



## LECTURE SERIES ON AFRICAN SECURITY

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# Nigeria and the African Union in Light of the Arab Revolts

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#### **Abstract**

This paper analyses Nigeria's role in the African Union (AU) and concludes that the latter is a strategic platform for the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in Africa. The study finds that the country has a 'manifest destiny' to play leadership roles in Africa and debunks the perception that Nigeria's role in the AU is in decline. The paper further explores Nigeria's AU priorities since the Arab revolts and concludes that the country's ability to steer a clear course at the AU holds out prospects for peace, stability and security in Africa.

*Keywords: African Union, Afrocentrism, Foreign Policy, National Interest, National Security, Pax-Nigeriana*

## Foreword

In 2012, the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) and the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) hosted a number of joint lectures on African security. The main objective of this collaboration during 2012 was to lay a solid basis for cooperation and capacity-building in Africa-related research on peace and security. In keeping with this objective, research cooperation on these issues has continued, as has the lecture series, which has become one of the key elements in this cooperation.

The theme of the 2012 lecture series was the political and institutional dynamics of the African Union (AU) in light of the Arab revolts. A particular puzzle addressed was the contemporary posture of South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Algeria within the AU format.

Presentations on each state's role in the AU were made to a specialist audience of Swedish policy-makers and scholars working on peace, security and development in Africa. Presenters were carefully chosen from among a highly qualified group of experts interested in sharing their knowledge and experience with a Swedish audience. The convenors required that papers be of scientific standard and available for deposit. Each published lecture is intended to serve as a background reader for experts concerned with African peace and security.

Edited versions of the presentations are included below, each conveying a personal take on the theme of the joint lectures. The views, interpretations and any errors are those of the author, not of FOI or NAI, and authorship should be attributed to each presenter.

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## Introduction

In 1988, Professor Assisi Asobie predicted that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) would either atrophy or transform itself into another organisation with reformed structures and processes to address the emerging challenges of integration in Africa.<sup>2</sup> This prediction was based on the observable inadequacies of the OAU arising from the inhibiting clauses in the organisation's Charter.<sup>3</sup> With the growing realisation that the Charter constrained the organisation's efforts at addressing armed conflict and several other challenges on the continent, African leaders set in motion mechanisms to steer the transition.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked the fulfilment of Asobie's prediction. The AU was considered an appropriate response to the challenges of globalisation, underdevelopment, economic marginalisation, poverty and other factors stifling human security in postcolonial Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Since the emergence of the AU, Nigeria has taken foreign policy measures considered consistent with the objectives of the organisation. These include her commitment to peace and security in Africa and to integration and sustainable democracy on the continent. Nigeria's commitment to the AU is born of careful articulation with her national interest priorities. However, there is scarcely any adequate literature focusing on Nigeria's role at the AU. In addition, the nature and extent of Nigeria's engagement with the body has prompted diverse interpretations in the public and official domain, and this issue therefore requires in-depth interrogation.

In light of the effects of the Arab Spring on Africa, Nigeria's sensitivity and responses to political developments across the globe has become more pronounced and imperative. The death of Colonel Ghadafi in Sirte on 20 October 2011 and the consequences of the Arab Spring for Algeria and Egypt have created a significant vacuum and heightened competition for continental leadership in Africa. For instance, Egypt has since January 2011 been engaged, amidst threats of Salafist incursions, in political re-engineering and other domestic challenges associated with

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<sup>2</sup> Assisi Asobie, "The OAU in the Year 2000: Some Informed Projections," *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1988, pp. 259-87.

<sup>3</sup> Specific mention was made of the emphasis on non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Asobie argued that these clauses, though adopted in good faith, constrained external intervention when internal instability threatened human rights and regional security.

<sup>4</sup> The mechanisms included the adoption of the Sirte Declaration in September 1999, following which the OAU summit mandated the council of ministers to draft the legal text for the AU, taking into account the provisions of the OAU Charter and the Treaty of the African Economic Community.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Oyovbaire, "Political Stability and the African Union," in *The African Union and The Challenges of Cooperation and Integration*. Proceedings of the national seminar organised by the Ministry of Cooperation and Integration in Africa, Abuja, 14-15 May 2001. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2002, pp. 35-43.

regime change, especially reconstruction and institution building. Libya is also saddled with the challenges of regime change arising from armed struggle. These developments, among others, have prompted the review of Nigeria's foreign policy priorities.<sup>6</sup> The imperative for this was captured by President Jonathan, who observed that:

In the era of globalization; at a time of grave challenges to national and international security, such as we face from terrorism and transnational criminal networks; at a time of massive poverty and youth restiveness in our country, we have no choice but to adjust and adapt the way we conduct foreign policy. As we respond to the forces of globalization, perhaps more than ever before, our diplomacy must be put at the service of our domestic priorities.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the Arab Spring, the continued armed conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the precarious security situation in Mali demand increasing sensitivity from Nigeria. This is because of the domino effects of such conflicts on the country. Africa is also confronted by insecurity associated with poor environmental governance. This has led to flooding in Niger, Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso, as well as drought in parts of the Sahel, especially Niger, and in Somalia. In addition, Africa is further confronted by threats associated with terrorism and transnational organised crime. The activities of the Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali and the challenges posed by the Lord's Resistance Army and Al Shabab in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa respectively constitute security challenges for the AU. The realities of these threats, especially for human security on the continent, require commitments and cooperation among AU member states in addressing them. In this situation, Nigeria should respond appropriately acting alone and in concert with the AU and its member states as well as with Regional Economic Communities.

This article provides an overview of the Nigerian policy debates regarding the country's role in the AU in light of the security challenges confronting Africa in general and Nigeria in particular in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. It discusses measures taken by Nigeria to strengthen the AU. It also examines Nigeria's role at the AU from the perspective of Nigerian politicians and analysts. Finally, it explores Nigeria's disposition in addressing the challenges at the AU arising from the Arab Spring.

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<sup>6</sup> Efforts to review Nigerian foreign policy were conducted by the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations (PAC-IR) in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).

<sup>7</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, Address by His Excellency, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, at the Retreat on the Review of Nigeria's Foreign Policy, Monday, 1 August 2011.

## Nigeria's Commitments to the African Union

Nigeria's role at the AU is best understood within the larger context of Nigeria's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in her foreign policy. This orientation, widely described as *Afrocentrism*, dates back to independence in 1960, and emphasises that Nigeria's political leaders pursue foreign policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa. The policy is driven by the belief in *Pax Nigeriana*, which stresses that Nigeria should play Big Brother to other African countries. Nigeria's understanding of its status as Africa's Big Brother is based on characteristics peculiar to the country. Professor Gabriel Olusanya, former director general of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, captures these characteristics as follows:

Nigeria is a born leader. Nigeria's credentials as the so called giant of Africa are credentials inherent in the country itself. Nigeria is over 100 million people ... So by virtue of size and population, Nigeria like America is in a situation where it cannot live outside her geographical boundary ... Nature has so placed Nigeria in a situation where she has to be her brother's keeper. If your neighbours are hungry and unhappy, you can never be happy. Nigeria's neighbours are wretched and therefore we have to be our brother's keeper.<sup>8</sup>

It is in recognition of the commitments and Nigeria's remarkable credentials in Africa that her current minister of foreign affairs, Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru, has reiterated that by her sheer endowments, destiny and disposition, Nigeria has always used its strength responsibly in defence or pursuit of peace, and in the interests and for the well-being of all people of African descent, irrespective of geographic boundaries.<sup>9</sup> This view was corroborated by Allasane Quattara, President of Côte d'Ivoire and chairman of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States, one of five regional blocs within the AU), when he observed that Nigeria's support for the restoration of the popular mandate in Côte d'Ivoire had contributed immensely to peace, stability and reconstruction efforts in his country and in West Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Successive administrations in the country have pledged commitments in terms of this orientation and taken several steps to pursue such commitments. Nigeria's pursuit of Afrocentrism includes her active engagement in decolonisation and the eradication of apartheid, both prime objectives of the defunct OAU. Nigeria also extended scholarships to Africans in colonised territories, encouraged the formation of ECOWAS and invested resources in conflict resolution and peace support

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<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Olusanya, *World Event*, No. 2, 1988, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Olugbenga Ashiru, "Perspective on Nigeria at the African Union," *Daily Trust*, Wednesday, 8 August 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Allasane Quattara, "Securing the West Africa Sub region: An Assessment of ECOWAS as Security Strategy," Inauguration Lecture of National Defence College, Nigeria for participants in Course 21, Friday, 14 September 2012.

operations (PSO) across Africa.<sup>11</sup> In recognition of these commitments, Joshua Nkomo, one of Africa's leading nationalists in the 1970s, described Nigeria as the heartland of Africa, her pulse and as Africa's dynamo.<sup>12</sup> Nkomo's portrayal of Nigeria at that time was apt in view of the country's strong economic profile and assertive foreign policy in African affairs.

Nigeria's disposition to play the Big Brother role in the AU is, it must be noted, one of the contentious areas in the country's foreign policy. Critics such as Professor Innocent Ukeje, former head of the department of political science at the University of Abuja, contend that this posture reflects the pretence of Great Power status, especially in view of Nigeria's adverse domestic socioeconomic realities, such as mass poverty and widespread infrastructural decay.<sup>13</sup> Yet optimists such as Professor Adegunle Ajala advocate the enhanced visibility of Nigeria in Africa as a basis for pursuing her national interests. Professor Ajala insists that Nigeria must be ready to carry her neighbours along if she intends to play an important role in world affairs.<sup>14</sup> Nigeria's leading role in ECOWAS is a giant leap towards this objective. She also extends bilateral assistance to her neighbours.<sup>15</sup> Nigeria is surrounded by fragile states in need of foreign aid and assistance and is therefore compelled to play a Big Brother role to protect her national interests.

### **Nigeria's Role at the African Union**

Nigeria's role at the AU is motivated by her commitment to the unity, peace and development of the continent.<sup>16</sup> The country further believes that unity in Africa should be a gradual process. This position differs from the radical approach advocated by the former Libyan leader, Muammar Ghaddafi, who favoured immediate unification of African states under a single government.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> C. Nna-Emeka Okereke and Alexander Emeh Ares, "Foreign Policy and National Security in Nigeria: An Assessment of Pax Nigeriana," *Constructive Engagement*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua Nkomo, Statement to the World Conference for Action against Apartheid, Lagos, 22-26 August 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Inno Ukeje, *Nigeria and Great Power Politics* (Lagos: Chinedum Publishers, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Adegunle Ajala, *World Event*, No. 2, 1988, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Okereke and Ares, "Foreign Policy and National Security in Nigeria".

<sup>16</sup> This is enshrined in the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of States Policy as captured in Section 19 (b) of the 1999 Constitution, which declares the "promotion of African integration and support for African Unity" to be one of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2011 (As amended)* (Abuja: Federal Government Printers, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> BBC News online, Tuesday, 26 June 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6239656.stm> (accessed 14 December 2012).

Nigeria therefore participated actively in the summits, conferences and other meetings leading to the creation of the AU.<sup>18</sup> Nigeria's position during the OAU ministerial meeting in Tripoli between 30 May and 1 June 2000 was explained by her then foreign minister, Ambassador Sule Lamido:

Nigeria favours the establishment of a strong African Union, one which would replace, over a period of time, existing continental institutions – the OAU and AEC. This need not be a replica of the United States of America, given the realities in our continent and the political experiences of our nation states. But it should be of such character, content and form which does justice to the cherished vision of the founding fathers of the OAU and satisfies the dreams and aspirations of the peoples of our continent.<sup>19</sup>

During the 36th OAU summit in Lomé (Togo) in July 2000, 25 member states, excluding Nigeria, ratified the draft AU Constitutive Act.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, on 27 April 2001, OAU Administrative Secretary Salim Ahmed Salim announced to an international summit on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and related diseases that the AU would come into effect on 26 May of that year.<sup>21</sup> This was in compliance with the provisions of Article 28 of the Act, which stipulates that the AU comes into effect exactly 30 days after the 36th instrument of ratification (representing two-thirds of OAU member states) has been deposited at the OAU secretariat.<sup>22</sup> It was the submission of Nigeria's instrument of ratification that brought the AU to being. The public unveiling of the AU as the successor to the OAU occurred in July 2002 at the summit of OAU heads of state and government held in Durban, South Africa.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The conferences included the September 1999 Extraordinary Summit of the OAU held in Sirte, Libya, the Panel of Six African Experts that produced the Draft Constitutive Act of the AU, and the Ministerial meetings in Tripoli held between 31 May and 2 June 2000.

<sup>19</sup> J.K. Shinkaiye, "Nigeria's Role in Shaping the African Union" in *The African Union and The Challenges of Cooperation and Integration, Proceedings of the National Seminar* organised by the Ministry of Cooperation and Integration in Africa, Abuja, 14-15 May 2001 (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2002) pp. 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> The countries that ratified the Draft Constitutive Act of the African Union at the Lomé Summit of July 2000 include Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo and Zambia. The countries that did not ratify the document are Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Republic of Guinea, Mauritius, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

<sup>21</sup> The Summit on HIV/AIDS was attended by representatives from over 40 African countries, including several heads of state and government.

<sup>22</sup> Shinkaiye, "Nigeria's Role in Shaping the African Union".

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Since the emergence of the AU, Nigeria has consistently pledged its commitment to Articles 3 and 4 of the AU Constitutive Act, which respectively outline the objectives of the organisation and the principles upon which it is based.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Nigeria has engaged with peace and security issues on the continent, including pursuit of integration and development in Africa. She has also hosted important AU meetings, including the 4th AU summit, in 2005 in Abuja and the 44th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) in Abuja in November 2008. Examples of Nigeria's commitments to the AU are discussed below.

### *Financial Contributions*

Nigeria's commitment to the AU is visible in its financial contributions to the organisation. The AU inherited some of the financial problems that handicapped the OAU. For instance, the AU's member states were the same as the OAU's, including those unable to pay their mandatory assessed OAU dues. The AU's funding challenges became more pronounced, since the organisation has expanded its budgetary requirements to about five times higher than the OAU budget. So far, Nigeria remains one of the five major financiers of the AU operating budget. As a major financier, Nigeria has full AU voting rights and has been able to sponsor her nationals for strategic positions requiring AU support in various international organisations. The other financiers are Algeria, Egypt, Libya and South Africa. These five countries contribute 75 per cent of the organisation's operating budget. The remaining African countries in the AU contribute 25 per cent. According to a source published in 2008, each of the 'Big Five' contributed US\$14.4 million towards the organisation's operating budget.<sup>25</sup> By 2012, these contributions were put at US\$16.7million.<sup>26</sup>

### *Pursuit of Peace in Africa*

In the sphere of peace and security in Africa, Nigeria has consistently played a prominent role. For instance, following the ratification of the protocol relating to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in December 2003, the PSC became fully operational on 16 March 2004 as the AU organ mandated to address peace and security in Africa. Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo served as the pioneer chairman of the council. In this capacity, he mediated during the early years of the Darfur crisis in western Sudan. During Obasanjo's term as chair of both the AU and the PSC, peace talks related to this crisis were held in Abuja, Addis Aba-

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<sup>24</sup> African Union, *Constitutive Act of the African Union*, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Agubuzu, "Evolution and Funding of the African Union," in U. Joy Ogwu and Warisu O. Ali (eds.), *AU and the Future of Africa* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 2008) pp. 15-26.

<sup>26</sup> Unstructured interviews with D.B. Dabeng on Thursday, 6 September 2012 at the National Defence College, Abuja. Prior to his retirement in April 2012, Mr Dabeng was the Deputy Director, Africa Union Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja.

ba, Accra and Tripoli . The Accra talks of July 2004 also focused on the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and involved President Obasanjo as AU chairman, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, and other African leaders.<sup>27</sup> The aim was to discuss peace initiatives in both countries. Obasanjo advised the international community not to resort to action that could jeopardise peace efforts in Darfur.<sup>28</sup> In addition, he appointed Abdulsalaam Abubakar (a former Nigerian head of state) as his peace envoy to Sudan and Chad.<sup>29</sup>

During August 2004, the AU PSC under Obasanjo's leadership convened peace talks in Abuja between the government of Sudan and rebels in Darfur to avert UN sanctions on Sudan.<sup>30</sup> This round of negotiations led to the adoption of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) on 5 May 2006.<sup>31</sup> Nigeria's commitment to the Darfur peace process was in furtherance of her overarching commitments to security and stability in Africa and world peace in general.

### *Africa Peace and Security Architecture*

Nigeria's commitment to the AU is further demonstrated by her roles in the implementation of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Nigeria participates in AU capacity-building exercises for the military, police and civilian components of the African Standby Force (ASF), which is an integral part of APSA.<sup>32</sup> She further participates in the activities of the ECOWAS Standby Force.<sup>33</sup> Nigeria's National Defence College Abuja is an AU centre of excellence for training in PSOs at the strategic level. These exercises and training have contributed significantly to the

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<sup>27</sup> African presidents in attendance included Ghana's John Kuffuor, Laurent Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire, Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, Mamadou Tanja of Niger, Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, Ahmadou Traore of Mali, Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, Omar Bongo of Gabon and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa as well as the chairperson of the AU Commission, Alpha Oumar Konare.

<sup>28</sup> *This Day*, Friday, 27 August 2004, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ogaba Oche, "Nigeria, the AU and the Challenge of Regional Integration" in Bola Akinterinwa (ed.), *Nigeria and the Development of the African Union* (Ibadan: Vantage Publisher, 2005) pp. 150-1.

<sup>30</sup> The Nigeria-led AU PSC succeeded in getting UN support for a proposal to sponsor the deployment of about 3,000 AU military observers and troops and another 1,100 police to Sudan. The AU intensified efforts to dispatch about 4,500 troops to Darfur before the end of November 2004.

<sup>31</sup> C. Nna-Emeka Okereke, "The African Union and Conflict Resolution in Africa: Reflections on the Civil War in Sudan," *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2005, pp. 104-28.

<sup>32</sup> In October 2010, Nigerian military officers and civilians participated in an ASF validation exercise (Ex Amani Africa) held at ASF headquarters in Addis Ababa. Nigeria is also preparing to participate in the forthcoming Ex Njiwa and Amani Africa II exercises.

<sup>33</sup> ESF validation exercises that Nigeria has participated in include the Ex Jingui I, II and III held in Burkina Faso, Mali and Ghana. Nigeria also participated in Ex Cohesion held in Benin.

pursuit of the AU objective of peace and security in Africa, especially PSO capacity-building.

Nigeria has also made commitments to the promotion and consolidation of democracy, good governance and human rights in Africa. First, it ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and subsequently deposited the instrument of ratification with the AU. Second, the country provided material and other support to the democratic and electoral processes in Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Niger and other African countries. Internally, the Nigerian government undertook electoral reforms in 2002, 2006 and 2010 with the aim of restoring the integrity of her electoral process so as to strengthen democracy. These commitments are anchored in the country's belief that a stable and democratic Africa is in Nigeria's national interests.<sup>34</sup> By fostering democratic enlargement in Africa, Nigeria has remained firmly committed to Article 3(g) of the AU Constitutive Act, which seeks to "promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance"<sup>35</sup> in Africa.

### **Nigeria and Power Politics at the African Union**

Big power politics at the AU have been manifested in the different approaches adopted by Nigeria and South Africa to Libya's preference for a United States of Africa with its capital in Sirte. They are also manifested in the responses to the personality traits of certain African heads of state in domestic and foreign policies. Recent examples of such competition include the race for the leadership of AU Commission, the intrigues associated with AU mediation during the 2011 revolution in Libya and the 2010 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Others are Gaddafi's role in CEN SAD (Community of Sahel-Saharan States) and the general dynamics of Nigeria-South Africa relations.

#### *Struggle for Headship of AU Commission*

The struggle for the chair of AU Commission between Gabon's Jean Ping and South Africa's former Home Affairs Minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma suggested the latent rivalries between certain major powers in Africa. The decision by South Africa to field a candidate contradicted the previous convention among Africa's Big Five not to seek leadership of the AU Commission. South Africa's action was viewed as intended to support her quest to represent Africa as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a status also sought by Nigeria, Egypt and Ethiopia among others.<sup>36</sup> Nigeria therefore supported the candidacy of former

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<sup>34</sup> Olugbenga Ashiru, "Perspectives on Nigeria at the African Union," *Daily Trust*, Wednesday, 8 August 2012.

<sup>35</sup> *Constitutive Act of the African Union*, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Jidefor Adibe, "Nigeria: Dr Zuma's Emergence As Chairperson of the AU Commission," *Daily Trust*, 19 July 2012.

AU Commission Chair Jean Ping. The eventual victory of South Africa's Dlamini Zuma at the July AU summit has thus been seen as a pointer of Nigeria's dwindling diplomatic clout on the continent.

Nigeria's ministry of foreign affairs has, however, argued that the election outcome was neither a failure of Nigeria's diplomacy, nor a diminishing of her influence in Africa. The ministry maintains that Nigeria subscribes to the promotion of inclusion, sense of belonging and accommodation at the AU, and will refrain from actions that could discourage medium and small African countries from occupying the chair's position to ensure greater unity and solidarity. This is consistent with Nigeria's resolve, in tandem with her statutory responsibility as contained in the 1999 Constitution, to abide by her commitment to the continent and to go to great lengths to promote and defend Africa's unity and solidarity.<sup>37</sup>

It is important to note Nigeria made some gains at the July 2012 AU summit. First, Nigeria's Ambassador Aisha Laraba was elected AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. The political affairs department is responsible for promoting democracy, good governance and credible elections in Africa. This appointment coincides with the appointment of Nigeria's Salamatu Sulaiman as Commissioner for Political, Peace and Security in ECOWAS. It is anticipated Nigeria will leverage her headship of these two portfolios to strengthen her pursuit of peace, security and stability in Africa within the AU peace agenda.<sup>38</sup> Presently, other Nigerians occupying significant AU positions include Dr Kolawole Aduloju, elected assistant secretary general of the Pan African Postal Union (PAPU), and Bethel Amadi, who emerged as president of the Pan African Parliament in June 2012.<sup>39</sup> Professor Okon Uya was appointed one of the nine Eminent Persons to serve on the Peer Review Panel of Eminent Persons during the 16th Assembly of African Peer Review Forum. Nigeria's visibility at these AU institutions is expected to enhance her credentials to represent Africa as part of a reformed and expanded permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

So far, while it is accepted that the Dlamini Zuma victory was a good showing for South Africa's diplomacy, the response of Nigeria's foreign ministry attempts draws attention to Nigeria's commitment to consen-

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<sup>37</sup> Ogbole Amedu Ode, "Dlamini-Zuma's Election: Nigeria's Crushing Defeat – A Rejoinder," *This Day*, Saturday, 4 August 2012. Amedu Ode is the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tafawa Balewa House, Abuja.

<sup>38</sup> Nigeria also used her membership of the AU to secure endorsement for the re-election of her national Dr Kanayo Nwanze as executive president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Similarly, Dr Olumuyiwa Benard Aliyu secured AU endorsement for election as president of the Executive Council of International Civil Aviation Organisation based in Montreal. Nigeria further secured AU endorsement of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala for the presidency of the World Bank prior to the election of US-backed Jim Yong Kim.

<sup>39</sup> Ode, "Dlamini-Zuma's Election: Nigeria's Crushing Defeat – A Rejoinder".

sus building and to moderating roles in African politics. This creates room for inclusive politics designed to accommodate and actively engage other African countries in steering the AU.

### *Nigeria and the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire*

The events surrounding the crises in Côte d'Ivoire have also been misperceived by critics as signifying Nigeria's dwindling role in Africa.<sup>40</sup> First, attention is sometimes drawn to AU's decision that South Africa mediate in the crisis as arising from Nigeria's dwindling status. Proponents of this hypothesis contend that Nigeria should have protested the AU decision as contravening the convention that each African regional bloc be the focal point of the AU's peace efforts in a region. South Africa is not a West African country and therefore former President Thabo Mbeki should not have been given the mandate as AU peace envoy to Côte d'Ivoire.

Second, the approaches South Africa adopted during the Ivorian post-election crisis between December 2010 and March 2011 further reveal elements of diplomatic competition for supremacy in Africa. For instance, whereas Nigeria favoured regional intervention through persuasion and ultimately force to secure the exit of former President Laurent Gbagbo, South Africa, which supported Gbagbo's victory, deployed a frigate to Abidjan, a move that provoked curiosity in diplomatic circles. It is, however, important to note that Nigeria's position on the disputed presidential election run-off was consistent with the AU's position. Nigeria worked with the AU and other West African countries through ECOWAS towards restoring the integrity of Côte d'Ivoire's electoral process. Allasane Quattara acknowledged that Nigeria's support for the restoration of the popular mandate in Côte d'Ivoire contributed immensely to peace, stability and reconstruction efforts in that country and West Africa.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the different approaches to the anti-Ghadaffi rebellion in Libya have also been cited as a demonstration of the rivalries between Nigeria and South Africa at the AU. It will be recalled that Nigeria was excluded from the AU's *ad-hoc* mediatory committee on Libya, which comprised presidents Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Amadou Toure of Mali, Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo and Mohammed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, as well as the former chair of the AU Commission, Jean Ping. President Zuma became very vocal and visible in mediatory efforts between Ghadaffi's government and the rebel National Transition Council (NTC). The AU's mediators were, however, unable to secure a ceasefire between the belligerents. Although Nigeria was not a member of the AU mediation committee, her unilateral recognition of the NTC in Libya set the pace for the AU, which seemed undecided. Nigeria's posi-

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, Dabeng.

<sup>41</sup> Quattara, "Securing the West Africa Sub region".

tion on the NTC prevailed and eventually became the AU's official response, despite South Africa's protests that Nigeria's actions violated the anticipated continental approach to the Libyan crisis.<sup>42</sup> These incidents arising from the political crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya have been perceived as sore points in Nigeria's relationship with South Africa at the AU.

### *Nigeria and South Africa*

Importantly, Nigeria and South Africa have also cooperated on a wide range of issues concerning Africa. Nigeria collaborated effectively with South Africa during the meeting that saw the transition from the OAU to AU, and cooperated to halt Ghadafi's United States of Africa. Both have built on the work of the Nigeria-South Africa Binational Commission to boost their economic relations. Apart from the personal conflict between President Nelson Mandela and General Sani Abacha arising from the hanging of environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight Ogoni kinsmen in November 1995, the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa has remained cordial for most of the post-apartheid era. What exists in recent public consciousness as the diplomatic rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa has emerged under Jacob Zuma's presidency. This climaxed during the deportation row between Nigeria and South Africa in March 2012.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore important to stress that constructive engagement between Nigeria and South Africa, in which both countries are major actors, remains a veritable approach to strengthening the AU.

This paper associates domestic misperception about Nigeria's role at the AU with the fact that Nigerians still interpret the conduct of governance through a military prism. Nigerians under military regimes were used to policy pronouncements and immediate implementation, since the executive and legislative powers were fused in the governing military high command. Under the present democratic dispensation, Nigerians seem impatient with the rigours that characterise foreign policy pronouncements and implementation involving the presidency, National Assembly and the wider foreign policy decision-making process.

The incidents outlined above have adversely affected domestic perceptions of Nigeria's diplomacy in Africa. Indeed, in July 2012, the chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Nnenna Elendu-Ukeje, decried the fading leadership role of the country on the continent. She therefore

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<sup>42</sup> "Libya: Nigeria and the African Union," <http://theeconomyng.com/editor15.html> (accessed 12 July 2012).

<sup>43</sup> On Friday, 2 March 2012, South African authorities deported 125 Nigerians aboard Arik Air for allegedly entering the country with fake yellow cards. Within a week, Nigeria retaliated by deporting about 136 South Africans for failure to meet immigration conditions. Nigeria's reaction prompted South Africa to deport another 5 Nigerians on arrival on a similar basis.

proposed that the time had come for Nigeria to draw up a roadmap of where it wanted to be in ECOWAS, the AU and the UN.<sup>44</sup>

While Nigeria has made significant contributions to the AU, domestic misunderstanding still exists about the country's engagements with that body. This has given rise to a negative domestic perception of Nigeria's posture on the continent. This paper argues that this misunderstanding is born partly of a lack of broad-based appreciation of the underlying determinants of the country's role at the AU and the nature of the interests the country seeks to achieve through the organisation. Thus, there is a need to enlighten the public on the nature and thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa and at the AU in particular.

In light of the Arab Spring, Nigeria's foreign policy has been confronted with new variables that require an official response. These include the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the proliferation of arms and weapons as well as the scourge of terrorism and transnational organised crime in West Africa. These emerging sources of insecurity have heightened existing threats to Nigeria's national security and to regional security in Africa. For instance, northern Mali has come under siege from AQIM, while the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria has intensified as a result of the influx of weapons from Libya.<sup>45</sup> We now examine the effects of the Arab Spring on Nigeria's engagement at the AU.

### **Nigeria's Role at the African Union since the Arab Spring**

In the spring of 2011, the Arab world was engulfed by popular demonstrations and rebellion, generally referred to as the Arab Spring. These events erupted in Tunisia and also engulfed Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as leading to an escalation of insecurity in Africa.<sup>46</sup> Central to the protesters' demands were greater political freedom, economic opportunity and an end to systemic corruption in affected states. Other demands were for greater political pluralism, transparency and political accountability.<sup>47</sup> These events brought about regime change in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, while Morocco, Al-

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<sup>44</sup> Nnenna Ukeje *cited* in Kolawole Daniel, "Reps Decry Nigeria's Dwindling Leadership Role in Africa," *Nigerian Tribune* (Abuja), Monday, 23 July 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Princy Marin George, "The Libyan Crisis and Western Sahel: Emerging Security Issues," *Backgrounder*, 14 August 2012, [http://www.idsa.in/backgrounder/TheLibyanCrisisandWestAfricanSahel\\_140812](http://www.idsa.in/backgrounder/TheLibyanCrisisandWestAfricanSahel_140812) (accessed 14 December 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Other sources of insecurity in Africa include the intractable conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and acts of terrorism perpetrated by armed groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army and the Al Shabab-Al Mujahedeen, among others. The scourge of terrorism, especially in the Sahel-Saharan belt, has escalated since the rebellions in Egypt and Libya. This could be attributed to the flow of weapons between various rebel factions.

<sup>47</sup> African Centre for Strategic Studies, "Africa and the Arab Spring: A New Era for Democratic Expectations," ACSS Special Report, November 2011, p. iii.

geria and other Arab countries embarked on basic socioeconomic and political reform without regime change. While the rebellion to oust President Bashar Al Assad has continued in Syria, the demonstrations in Libya led to the violent overthrow of the Ghadaffi regime. Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali of Egypt and Tunisia respectively were compelled to leave office, but with much less violence than attended the parallel events in Libya, Yemen and Syria.

The effects of the Arab Spring were felt in Africa. For instance, the AU was compelled to intervene in the peace process in Libya. This intervention was intended to bring an end to hostilities between Colonel Ghadaffi's forces and the rebel groups making up the NATO-supported TNC in Libya. Beside its mediation role in Libya, the AU accepted the new regimes and leaders of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, with their distinct orientations, into its fold. Finally, the AU was confronted with various security challenges associated with the Arab Spring. For instance, various African countries had to contend with renewed forced migrations occasioned by internal displacements and refugee movements, as well as the scourge of terrorism and arms proliferation.

In West Africa, the influx of weapons stolen from Libya heightened the sub-region's vulnerability to terrorism and rebellion. For instance, following the mass return in September 2011 of heavily armed Tuareg fighters that had previously been part of Ghadaffi's forces, Mali was faced with armed rebellion and political turbulence that resulted in a military coup. The Tuareg fighters, organised under the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), initiated a rebellion and demanded a Tuareg state of Azawad comprised of parts of Algeria, Mali and Niger. The MNLA initially aligned with Islamist groups such as AQIM and Iyad Ag Ghali's Ansar ul Deen. This escalation of the scourge of terrorism and related security challenges in West Africa directly threatened ECOWAS efforts at security and integration in the sub-region.<sup>48</sup>

Nigeria has not been spared the insecurities emanating from the Arab Spring. Prominent among these are the influx of weapons into the country and the escalation of Boko Haram assaults on the Nigerian state. Nigeria's minister of foreign affairs, Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru, has declared that the peace and security of the West African sub-region is tied to peace and stability in Nigeria. The menace of Boko Haram and its links to other terrorist organisations in Africa, such as AQIM, has demonstrated to us in Nigeria the nexus between the domestic situation and foreign policy.<sup>49</sup> The ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mrs Salamatu Suleiman has observed that ECO-

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<sup>48</sup> I. Back, "The Arab Spring an Sub-Saharan Africa" *Africa Geo-Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 10, 2011, Journal of the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle East Studies, Tel Aviv University.

<sup>49</sup> Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru cited in "Boko Haram: Why Nigeria, ECOWAS will intervene in Mali - Minister," *Osun Defender*, Thursday, 29 November 2012.

WAS's decision to intervene in Mali is intended to check the spread of Boko Haram and the movement of Al Qaeda groups into Nigeria and neighbouring countries. She maintained that Nigeria's territorial and national interests are at stake and traced Boko Haram terrorism to Mali.<sup>50</sup> It is this reality that underscores Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS peace process in Mali and the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2071, which allows for military and other interventions and assistance to Mali.

Consequently, the AU and ECOWAS have jointly solicited Nigeria for support in tackling the deteriorating political situation in Mali. The ECOWAS chair, President Allasane Quattara of Côte d'Ivoire, disclosed this after a tripartite meeting with the AU chair, President Boni Yayi of Benin and President Goodluck Jonathan at State House, Abuja.<sup>51</sup> Nigeria has therefore intensified efforts at addressing the Malian crisis through multilateral engagements under the banner of ECOWAS, the AU and UN. This is the more necessary as South Africa is geographically remote from Mali, while Egypt and Libya are still addressing their own domestic challenges. Finally, Algeria, one of Africa's Big Five, remains reluctant to support military intervention in Mali. It therefore behooves Nigeria, a major power in West Africa, to lead the ECOWAS initiative in Mali.

Nigeria's credentials to lead this peace initiative in Mali rest on her accumulated experience in international peacekeeping under the UN, AU and ECOWAS, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Darfur. Nigeria also has oil wealth and stands above several other countries in West Africa in terms of population, military preparedness and willingness to intervene. It is, however, important to acknowledge that any military intervention in Mali will come with its own challenges and peculiarities. The Tuaregs and Islamists operating in Northern Mali are well armed and trained in desert warfare and are driven by nationalistic zeal to secure the independence of Azawad, and their ranks are increasingly swelling through the recruitment of locals and the arrival of foreign Islamist fighters.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kingsley Omonibi, "Nigerian Troops in Mali will halt Spread of Boko Haram – Salamatu Suleiman," *Vanguard*, Saturday, 24 November 2012.

<sup>51</sup> *Leadership*, "AU, ECOWAS Seek Nigeria's Support to tackle Mali Crises," Friday, 14 September 2012, [http://leadership.ng/nga/articles/34898/2012/09/14/au\\_ecowas\\_seek\\_nigerias\\_support\\_tackle\\_mali\\_crises.html](http://leadership.ng/nga/articles/34898/2012/09/14/au_ecowas_seek_nigerias_support_tackle_mali_crises.html)

<sup>52</sup> Will Ross, "West Africa Prepares to Take on Mali's Islamists," *BBC News Online*, 21 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20413428> (accessed 23 November 2012).

## **Conclusion**

The relevance of the AU to Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in Africa cannot be overemphasised. So far, Nigeria is still regarded highly at the AU and has worked assiduously towards the realisation of the AU's objectives. Nigeria's commitment to the AU is visible in the areas of financial responsibility, pursuit of peace and security and promotion of integration and development on the continent. Consequently, Nigeria is still looked upon to provide direction to the organisation.

However, Nigeria's commitment to the AU has raised domestic curiosity in the country. On the one hand, there are sceptics who constantly query Nigeria's continued commitment to the organisation. They insist Nigeria should refrain from playing Great Power politics in the AU and should first address her evident domestic socioeconomic and security challenges. On the other, the optimists argue that leadership in Africa is Nigeria's first role and that it should continue to give direction in the conduct of intra-African affairs at the AU. Beyond these debates, certain facts remain sacrosanct. First, the AU constitutes a credible platform for Nigeria's diplomatic engagements in Africa. This is because the objectives of the Union are consistent with Nigeria's foreign policy objectives for the continent.

In the wake of the Arab Spring in parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Africa's security has come under increased threat. In saying this, I am not, however, discountenancing the reinvigorated propensity for democratic enlargement on the continent. Moreover, the Arab Spring has led to a review of the engagement of Africa's Big Five, since Libya and Egypt are presently addressing domestic challenges. Nigeria therefore faces the task of providing strategic direction and stability in Africa through the AU. Consequently, it utilises ECOWAS to pursue these objectives in West Africa. This approach has come in for keen contestation by South Africa.

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