in stopping the carnage and abuse of human rights (Keith, 2007, p. 154). In respect to the AU's commitment to the enforcement of and compliance with human rights in Darfur, the International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR) noted that the African Heads of State and Government at the conference of the African Union, held in Sirte on 3 July 2009, took a unanimous decision to prevent the arrest of President al-Bashir who has been accused of a war crime by the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Worldwide Movements for Human Rights, 2009). The African Union had accused the International Criminal Court (ICC) of interfering in the peace efforts in the region, as well as unfairly targeting African leaders (The BBC, 2013) within the ambit of the ICC's watch. Also, Nigeria, as an advocate of peace efforts in Darfur, also hosted al-Bashir in 2013 during the African Union Heads of State summit in Abuja after the AU decision in 2009 that no member state should enforce any sanctions issued by the ICC against the Government of Sudan (The BBC, 2013). Ultimately, if Nigeria has failed to ensure compliance to arrest al-Bashir by the ICC during his visit to Nigeria, then it is valid to assert that Nigeria has compromised its commitment to strengthen the AU's Constitutive Act and its African neo-conservative foreign policy.

Overall, Nigeria initiated and facilitated peacekeeping and the peace agreement in Sudan, the United Nations Peace and Security Council, through its mandate of resolution 1590, and later established the United Nations Mission (UNMIS) in 24 March 2005 to facilitate the enforcement of the Peace Agreement signed between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) (Langholtz, Kondoch, & Wells, 2006, p. 377), which served to complement Nigeria/AU efforts in the enforcement of peace and security in Darfur.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the African Union (AU) security architecture vis-a-vis Nigeria's strategic role in the promotion of regional security, peace, and democracy since the return of Nigeria to civilian rule in 1999. The paper has shown that Nigeria is a strategic actor in the African Union and one whose constructive neo-conservative foreign policy cannot be over emphasised. Nigeria's commitment to the AU is visible in the areas of financial responsibility, the pursuit of peace and security, promotion of democracy and regional integration on the continent. It has provided leadership at the level of ECOWAS in critical situations such as conflict resolution and restoration of democracy in the West African sub-region.

Nigeria's neo-conservative leadership role is also a clear statement about the capability of African states to solve African problems through the AU's collective security framework. Nigeria's role is so fundamental, however, because it both determines the direction of security policy and provides the backbone for its

implementation. For example, the successful interventions of the AU and ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire's political impasse (2010-2011), the Gambia (2016-2017), and Togo (2005) under Nigerian leadership have shown that, given the necessary political support, African states can successfully manage their security challenges.

The general commitment of Nigeria to regional stability since 1999 was informed by a broadly defined foreign policy objective, anchored in its national role conception as a regional leader and a pivotal state, documented in its National Defence Policy, and underscored by informed conventional perspectives of threats. Based on this perspective, through the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS, Nigeria has shown a great deal of commitment through its military capability in various peacekeeping missions in Africa.

Nigeria's domestic security situation, arising from the terrorist activities in the north-east of Nigeria, thus raises doubts about its commitment to the African Union in regional security management. Boko Haram has continued to unleash terror and catastrophe on the Nigerian state, claiming thousands of lives and displacing millions. The Nigerian military has not been able successfully to address and tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, but rather depends on external and regional actors through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) combining Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Mali.

On the other hand, the optimists affirm that leadership in Africa is Nigeria's first role and it should continue to give direction in the conduct and management of inter-African affairs at the AU. Beyond this argument, certain facts remain salient. First, Nigeria is a strategic actor in the AU. Second, the AU constitutes a credible institutional platform for Nigeria's neo-conservatism and diplomatic activities in Africa. It also constitutes a strategic platform for Nigeria to advance and promote democracy, peace, and security in Africa. This is because the African Union objectives are consistent with Nigeria's African foreign policy objectives that emphasise the sovereign equality of all African states, commitment to functional co-operation as a means of promoting African unity, and respect for independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all African states (Agbu, 2011, p. 25). Nigeria's commitment to functional co-operation as a means of promoting African unity is, arguably, central to its various roles in the AU in the promotion of democracy in Africa since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Third, Nigeria's continuous commitment to the African Union's security architecture will continue to determine the future direction of the continental organization.

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