# Nigeria-South Africa Relations in the Post-Apartheid Era: Shifting Patterns of Diplomatic Engagements and Contestations

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**Abstract**

The paper explores the shifting patterns of diplomatic engagements and contestations between Nigeria and South Africa. This is against the backdrop of historical hegemonic rivalries that have marked the relations of both states in the post-apartheid era. The thrust of analysis in the paper straddles the contentious issues in the contemporary relations between the two states, particularly their competitive quest and bid for UNSC seat, differing roles in the recognition of the Transitional National Council in Libya, and Post-election violence in Cote d'Ivoire. The implications of such diplomatic contestations for Africa's sustainable political progress are also underscored. The paper adopts descriptive historical analysis based on secondary data to anchor its analysis and submissions. It posits that the apparent antagonistic posture of both states in their contemporary relations portends negatively for Africa's sustainable political future. The paper recommends a paradigm shift from hostility to cooperation between the two states, noting that their potentials and strategic interests can be better severed when they work as partners in navigating the challenges of international environment in a rapidly-changing world order.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, bilateral relations, diplomacy, post-apartheid, sustainable development.

## Introduction

Nigeria-South Africa relations have been a topical issue in contemporary political and diplomatic discourse. The engagement between the regional giants date back to 1958, as strategic trade partners but the links did not translate into formal diplomatic relations until 21 February, 1994 due to South Africa's pariah status.[1] As the president of European Union, Ursula Vonder Leyen aptly remarked, bilateralism help states to partner and join forces to push for global change based on common values, interest and global influence.[2] Although advanced economies have championed growing movement for economic cooperation across the globe, Nigeria-South Africa engagements had been a potpourri of hostility, confrontation, competition, and cooperation.[3]

In spite of the twist in the bilateral relations, both states acted jointly in the establishment of African Union, New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), and African Peer Review mechanism. Yet, South Africa was distracted from strengthening her bilateral relations due largely to the attention she received from the developed World and new obligation under the Commonwealth of Nations.[4] There is a manifold of reasons that

1. Seteolu, B and Okuneye, J. 'The struggle for hegemony in Africa: Nigeria and South Africa Relations in perspective 1999-2014' *African Journal of Political Science and international Relations,* Vol.11, No.3. 2017, 57-67.
2. Ursula Vonder Leyen, Remarks on EU-US transatlantic partnership, Brussels: 15 June, 2021.
3. Seteolu, B., Okuneye, J. 'The struggle for hegemony in Africa: 1999-2014'57-67.
4. Games, D. Nigeria-South Africa baseline study', South Africa Foreign Policy Initiative, (SAFPI), policy Brief, 44, September, 2013, 1-2

accounts for these frosty bilateral ties. First, South Africa's demand for the restoration of democratic tenets in Nigeria, and ending human right abuses widened the rift.[5] Fundamentally, Nigeria's flagrant violations of the Harare declaration of principles particularly the extra -judicial killings of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists attracted her suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations during the Auckland summit, on 10th November, 1995. Besides, the differing foreign policy goals of both countries on the observance of human rights and rule of law created simmering tensions in Nigeria-South Africa bilateral ties. These myriads of problems compelled N. Mandela to sustain international campaign which culminated to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1995, during the Auckland summit.[6]

The restoration of democracy in both states since the 1990s brought cordial relations during the era of strategic partnership between 1999 and 2008. This offered a platform for building strategic partnership through the instrumentality of Nigeria-South Africa Bi-National Commission in 1999, the establishment of NEPAD, and Africa's Peer Review Mechanism in 2003.[7] These platforms enhanced good governance, promote the rule of law, respect for human rights, and efficient management of public resources for political and economic stability in Africa.[8] However,

5. Akinboye, S.O, 'From confrontation to strategic partnership: Nigeria's relations with South Africa, 1960-2000' In Ogwu. U. J (ed.), *New Horizon for Nigeria in World Affairs*, Lagos: NIIA, 2005, 212
6. Iortyer, P. 'Nigeria's Diplomatic Relations with the Commonwealth of Nations since the 1990s: From pariah to participant' in *Lafia Journal of History and International Development,* Vol.1, No.3, March, 2019, 1-24.
7. Akinboye, S.O, 'From confrontation to strategic partnership: 2005,214.
8. Landsberg, C. Nigeria- South Africa tensions leave leadership gap, 2012, 1-3

the cordial bilateral ties had been marred by hegemonic contestations to represent a voice for Africa at the United Nations Security Council. We can attest to the quest for UNSC seat proposed by Ezulwini consensus in 2005,[9] the differing roles in the recognition of National Transitional Council in Libya, 2011, Post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, in 2011,[10] and the role of the troika in the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth of Nations, among a gamut of issues.[11]

These myriads of problems heightened tensions to an extent that both states voted against each other's interest at bilateral and multilateral levels. The aim of the paper is to provide newer insight on decades of escalating diplomatic tensions and hegemonic contestations between Nigeria and South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Recent studies on the bilateral engagements between the focal states tend to have failed to sufficiently address the salient historical shifts and dynamics that define their changing patterns of diplomatic relations. Adopting a descriptive historical method, this paper seeks to bring such neglected perspectives into focus. The thrust of the analysis draws on secondary data elicited from library and official documentary sources.

The remainder of the paper is thematically structured under the following themes: an introduction, the Role of the troika in the

9. African Union, Executive Council.7th Extra-Ordinary Session, held between, 7 and 8 March, 2005, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Ext/Ex.cu/2/vii)
10. Nagar, D., Paterson, M. "The Eagle and the Springbok: Strengthening the Nigeria-South Africa Relationship' Policy Brief 12, Lagos: *Policy Advisory Group Seminar Report* held on 9-10 June, 2012,
11. Sidiroupolos, E. 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress and the heart of the Problem' in Ogwu, U.J, (ed.), *Nigeria's Commonwealth summit: A Commonwealth policy studies, Unit briefing,* (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2003), 35-41

suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth of Nations, the differing Roles of Nigeria and South Africa in the Recognition of National Transitional Council in Libya, 2011, the post- election crises in Cote d'Ivoire, 2011, the quest for a Permanent Seat at the UNSC, Emerging trends in African Union Commission, and Conclusion.

**Zimbabwe's relations with the Commonwealth of Nations**.

Zimbabwe has been on the spotlight of the World since she broke from the shackles of colonial rule from Britain in 1980. The state joined the membership of the Commonwealth of Nations based on her historic attachment with Britain, attractions and benefits derived by member states of the Commonwealth of Nations. Since attainment of independence, Zimbabwe has repeatedly taken the Centre stage in the Commonwealth of Nations over a gamut of political issues that border on persistent human Right violations, and absence of the rule of law. The political imbroglio in Zimbabwe began in 2001, following Commonwealth observer report of 14 March, 2002, which explicitly state that the presidential and parliamentary elections conducted in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for free expression of the will of the electors.[12]

The Fundamental issue had been Zimbabwe's infringement of the Harare declaration of principles 1991. The most abused aspects of the Harare landmark document had been in the area of human right abuses that culminated to the suspension of Zimbabwe from the

12. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Coolum Declaration: The Commonwealth in the 21 st Century: Continuity and Renewal. held on, 2-5, March,2002, Australia.

Commonwealth of Nations in 2002.[13] This was informed by Mugabe's failure to promote and protect fundamental political values as enshrined in the Harare landmark document. In the wake of the political debacle, the Commonwealth troika, consisting of Australia, Nigeria and South Africa were set up during the Coolum summit, Australia in 2002, to assess the extent of the crisis, and recommend measures for remedial action. This was sequel to the report of the Commonwealth observer group which revealed that the elections displayed high level of politically motivated violence. Aside, the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of the will of the electors.[14] Generally, the Zimbabwean diplomatic conundrum expressed divergent scholarly viewpoints on the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe when the political situation came up for a review. As an instance, Australia, called for an extension of the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth of Nations based on the escalating human Rights abuses, and lack of progress on negotiation between the two protagonists. The core issues hinge on the fact that there was unwillingness on the part of the government of Zimbabwe to negotiate with the Commonwealth Secretary General.[15]

Since 2002, the role of the governments of Nigeria and South Africa had been rather reticent. As O. Obasanjo aptly remarks, the government of Zimbabwe would be irresponsible, if it would not

13. Ingram, Delek, Commonwealth update. *The Round Table*,91 April, 2002,131-159. Accessed 10/2/2024.
14. Sidiroupolos, E. 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress and the heart of the Problem' in Ogwu, U.J, (ed.), *Nigeria's Commonwealth summit: A Commonwealth policy studies, Unit briefing,* London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2003, 35-41
15. Sidiroupolos, E. 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress and the Heart of the Problem' Commonwealth policy study unit, 2003, 35-41.

act towards land redistribution. This statement placed Nigeria in a dilemma, because it did not outrightly condemn Mugabe's human rights violations, and absence of the rule of law. Yet, Zimbabwe was not invited to participate in the Abuja Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) during which O. Obasanjo served as Chair-in-Office in December,2003. The differing stance by the republic of South Africa on the political debacle in Zimbabwe can be assessed based on the involvement of the government of South African. As T. Mbeki aptly opines, the solution to the crisis lay in the hands of Zimbabwe people, who do not support regime change.[16]

Arguing on the same political discourse, diplomatic scholars have argued that the stance of the political leadership in Nigeria and South Africa was a digression from the mandate given to the Commonwealth troika to assess Zimbabwe's level of compliance with the Harare principles. Rather, the political scenario in Zimbabwe reveals a display of hegemonic contestations between the regional powers, who treaded cautiously to keep their warm diplomatic relations with the government of Zimbabwe, just to lure her support at multilateral and bilateral levels anytime the occasion demand. The differing roles displayed by the emerging African giants indicate a dismal failure to address the global realities, and concerns of the Commonwealth on democracy, human rights, and respect for the rule of Law.

Within Zimbabwe, there was a strong opinion that her suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations was regulated by identifiable interest, particularly a racially defined attempt to oust a leader of

16. Sidiroupolos. 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress and the Heart of the problem, 2003, 35-41

liberation struggle with the aim to support an opposition that was believed to be funded by the western powers.[17] These divergent approaches brought South Africa's quiet diplomacy into focus. This stems from the fact that its soft approach is dissonant with its commitment to array of NEPAD's goal on greater leadership, accountability, and responsible government. Aside, ZANU-PF did not want to be a pliant partner, whose negotiation with an opposition party could result to its removal from power, and loss of substantial economic perks.[18] The lethargy of South Africa to mediate with an opposition party which emerged out of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions with a problematic history of hostile relations can be understood against the backdrop that, it had similar antecedents with Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU), back home. The role played by Nigeria and South Africa on their quest for United Nations Security Council (UNSC), seat proposed by the Ezulwini consensus had already been blocked by China and United States veto.[19] Furthermore, the cautious approach adopted by both states displays elements of hegemonic struggles at the multilateral stage to win the support of African states for United Nations Security Council seat and represent a voice for Africa. Scholars have considered the quest for UNSC seat as a deviation from tackling global injustice affecting developing countries. This portends negatively for the achievement of sustainable political growth in a fast-changing world.

17. Sidiroupolos, E, 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress and the Heart of the Problem' Commonwealth policy study unit, 2003, 35-41
18. Sidiroupolos. 'Zimbabwe: Defining progress….. 2003, 35-41.
19. Nagar, D., Paterson's. The Eagle and the Springbok: Policy Brief 12, Lagos: Policy Advisory Group Seminar Report, 9-10 June, 2012,

**The Differing Positions in the Recognition of National Transitional Council in Libya, 2012**

The crisis in Libya in the post -Arab spring, exemplify an element of hegemonic contestations in Africa by the emerging African giants over Africa's leadership question. Nigeria and South Africa expressed differing roles in the recognition of National Transitional Council in Libya, in 2012. This scenario presents the dilemma of leadership in Africa, including its supranational body, (African Union), that had been in total disarray with no clear path to follow.[20] Strengthening this notion, S. Minteh argued that Nigeria and South Africa adopted differing roles at multilateral level over the political impasse in Libya. The concerted efforts made by African Union Peace and Security Council to constitute a committee that prevented the escalation of the Libyan crisis is commendable. However, the A.U consideration of five African states for a mediation committee without the choice of Nigeria, which had been a regional power, conciliator, and shared closer geographical borders with Libya raises several concerns.

The A. U efforts to reconcile the warring groups in Libya made it compulsive for the body to constitute high level Ad hoc Committee on Libya on 10 March, 2011, consisting of South Africa, Mauritania, Mali, Uganda, Congo Brazzaville, and Jean Ping of Gabon, as Chairman of the A.U Commission. [21] It is interesting to note that the emerging giants adopted a common diplomatic stance

20. Ashiru. 'Nigeria's Foreign Policy: New Realities in a rapidly changing World' being a paper presented at a Luncheon organized by Retired Ambassadors of Nigeria, held at Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island Lagos, on Monday, 15 th April, 2013, 1-13

21. Sithole. The African Union Peace and Security Mechanism's Crawl from design to reality: Was the Libyan crisis a depiction of severe limitations? 111-134, Accessed 3/3/2024.

in 2010, as members of United Nations Security Council on non-permanent basis, and African Union Peace and Security Council. However, both states voted in favor of United Nations Security Council Resolution, (UNSCR), 1970 of 26 February, 2011[22,] and UNSCR 173 of 17 March, 2011.[23] The resolutions provided legitimacy for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), attack on Libyan forces following its efforts to crush rebellion that was sparked by protest in Benghazi in February, 2011.[24] The resolutions also institute punitive sanctions, including arms embargo, and imposed no fly zone over Libya to protect the civilian population.

The Libyan crisis had crippling effects on Africa particularly, in the area of refugee crisis and dire humanitarian concerns. However, common sense dictated that the two countries would have acted jointly to end the conflict in the spirit of Pan-Africanism. Yet, Nigeria and South Africa were rather overwhelmed by competitive struggle over African leadership question, and adopted differing roles in the political imbroglio that engulfed Libya. Nigeria in this regard, adopted multilateral effort in the recognition of National Transitional Council in Libya, 2011. Conversely, South Africa reneged on its earlier stance it took in support of UNSCR 1970, and 1973, respectively. Instead, she accused NATO, and western powers of using humanitarian intervention as a pretext to effect regime change. This informed her in difference in the recognition of the anti-Gadhafi coalition united under the banner of the National Transitional Council. [25] The

22. S/RES/1970, of 26 February, 2011, Accessed 10/3/2018)
23. S/RES/1973 of 17 March, 2011, Accessed, 10/3/2018)
24. Obi, C. 'Recalibrating South Africa's Role in Global Economic Governance: A Nigerian Perspective on some Strategic challenges, Johannesburg: SAIIA, Policy Insights 11, march, 2015,1-12
25. Obi, Cyril, Recalibrating SAIIA, policy Insight 11, 2015, 1-12

Government of South Africa only altered her diplomatic stance on realization that African Union accepted to implement UNSCR, and its resolution referenced A/RES/66/290 of 25 October, 2012, on Libya at the 66 United Nations General Assembly deliberations in Newyork.[26]

As B. Minteh reasons, both states adopted differing positions for a manifold of reasons. Nigeria's multilateral effort hinges on a number of concerns. First, it considered sovereignty as responsibility, and the changing notion of threats from the frontier of a nation, to one driven from pervasive threats to the people's rights and safety of lives. The choice of a multilateral effort was borne out of her role as a regional stabilizer, conciliator and peace builder in West African sub-region. In this regard, Nigeria's stance hinged on the destabilizing effect of Libya under M. Gadhafi on several states in Africa. This support did not only instigate civil wars, but acted as a threat to national security of the entire sub-region. Jane's report on terrorism and security monitor further buttresses this assertion. As the scholar opines, Libya continually shifted war materials through Burkina Faso, to Liberia Revolutionary United Front (RUF) strongholds, and other locations within Sierra Leone as a major distribution strategy.[27] Nigeria, on her part was conscious of the fact that a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Libya will prevent a spill- over effect on the state, particularly in the area of refugee crisis, population displacement and dire humanitarian concerns. There were grave concerns in Nigeria that the worsening crisis in Libya will exacerbate existing security concerns and create political

26. Minteh, B. 'Recognizing of Libya's Revolutionary National Transitional Council' Syracuse University, Maxwell School, 2018. Accessed, 7/2/ 2019
27. Minteh, B. 'Recognizing of Libya's Revolutionary National Transitional Council, 2018.

instability in addition to the gamut of problems the state had to contend with, such as the vicious Boko Haram insurgency in the north east, banditry and kidnapping, separatist agitations in South - east, militancy and piracy in the South -south region and farmer - herder conflicts which have assumed disturbing dimensions in all the geo-political regions of Nigeria.

Conversely, South Africa's unilateral stance on Libya can be understood against the backdrop that the Springbok benefitted tremendously from Libya's bank rolling efforts in the use of state funds in support of multi- Million- dollar investment, and development project. This was demonstrated by Libya's investment in South Africa that amounted to over €6 b Euro, through the Libyan Africa Arab Investment Company, (LAAIC). [28] The remarks by the former apartheid state which singularly recognized Libya and Cuba's role in the supply of arms and provision of training to African National Congress during the era of liberation struggle with White Supremacist attests to the age long hegemonic contestations.

South Africa's understanding of security in Africa is clustered around the doctrine of Pan-Africanism. This stems from the fact that the political leadership in South Africa strongly believes, the security challenges of Africa emanate from intervention of Western powers. In this regard, the resolution of security issues in her opinion should be managed within Africa. This informed South Africa's role in championing the search for Africa's solution to the problems of the region, based on the doctrine of Pan Africanism, and geo-political interest driven by the historic

28. Minteh, B. 'Recognizing of Libya's Revolutionary National Transitional Council,2018

relationship with Libya.[29] Furthermore, Libya and South Africa have been political allies over the decades, as attested by the funds the state of Libya infused in South African economy.[30] The state visit by president N. Mandela to Tripoli in 1997, and his acceptance to play a mediatory role for the successful extradition of two Libyan nationals alleged to have been involved in the bombing of the Pan A.M 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland buttresses this assertion.[31] Aside, the strong bilateral engagement between South Africa and Libya became clearer with the conferment on M. Gadhafi with the Order of Good Hope, being the highest award to a foreigner.

The accusation of NATO's violation of UN mandate championed by South Africa for the purpose of regime change, and unfreezing of assets for the NTC in Libya is viewed by diplomatic experts as an expression of age long hegemonic contestations.[32] The Libya-South African ties explain the manifold of reasons for the divergent viewpoints both states expressed. The outright condemnation of Nigeria's multilateral approach, and exclusion on Libyan mediation efforts. Aside, South Africa's role, and insistence for an investigation into NATO'S air campaign activities in Libya, on assumption of rotational presidency of UNSC in January 2012, had be understood from the standpoint to lure the support of African states at bilateral or multilateral levels.[33] In

29. Minteh. 'Recognizing of Libya's Revolutionary National Transitional Council.
30. The New York Times, 'Despite UN Ban, Mandela meets with Gadhafi in Libya' 23/10/1997
31. Eric, G. B. 'Arming the Revolutionary United Front' African Security Review, Vol.10, No.1, 2001
32. Nagar, D., Paterson, M. 'Eagle and the Springbok: seminar Report,9-10 June,2012.
33. Good enough, P. 'South Africa calls for UN probe into NATO's Libya Mission' *CNS News.com* 6 January, 2012

spite of varying diplomatic approaches and condemnation of Nigeria's multilateral efforts, Nigeria's position on Libya prevailed and eventually became the official position of African Union.

It is the considered position of scholars that the role of South Africa in negotiating political outcomes, while seeking to stand as champion of African opposition to outside influences hinges on economic benefits it achieved from Libyan investments in South Africa. In spite of these differences, the gains both states achieved through the entrenchment of Bi-National Commission, and neoliberal policies in Nigeria in the area of intra- African trade, employment generation and catalyzed investment far outweighs other concerns. There is need for cooperation by both states, in view of the fact that Africa had been the most vulnerable, and the most threatened continent on the globe.[34]

**The Post-election violence in Cote d'Ivoire**

Cote d'Ivoire experienced political violence at the dawn of the millennium arising from ineptitude of African political leadership. As scholars have argued the crisis depicts another opportunity for Nigeria and South Africa to exhibit hegemonic contestation that became visible at bilateral and multilateral levels.[35] The post-election violence in Cote d'Ivoire was occasioned by the refusal to relinquish power by the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo to the presumed winner of the 2010 presidential election Alassane Quattera. It is the opinion of political analysts that the choice from

34. Nwoke, C.N. "Nigeria and ECOWAS" in U.J Ogwu, *New Horizon for Nigeria in World Affairs*, (Lagos: NIIA, 2005), 111.
35. Osita, A. etal "The Foreign policy Environment in Nigeria and implications for Nigeria-South Africa Relations: Baseline study (SAFPI), policy Brief, 54. 2013, 1-12 http://www.safpi.org/sites/default/files/publication/SAFPI-policy- brief 54 pdf,2013,

South Africa region to lead mediation efforts in Cote d'Ivoire's political imbroglio was inappropriate against the premise that the preference for South Africa violates A.U convention which placed mediation efforts under respective regional groupings.[36] Fundamentally, the choice was inadvertently made within the period President O. Obasanjo served as the Chairman, A.U Assembly of Heads of States and Government. Scholars have argued that the A. U's failure to include Nigeria in mediation efforts in Cote d'Ivoire raised doubts on the impartial role of the Union and an attempt to heighten hegemonic agendum designed to lure the support of South Africa at multilateral levels, as a means of assuming African leadership question.

Diplomatic experts have raised concerns on the non -recognition of Nigeria by African Union as regional stabilizer, and conciliator in war- torn countries in Africa. As an instance, Nigeria's avowed commitment to Afrocentrism imposed heavy financial burden on her economy. For the records, Nigeria incurred $90 b on peace keeping in Chad. It doled $500 m to Nigeria's Trust Fund under the auspices of African Development Bank, to assist needy African needy states obtain soft loans. Similarly, Nigeria doled $20 m to Agostinho Neto's government in Angola to ensure a smooth take off in 1976. Furthermore, the sum of $10 b was expended on Liberia conflict, in addition to the gallant armed men abnd Women who paid supreme sacrifice for the cause of peace.[37] These stupendous contributions Nigeria extended to African states was worthy of note in the spirit of Pan -African solidarity. These

36. Nwanolue, B.O.G., FRHD, Victor, Chidubem Iwuoaha, A Reflection of Nigeria's Past:Africa as the Centre piece of Nigeria's foreign Policy Revisited. Vol.2, No.4, Developing countries studies, 2012, 76-84.

37. Dosson, D., Abdul Rahman. 'Cote d'Ivoire Post-Electoral Crisis *Journal of African Elections,* Vol.10, No.2. 6-21

manifold of reasons and contributions placed Nigeria on the spotlight of the world and thus better disposed to lead mediation efforts in Cote d'Ivoire in view of her geographical contiguity.

As a conciliator in the Ivorian post-election crisis, T. Mbeki initiated a peace deal between the warring parties in the Pretoria Agreement of April, 2005. However, he resigned from his position as leader of the Ivorian mediation because his leadership took a rocky path owing to the nebulous transition programme in the state. Mbeki's resignation was based on the fact that he did not effectively play the role of an impartial umpire. As an instance, he called for an investigation of the political issues, particularly, the constitution, and the entire electoral process in Cote d'Ivoire, placed him as an interested party in the crisis. This depicts that the diplomatic stance of South Africa was not at variance with A.U mediation efforts in Cote d'Ivoire.

The eventual take- over of South Africa's mediatory role by Riala Odinga of Kenya can be understood from the issues highlighted. The changes situation was necessitated by the fact that Cote d'Ivoire had a nebulous transition programme which extended election time table between 2005 and 2010. The six post-ponements hinges on issues that bordered on voter registration, the credibility of Independent Electoral Commission, and more significantly, the demilitarization, demobilization, and reintegration progress (DDR) [38] The political implication of the South Africa's differing position hinges on the fact that the prevailing situation in Cote d'Ivoire heightened hegemonic

[38] Games, D. 'Nigeria-South Africa baseline study', policy Brief, 44, September, 2013, 1-29

struggles at the continental level between Nigeria and South Africa. This assertion is buttressed by Mbeki's opposition to President Obasanjo's bid, to recontest for the office of Chair, A.U Assembly of Heads of States and Government. Furthermore, South Africa's unclear stand on the Ivorian political debacle between December, 2010, and March, 2011, points at elements of age long hegemonic contestations to represent a voice for Africa at the international fora. It was these circumstances that informed Nigeria's stance to favor regional intervention through persuasion, and ultimately use of force to secure the exit of the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo to abdicate his seat.

Conversely, South Africa overt in difference in the crisis through the deployment of naval vessel in the country for possible assistance to the incumbent president Gbagbo, undermined her credibility as an impartial umpire.[39] These hegemonic contestations by the two regional powers portends negatively for sustainable political developments in West African sub-region. The aftermath of the emerging scenario had profound effects on political developments of the sub-region in multifaceted ways. First, the post- election crisis brought crippling effects on the state's economy. For instance, Cote d' Ivoire experienced soaring unemployment, and under employment among the Youths. The state lost over 3000 citizens in the post-election crisis, and propelled insurgency, refugee crisis, and dire humanitarian consequences at the wake of Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to abdicate his seat. In economic parlance, the state of Cote d' Ivoire lost its

39. The Conflict in Cote d' Ivoire and its effects on West African Countries: A perspective from the ground, Regional Bureau for Africa, Newyork: UNDP Program, USA, July, 2011,1-8. Undp.org/Africa-united Nations Development programme.

standing as an economic hub to several landlocked states in West Africa. Hitherto, the state had been a port of access to international trade, with a history of economic cooperation and integration with other countries through trade, migration, and financial flows. [40]

**Emerging trends in African Union Commission**

In 2011, the tenure of the A.U Chair, Jean ping of Gabon elapsed. It was therefore expected that the vacant seat will be filled by prospective candidates from interested states. Arising from this, the desire of some of South Africa to contest for the office of chair was condemned by some African states. It was the opinion of Nigeria that the declaration was contrary to the existing convention which prevent its major funders such as Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria from contesting in its key offices. As M. Paterson notes that tension flared up at the Commission over Nigeria's refusal to support Nkosazana, Dlamini Zuma in the contest.[41] Nigeria's opposition to N. Zuma's candidacy in preference for incumbent Chairman, Jean Ping of Gabon, was based on existing conventions in the Union.

Nigeria considered South Africa's quest for the seat at the A.U Commission as a violation of an unwritten understanding reached among African main financial contributors to the Union. The Convention was adopted to give a sense of belonging to small states with smaller economies, an opportunity to contribute towards continental development. The competitive contest among its funders presents challenges to the emerging trends in the Commission in several perspectives. First, Nigeria took a differing position because she feared Zuma's emergence and influence

40. Nagar, D., Paterson, M. 'The Eagle and the Springbok: June,2012, 1-54 Accessed on 17/6/2019.

would make South Africa to underline her longer period of multilateralism. Besides, she had the conviction that South Africa's intransigence will create a precedence on how future consensus could be reached.[42]

The emergence of South Africa as Chair of A.U Commission had several implications for Nigeria-South Africa bilateral relations. First, it created a strained bilateral relation because smaller African states no longer had a stake in the future development of Africa. Aside Nigeria's preference for Jean Ping was understood from the backdrop that the new role would give the Springbok the credibility and offer an impetus to add her weight to the country's quest for a seat at the UNSC. This diplomatic conundrum was accentuated by South Africa's perceived role by the international community as a leading state the Western advanced democracies would rely on its considerable economic, political and military influence to instill order in Africa, and act as a catalyst for economic regeneration after a successful transition to multiracial democracy.[43]

The hegemonic contestations between Nigeria and South Africa were felt multifarious ways. First, one hundred and Twenty-five Nigerian nationals were deported by South African Authorities over Yellow Fever Certificate infraction.[44] This stance was viewed

41. Games, D. 'Nigeria-South Africa baseline study' policy Brief, 44, September, 2013, 1-29
42. Mbeki, M, 'Towards a more productive South Africa Foreign Policy', in *South Africa Year Book*, 2002/2003.Johannesburg: *SAIIA*, 2003
43. Egwemi, V., Ochim, F.I. 'Reciprocity in international Affairs: An Analysis of Nigeria-South Africa Yellow Fever Diplomatic face-off, March,2012' *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, Vol.10, (1) Serial No.40, January, 2016, 116-133.
44. Games, D. 'Nigeria-South Africa baseline study' 2013, 1-29

as premeditated action because the World Health Organization (WHO), had declared Nigeria free from yellow fever fourteen years before the deportation saga. Similarly, the frosty bilateral relations were accentuated by the furore over the death of 116 South African nationals in the tragic collapse of a house at the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOA) at Ikotun, near Lagos Nigeria in 2012.[45] Nigeria's reciprocal reaction turned back 131 South African nations over possession of irregular travel document.

The inability of South Africa to explore other conflict resolution mechanisms indicates that there were other underlying issues in their political relations. Diplomatic scholars have recently pointed at the growing antagonism which necessitate South Africa's opposition to Nigeria's proposals for the establishment of Central Bank of Africa. This would have given African Union a clear mandate to take over the responsibility of African Monetary Fund for the purpose of establishing a common currency by 2028, as a major step towards African integration as earlier advocated by the OAU- Lagos plan of Action. In spite of the rifts, the ties have been sustained due largely by the fact that, there is far more that unites the government of South Africa with Nigeria than divide them.

**The Competitive Quest for a United Nations Security Council's Seat**

The United Nations came into being in 1945, with a mandate to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and guarantee international peace and collective security. It's

45. Gambari, A. I. 'Nigeria and the United Nations: The pursuit of National Interest Through multilateralism in a changing World Order' in U.J. Ogwu, (ed.), *New Horizons for Nigeria in World Affairs,* Lagos: NIIA,2005,190

significant to note that the UN is not a World government. Rather, it is an association of sovereign states which came together to harmonize policies, and work towards the attainment of goals and objectives enshrined in the charter. [46] Since 1960s, developing countries consider the activities of the UN as lopsided given that its representation at the UNSC did not secure fairer global representation. In Continental Africa, a meeting of African foreign Affairs Ministers held in March, 2005, in Swaziland, culminated to what became known as the Ezulwini consensus. The consensus called for reforms and expansion of UNSC from 15 to 26 member states, with two African representatives' seats with veto powers, and five rotating non- permanent seats for Africa.[47]

As Ibrahim Gambari opines, the raison d'etre of the United Nation was to promote conciliation and agreement through the maintenance of international peace and security. This role is further emphasized in the preamble of the UN Charter that asserts thus; 'We the people of the United Nations, are committed to saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life time has brought untold sorrow to mankind .[47] Prior to Ezulwini consensus, Nigeria has always supported efforts to reform the world body it considers as lopsided in character. This was earlier buttressed by the former Secretary -General of the United Nations, Boutros Ghali made a commendable start in charting a new course for the future of the UN in the post-Cold war era. The rationale for reforms was borne out of the desire to respond more effectively to the needs of its members, and enhance its capacity to respond and reorient its approach to issues before

46. Gambari, A.I. Nigeria and the United Nations: The pursuit of National Interest through multilateralism in a changing World Order' 2005, 187-198
47. EZULMINI CONCENSUS,2005

the world body. Although, the Ezulwini consensus was mooted as part of the reforms to accommodate the growing influence of the emerging markets in the global South in 2005. It is significance to emphasize that Nigeria-South Africa bilateral relations will have beneficial outcome if it is sustained. Its importance cannot be underscored. For instance, it provides a platform for dialogue, information sharing, problem solving, and act as a link to top government officials. The discordant relations that refuse to disappear portends negatively for Africa's sustainable political growth.

There are fears among developing countries that the strained relations between Nigeria and South Africa could undermine unity of purpose in advancing peace, security and development of the continent. Although both states have acknowledged the primacy of the African Union to mandate Africa's non-permanent representative to the Security Council. Yet, South Africa insists on the 2005, Ezulwini consensus as the way forward.[48] Amidst the growing antagonism and varied continental interest both states have touted themselves as gateways for investment and trade to other parts of the continent. Nigeria, for instance, considers herself eminently qualified to occupy the permanent seat at the UNSC based on a manifold of reasons but not limited to her population, longer period of multilateralism, and a history of peace Keeping operations.[49]

Conversely, South Africa prides herself with a diversified economy, a successfully negotiated multiracial democracy, and principled support of emerging markets including the G.20 and

48. Nagar, D., Paterson, M. 'The Eagle and the Springbok: 2012, 1-54.
49. Games, D. 'Nigeria-South Africa baseline study,2003,1-29.

BRICS. These contestations have created simmering tensions between both states without recourse to its history of collaboration and cooperation. Moreover, the desire for reforms has remained a mirage because the tempo has been slowed by the veto power of the United States and China, which effectively ended the hope for United Nations Security Council reforms. Besides, the growing tension does not stimulate political development of Africa for a manifold of reasons. Nigeria and South Africa in 2010 served as member states of the UNSC on non- permanent basis, but failed to bring transformative strides that could make a difference, because of the ambition of both countries. Within the Continental platform, both states have occupied seats in African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC); [50] yet, both states have not utilized their presence in these multilateral platforms to depict their mettle as continental leaders.

It will be right to submit without fear of contradiction that, these contestations have exogenous influences from imperialist nations after South Africa's successful transition to multiracial democracy in 1994. The West positioned South Africa status as a leading state in Africa that is driven by the principles of democracy, human Right and the Rule of law, Peace, stability and development, as its new foreign policy drive with other countries of the World.[51] The veto by China and United States have placed on hold the reforms of the UNSC. There is need for Nigeria, and South Africa to reset their edgy relations and consolidate on the gains the Bi-National Commission achieved during the era of rapprochements as a

50. Games, D, SAFPI 45. Nigeria –South Africa Baseline study: Key findings, September, 2013, 1-5

51. Mills. 'Prisoners of a Paradigm? Understanding South Africa's foreign Policy' in South Africa year Book of International Affairs, 2002/2003.

means of stabilizing her political relations and cooperation in Africa.

**Conclusion**

The paper is aimed at exploring the nature of Nigeria-South Africa bilateral relations that oscillates between shifting patterns of diplomatic engagements and contestations. The engagement between the two foremost states hinges on Nigeria's quest to act in concert with the international community to dismantle the horrendous apartheid system. Relatedly, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 equally triggered Nigeria's outrage to champion the exit of South Africa from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1961.

The restoration of democracy in the 1990s in both States offered a fresh impetus to strengthen diplomatic engagements especially during the era of rapprochement. We can attest to the reconstruction of Africa's institutional architecture as exemplified in the transformation of OAU into African Union, African Peer Review Mechanism, NEPAD, and the inauguration of Nigeria-South Africa Bi-National Commission. The benefits of these engagements were ineffable and enabled One hundred and twenty (120) South African companies that penetrate into Nigeria's economy. Similar collaborative gestures came from Barlow firm that supported Nigeria's fight against Islamic extremism in north-East Nigeria.

In spite of this cordiality, the gains achieved during the era of rapprochement were not sustained largely due to the fact that the ties vacillate from engagement to contestations. The changing relations hinged on a manifold of concerns that include but not limited to the quest for a seat at the United Nations Security

Council proposed by the Ezulwini consensus in 2005, differing foreign policy objectives of South Africa that centered on democracy, human Rights abuses and the rule of law. Part of these violations were evident in the extra -judicial killings of Ken Saro Wiwa and Eight other environmental Activist in the Niger Delta when the plea for clemency was ignored. Since 2009 and the decade that followed, the bilateral ties between Nigeria and South Africa wobbled due to the resurgence of xenophobic expulsions of Nigeria immigrants in South Africa. The purges were based on yellow fever certificate infraction, drug peddling, criminal activities, prostitution, and economic opportunities in Education, Health Care, and jobs that strained South Africa's economy.

These factors have been advanced as causes of persistent xenophobic eruptions in South Africa on immigrant Africans. However, the views have been debunked by scholars as not satisfactory. It is their considered opinion that xenophobic expulsions have been attributed to government failure to implement her policies, create jobs, end poverty and curtail growing inequality in the South African society appear more plausible in understanding xenophobia in contemporary South Africa. The way forward is dependent on the two largest economies in Africa to make a paradigm shift from persistent confrontation to cooperation. Furthermore, the status of Africa as the most vulnerable and externally threatened continent on the globe must realize that its survival is contingent on cooperation with other states to achieve economic prosperity. Besides, the emphasis on interdependence in the era of globalization is important since the economies of both states are too small to survive independently. In view of changing environment, both countries must take a cue from the EU-US Trans - Atlantic

partnership whose beneficial outcome has translated to catalyzed investment, job creation and economic integration have galvanized economic and political development of their regions. It submits that the antagonistic posture of Nigeria and South Africa portends negatively for the future of Africa.