

# **JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY** (JCIRD)



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# **JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY** (JCIRD)



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## Journal of International Relations and Diplomacy

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## About the Journal

*Journal of International Relations and Diplomacy* is a university-based academic and peer-reviewed journal domiciled in the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, College of Social and Management Sciences, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. The Journal welcomes rigorously-researched original articles that are theoretical, empirical/policy-oriented in diverse areas of international relations and diplomacy as well as cognate disciplines. Submission of articles to JCIRD implies that the work has not been published previously and is not under consideration in any other journal. JCIRD is published on bi-annual basis.

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# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE “POLITICS” OF CHINA’S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY: ANALYSIS OF CHINA’S COVID-19 AID TO NIGERIA

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## Abstract

An acute respiratory and infectious novel coronavirus disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (COVID-19) was discovered in Wuhan, China in late 2019. In January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19. Since then, the virus has mostly spread through person to person contact to all countries in the world except Antarctica. As the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, China was able to contain the first wave of disease and as a result, presented itself as a global leader by offering support to other countries in the fight against the pandemic. However, countries’ response to China’s COVID-19 aid has been mixed with both praises and criticisms. In Nigeria, for instance, the invitation of the Chinese medical team was vehemently resisted by the Nigerian Medical Association, who saw China’s aid as politically motivated. Thus, this study analyses China’s COVID-19 aid to Nigeria within the context of the politics of China’s soft power diplomacy. Both primary and secondary sources of data are employed including interviews with staff at the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Chinese Embassy in Nigeria; Nigerian Medical Association, academic experts on China-Nigeria relations, scholarly works, et cetera. Preliminary findings show that China’s COVID-19 aid to Nigeria was indeed highly politicized. Although Nigeria received Chinese nationals amid COVID-19 lockdown to assist the country in the fight against the pandemic, it turned out to be pure propaganda as the so-called medical doctors were later presented as staff of the China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC). The politicization of the COVID-19 aid to Nigeria shown in the announcement of the medical team that never existed was a strategy by the Nigerian government to boost China’s image as Nigeria seeks to get debt relief and is also requesting for additional loan from China to balance its budget deficit. The paper then recommends that China should realise that soft power can backfire and cause a reputational loss. Thus, the need to engage in genuine and transparent activities in its overall relations with Africa.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Politics, Soft Power, Diplomacy, Aid, Nigeria

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## Introduction

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in Wuhan China in late 2019, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica with over eighteen million cases worldwide and almost seven hundred thousand deaths.<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus disease 2019 called COVID-19 is a communicable respiratory disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus that causes illness in humans. It has halted activities all over the world. Countries raced to slow the spread of the virus by imposing lockdown of human activities and movements, testing and treating of patients, carrying out contact tracing, isolating suspected cases, and quarantining identified cases but the pandemic has not ceased, as new cases emerge every day. Reaching the African continent through travellers returning from Asia, Europe, and the United States, Africa's first COVID-19 case was recorded in Egypt on February 14, 2020. Since then every country in Africa has reported cases of COVID-19. While the virus was slow to reach the continent compared to other parts of the world, the infection has grown exponentially. There are over 900, 000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Africa and over 19, 000 deaths.<sup>3</sup> Southern Africa has the highest number of cases, followed by Northern Africa, Western, Eastern, and lastly, Central Africa.

After scrambling to contain the outbreak within its borders for months, China began to focus outside its borders (Larsen and Gramer, 2020). China launched a campaign to cast itself as a global health leader sending medical teams, personal protective equipment (PPE), and testing kits to dozens of countries around the world (Rubin and Lancaster, 2020). Since 1 March, China has shipped 1.33bn worth of various medical supplies (3.86 billion masks, 37.5 million protective clothing items and 16,000 ventilators, according to Chinese customs authorities) to more than 80 countries, including African countries (Caslin, 2020). China's recent White Paper documents its COVID-19 medical support as the largest medical assistance in the Peoples Republic of China's (PRC) history. In Nigeria for instance, Chinese government medical supplies were valued at 1.5 million US dollars by the Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria. In terms of medical technology cooperation, China has also shared diagnosis and treatment plans with countries around the world, held video conferences with health experts from many countries and international organizations, and dispatched medical expert groups to countries that were first hit hard such as Iran, Iraq, and Italy and later African countries. China's initial mishandling of the crisis and lack of transparency stood against China's soft power but China was prepared to build a better and new image of itself with the support it embarked on. China knew that it has to "reposition itself

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<sup>2</sup>At the time of printing this Journal on August 3, 2020 COVID-19 cases reported worldwide was 18, 144, 566 million and the total number of deaths stood at 690, 911 ([https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm\\_campaign=homeAdvegas1?](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?))

<sup>3</sup>As revealed in the Africa Center for Disease Control website, (see <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>) COVID-19 cases in Africa as at the time of printing this Journal on August 3, 2020 stood at 945,882 and the number of deaths were 19, 983.

not as an authoritarian incubator of a pandemic but as a responsible global leader at a moment of worldwide crisis” (Rudolph, 2020). It was positioned for a global soft power grab with its “mask diplomacy” supply of medical equipment (Jacinto, 2020). Amid China’s COVID-19 soft power diplomacy, China was extolled for its willingness to support when other powerful countries were not forthcoming. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, in a press conference named China as one country that its government could count on when the European Union was not there (Larsen and Gramer, 2020). Also, Pakistan received a significant amount of related aid from China and its leaders had an outpouring of gratefulness to their Chinese counterparts. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said:

This challenge has brought the people of China and Pakistan even closer. In these challenging times, the Pakistani people expected China to come forth and China has lived up to expectations (see Rubin and Lancaster, 2020)

However, the backlash against China was seen in some countries. For example, Australia called for an inquiry into the origin of the virus; Germany and Britain are hesitating about inviting the Chinese tech giant Huawei (Erlanger, 2020) due to allegations of China’s lack of transparency on COVID-19. President Trump blamed China for the contagion and is seeking to punish it. Some other governments want Beijing sued for damages and reparations (Erlanger, 2020) as the pandemic causes both economic and social havoc. In Western European countries like Spain, views of China’s pandemic aid were primarily negative. This is at least somewhat informed by negative attitudes before the pandemic, with an estimated 53 percent of Spain’s population holding an unfavorable view of China (Rubin and Lancaster, 2020). Also, China sent medical supplies to Spain but the Spanish government ended up recalling 50,000 testing kits received from China after it was revealed that they only had a 30 percent accuracy rate (Rubin and Lancaster, 2020). Due to the inconsistency in the quality of aid received from China, the European Union (EU) leaders have remained skeptical of the motives behind China’s medical aid activity (*Rubin and Lancaster, 2020*). Alongside the example of Spain, the Czech Republic, Netherlands, Turkey, and other nations have noted the substandard quality of testing kits procured from Chinese companies.

When China thought it was coming out on top of the crisis (Jacinto, 2020) by engaging in soft power diplomacy particularly the supply of medical equipment and sending of a medical team to countries fighting the pandemic, its assistance was rejected in some countries. In Nigeria for instance, the announcement of China’s COVID-19 aid was first met with resistance from the Nigeria Medical Association, who rejected the invitation of the Chinese medical doctors. Besides, other issues have emerged with regards to China’s COVID-19 aid to Nigeria, hence the need to examine the COVID-19 pandemic and the “politics” of China’s soft power diplomacy. Using China’s COVID-19 aid to Nigeria as a case study, this paper analyses the politics of China’s soft power diplomacy amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper employs both primary and secondary sources

of data including interviews with staff at the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Chinese Embassy in Nigeria; Nigerian Medical Association, academic experts on China-Nigeria relations, scholarly works, et cetera. The paper has five sections. Introduction covered Section I. Section II contains a historical background of China's aid to Nigeria. Section III is a conceptual and theoretical explanation of soft power/soft power diplomacy in international relations. Section IV is the analysis of the politics of China's soft power diplomacy with regards to China's COVID-19 aid to Nigeria. Section V is the conclusion.

## **Background to China's Aid to Nigeria**

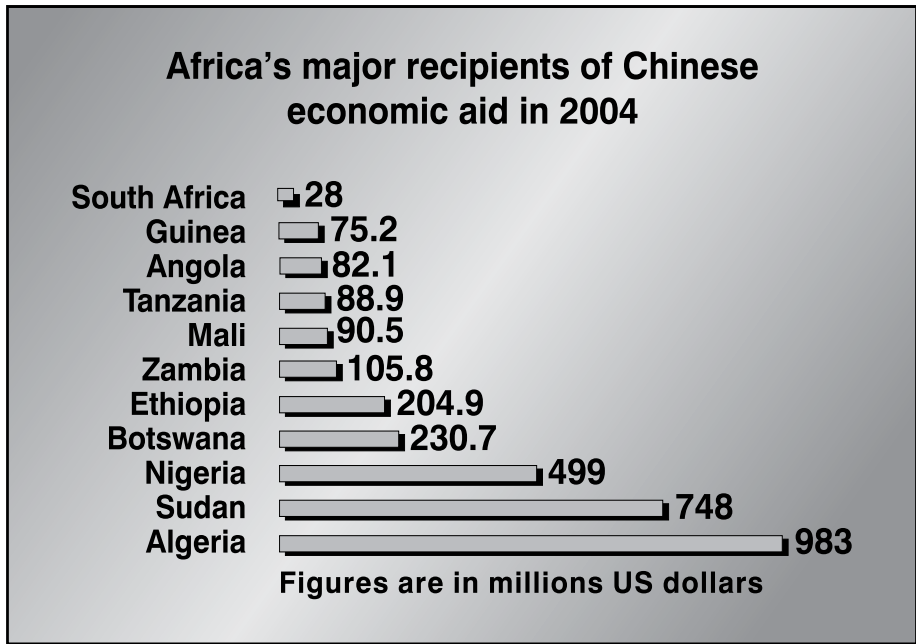
China's aid to African countries is not a new development. Studies have shown that Chinese economic aid to Africa started in the mid-1950s after the Bandung Conference of 1955 (Osondu-Oti, 2015, Hutchinson, 1975). China offered aid to Egypt in 1956 (the first African country that established diplomatic relations with China) in support of the fight over the Suez Canal (Osondu-Oti, 2015). Also, China committed itself to the front line of the struggle against colonialism and imperialism in the Third World (Anshan, 2007:70) extending aid to Guinea, Mali, Ghana et cetera. By 2006, China had contributed a total of 44.4 billion Yuan (US\$5.7billion) for more than 800 aid projects (Wang, 2007). Today, China has emerged as the largest single creditor for African nations (see Brennan, 2020). Estimates by Johns Hopkins University stated that between 2000 and 2017 about \$143 billion was lent to African nations by the Chinese government, banks, and companies (see Brennan, 2020).

However, its aid to each country in Africa varies. In the case of Nigeria, at its independence in 1960, Nigeria was not among the recipients of Chinese aid, as was seen, for example, in China financing and building of Tan-Zam railway for East African countries. The reason attributed for Nigeria's non-recipient of Chinese aid was due to the non-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries at Nigeria's independence (Osondu-Oti, 2013). Nigeria's anti-communist ideology was a major factor. Nigeria at independence had a lukewarm attitude towards the communist bloc, which delayed the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the two countries until 1971, after the Nigerian Civil War. Nigerian leaders distanced themselves from the communist world as neither the Prime Minister nor other members of the Cabinet visited a communist country during their time. But the lesson learned during the Civil War when Nigeria was abandoned by the West and its traditional allies, who refused to supply the country with weapons in the middle of the War until the former Soviet Union (a communist country) agreed to supply Nigerian government with weapons, led to a revision of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Although Chinese businessmen have been trading with Nigerian merchants since 1957, the two governments got closer in the 1990s due to two major reasons/factors: the Tiananmen incident of 1989 and the sanction imposed on Nigeria during the military administration of late General Sani Abacha by the West. For example, China got the support of Africa during the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, when African countries maintained the principle of non-interference in the affairs of China. With that action from Africa, China saw Africa as a friend in need. The Nigerian government on the other hand, in the mid-1990s, faced sanctions from the West due to incessant human rights abuses, for example, the killing of human rights activist and writer, Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 other Ogoni men. China stood by Nigeria's side. Thus, as a result, late Sani Abacha government adopted a look-east policy, and as a sign of appreciation to China, the Nigerian government in 1995 awarded a contract to the China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC) for the rehabilitation of Nigeria's railway to the tune of \$528 US dollars (Osondu-Oti, 2016). It was also a good opportunity for China to fill the vacuum left by the West in Nigeria. China has often presented itself as an alternative partner when the West begins to "moralise" or "to play human rights politics" in Africa. Chinese Ambassador in Sudan once said in an interview with a journalist (when the West withdrew from Sudan due to human rights abuses in the Darfur conflict):

We separate business from politics. Business is business for China and China does not interfere in the internal affairs of other states.

Thus, China tries to distance itself from the internal politics of Africa as much as possible. Beyond the support the two countries received from each other in times of abandonment by the West, China's economic transformation also contributed to the increasing cooperation with Nigeria at the turn of the 21st century. Nigeria, after the transition to democracy in 1999 needed support to rebuild its dilapidated infrastructure (coming out from 16 years of military rule), and with China seeking market expansion, their cooperation expanded. Moreover, Nigeria, just like many other African countries wanted to cut down overreliance on the West and to secure aid without political strings attached. For Nigeria, China is the place where the sun is rising in terms of accessing loans and support for infrastructural development. With China's increasing loan to Africa, Nigeria emerged as one of the major recipients of Chinese aid in Africa. In 2004, for instance, Nigeria was the third-largest recipient of Chinese aid in Africa (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Chinese Economic Aid to Africa in 2004**

**Source:** Van der Wath K. and Kotze D. Africa and China: A Neglected opportunity, African Analyst Quarterly, Issue 1

Since 2000, Nigeria had borrowed over \$6.5 billion from China to fund various infrastructural projects, according to official disclosures from the Debt Management Office and the Finance Ministry in 2019 (Adebayo, 2020). In 2006, for example, China Exim-Bank loan in the infrastructural sector to Sub-Saharan Africa amounted to over \$12.5 billion for projects in power, telecom, transport, water and excluding projects in petroleum and mining sectors, and these loans were concentrated in just a few countries- Sudan, Algeria, Angola, and Nigeria (Broadman, 2007). The data received from the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that Nigeria alone got \$5 billion from this loan for its infrastructure development (Osondu, 2014).

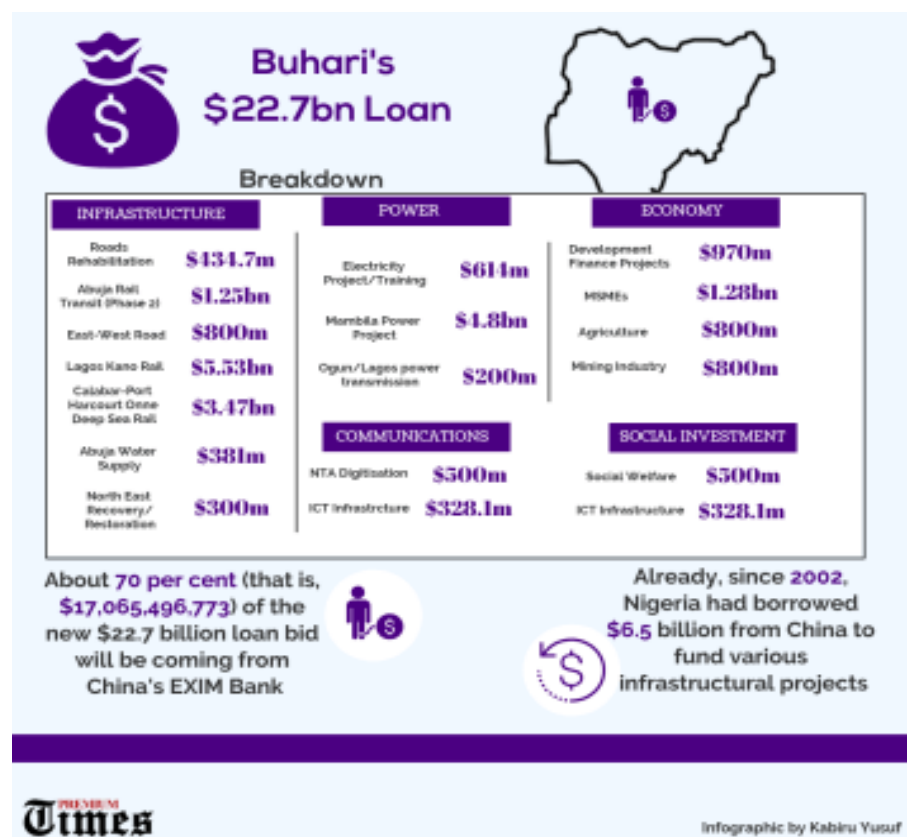
## 2006 China's Aid in Nigeria, Sector Distribution

Major projects	The amount allocated (in US dollars)
Railway upgrade	2 billion
Hydropower construction	1 billion
Rural telephone services	5 hundred million
Satellite telecommunication Construction	5 hundred million
Others like the construction of boreholes, Schools, government offices, etc	1 billion

Source: Osondu, Adaora (2014), Emerging Powers Interests, and the Implications for Economic and Political Development in Nigeria; Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria.

China's loan to Nigeria has continued to increase yearly. In 2012, China offered Nigeria \$600 million for the Abuja light rail projects (Osondu-Oti, 2013). The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation Ltd (CCECC) is building the new terminal of Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, as well as the train stations in Abuja and Kaduna as part of the \$600 million loan agreement (Ekeruche, 2018). In 2013, President Jonathan's visit to Beijing led to a \$3 billion loan for infrastructure which included expansion of the airports in Lagos, Kano, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. Following President Buhari's visit in 2016, Nigeria was offered another infrastructural loan of \$6 billion. Between 2000 and 2016, Chinese companies have earned \$34.2 billion from implementing projects in Nigeria, some of which are tied to loan agreements (Ekeruche, 2018). Recently, Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari has requested a new loan from China worth over \$17 billion US dollars (see Figure 2). Out of the \$22.7 billion that the government is sourcing for, 70 percent will be coming from China. Apart from China, the other lending agencies are the World Bank, \$2,854,000,000; African Development Bank (ADB), \$1,888,950,000; Islamic Development Bank (IDB), \$110,000,000; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), \$200,000,000; German Development Bank (KfW) – \$200,000,000 and the French Development Agency (AFD) - \$480,000,000 (Adebayo, 2020).

Figure 2: Breakdown of the New Loan Request by President Buhari in March 2020



Source: Adebayo, Taiwo-Hassan (March 7, 2020), “As Senate Approves Buhari’s \$22.7bn request, Nigeria could Service Chinese Loans till 2040” The Premium Times Nigeria (<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/380677-as-senate-approves-buharis-22-7bn-request-nigeria-could-service-chinese-loans-till-2040.html>)

If the new loan is approved, Nigeria would keep servicing Chinese loans until around 2040 (Adebayo, 2020). Already, over a quarter of Nigeria’s N10.59 trillion (\$35 billion) 2020 budget, that is N2.7 trillion, goes to debt servicing exceeding N2.4 trillion appropriated for capital expenditure (Adebayo, 2020). This is a source of worry for Nigerians, who are not happy with the loan accumulation by the government as debt servicing will impact on service delivery. Besides the Chinese loans which are tied to its infrastructural development, China has also supported Nigeria in other sectors such as agriculture and health. In agriculture, Nigeria is already gaining in Chinese expertise and training in mechanised farming, and this is seen in Northern states such as Kebbi and Jigawa where the Chinese are



assisting the governments in agricultural development with farming implements from China (Osondu, 2014). China has also been supportive of Nigeria's health sector. For example, in 2013, it supported Nigeria's Rollback Malaria Program through the provision of anti-malaria drugs and insecticide-treated mosquito nets worth about N400 million for a start (Wali, 2013). China and Nigeria later signed Memorandum of Understanding for the supply of another round of anti-malaria drugs worth N83.6 million (Wali, 2013). In 2013, China fulfilled the pledge it made to Nigeria during the 2006 China-Africa Cooperation forum. China pledged to build 30 hospitals for African countries and Nigeria was one of them. China constructed a 150-bed facility worth 12.5 million USD. The Nigerian government only donated the 4.85 hectares of land where the hospital was built and also provided the necessary infrastructural facilities which included water, electricity, and temporary access roads (Dreher et al, 2017). The China-Nigeria Friendship Hospital (or Nigerian-Chinese National Hospital), as it is called is located in Jabi, Abuja. The relations between the two countries have been growing steadily in all sectors, and China's aid has become significant.

### **Soft Power/Soft Power Diplomacy: Conceptual/Theoretical Explanation**

Power is the ability to make others do what they would not want to do. It is the ability to affect others to get outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion (Nye, 2017). On the other hand, soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2017). The term soft power is used to describe a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence. In international politics, soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce, which is often seen in the use of hard power. Soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others. Power in international relations has traditionally been understood in the context of military and economic might: hard power. Hard power is deployed in the form of coercion, the use of force or threat of force and sanctions. Hard power is based on military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions (Wilson, 2008). It relies on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means (Gallarotti, 2011). In contemporary times, soft power resources have become indispensable foreign policy tools for governments. In contrast to hard power, soft power describes the use of positive attraction, appeal and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives and to further the national interests of states. Soft power rejects the traditional foreign policy tools of carrot and sticks, dwelling instead on other tools of influence such as building networks, penetrating states and region by using resources that make the country attractive to the world. Soft power means the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion (Ikenberry, 2018).

The concept of soft power was originally coined by Joseph S. Nye, an American political scientist and former Clinton administration official in his 1990 book

titled “Bound to Lead” that challenges the then conventional view of American decline. Nye argues that sometimes people influence others by ideas and attraction and get them to either want what they want or do what you want. Soft power was used as an analytic concept to fill the deficiency in the way analysts thought about power (Nye, 2017). According to Nye (2009), persuasive power is based on attraction and emulation and associated with intangible resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions. Beyond using military power to do things and control others, Nye in his 1990 book argued, that the United States could draw on its soft power –its non-coercive- to cement its leadership position in the world (Li, 2018). Nye put America’s soft power into three categories- cultural, ideological, and institutional. As Nye noted at the time, the basis of U.S soft power was liberal democratic politics, free-market economics, and fundamental values such as human rights- in essence, liberalism (Li, 2018), which was later confirmed at the end of the Cold War. After the United States won the Cold War, American liberalism had unparalleled appeal around the world (Li, 2018). The soft power of countries could vary but it often rests on three primary categories or pillars which are: political values, culture, and foreign policy. Although each pillar has varied sources and is manifold, a country’s soft power is often assessed based on the quality of its political institutions, the extent of its cultural appeal, and the strength of its diplomatic network. The list of indices for assessing a country has continued to expand to include the attractiveness of the economic model, a country’s digital engagement with the world, and the reputation of the higher education system, among others.

Nye argues that successful states need both hard and soft power- the ability to coerce others as well as the ability to shape their long term attitudes and preferences (Ikenberry, 2019) but due to failures of hard power and how it has undermined U.S global position, many states now use soft power in external relations. According to Steinberg (2008), one of the U.S hard power strategies (the invasion of Iraq) failed to understand what elements of power were most needed to defeat the emerging threats from the terrorist groups and in the long term, the mistake has caused the degradation of American soft power. Today, powerful countries or emerging ones are adopting soft power diplomacy- that is, the use of persuasive appeal, the strength of the diplomatic network, and other attractions to further foreign policies and gain global influence. China’s soft power diplomacy is noteworthy in the 21st century. Having emerged as one of the major world economic colossus (next to the USA- the second largest economy in the world), China’s foreign policy has embraced soft power appeal. As China dramatically developed its hard power resources, leaders realised that it would be more acceptable if it were accompanied by soft power (Nye, 2017). The ability to combine hard and soft power into successful strategies is considered as smart power (Nye, 2017). In other words, the term “smart power” is the successful combination of hard and soft power resources into an effective strategy, which China employs in its international relations.

In 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao told the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that they needed to invest more in their soft power, and this has been continued by the current President Xi Jinping (Nye, 2017). Billions of dollars have been invested to promote soft power. For example, China's economic aid (with no strings attached) is increasingly surpassing that of the West and Europe in Africa. Its market and investment expansion, cultural diplomacy of shared values, and recently COVID-19 medical support to over 80 countries are part of China's attraction to the world. Africa as well as many other countries in Europe (Serbia for example) and Latin America are turning to China. While Li (2018) called U.S soft power at the end of the Cold War, the "great conversion", China's soft power is winning the souls and hearts of African leaders. However, soft power can boomerang, if not managed properly. Cooper (2004) emphasises the importance of legitimacy for the concept of soft power. State activities need to be perceived as legitimate to boost the soft power strategies, and ultimately the image of the country. For example, the public expects behaviour in conformity with the image portrayed and any deviation/deviance may lead to loss of image. Soft power is expected to accumulate through good and convincing deeds, and anything less than that is seen as "propaganda", which according to Nye (2017) is not credible and does not attract. Others have argued that more attention needs to be paid towards locating and understanding how actors' attempts at soft power can backfire, leading to significant forms of reputational damage and loss, or what has been termed 'soft disempowerment' (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018).

Also, the desirability of the outcomes of soft power strategies depends on particular circumstances that cannot necessarily be influenced by states (Cooper, 2004). For example, China's soft power strategy has been perceived by some analysts and scholars as one with "hidden" imperialist intention (Akol and Thayer, 2019; Mead, 2018; Okeowo, 2013). The scramble for Africa in 1884 and the neocolonial tendencies of Europe and North America are not likely to disappear, leading keen observers of African history and development to warn of new forms of colonialism among emerging powers. Also, the perception of China as a country where discrimination against Africans occurs is likely to be contributing (among other factors) to "failure" of Chinese soft power diplomacy and the increasing scrutiny of the motives behind the COVID-19 soft power diplomacy. In some cases, China's authoritarian political system also hinders the full utilization of its soft power potentials (Heng, 2010), due to the perception of its leadership style that includes a lack of respect for human rights. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because others are attracted to its values and aspire to its level of transformation. But when the values a country promotes externally contradicts its internal situation, countries might have their reservations in keying into its soft power diplomacy.

## **China's COVID-19 aid to Nigeria and the "Politics" of China's Soft Power Diplomacy**

Emerging as a major donor to Africa at the turn of the 21st century, China's aid became controversial. This is due to various reasons. First, the foreign aid arena as it pertains to the African continent has traditionally been dominated by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Kafayat et al 2016). Second, the increasing importance of non-traditional donors meant that the economic and political stronghold of Western and OECD countries in Sub-Sahara African (SSA) has gradually ebbed (Kafayat et al, 2016) particularly with a strong contender such as China, who is now the single largest creditor for African nations. Third, China's principle of non-interference and its aid policy that does not attach any political conditions such as human rights promotion and democracy is winning the hearts of African leaders, but China's aid critics believe that China is abetting and aiding authoritarian regimes. For example, China's stance on non-interference was blamed for enabling the ruling forces in Sudan to carry out genocide (Hodel, 2008) during the Omar al-Bashir administration and served as a carrot for the dysfunctional government in Angola (Hodel, 2008).

Fourth, China's less strict approach is challenging European and Western development policy and bureaucratic pattern of aid and presenting an alternative source of financing that Africa was embracing to the chagrin of the dominant powers in the international system. For example, European Union has a normative orientation of development policy, which entails the linking of aid to the fulfillment of various political conditions relating to human rights, democracy, and good governance (see Osondu-Oti, 2015; Manners, 2002). The United States also has eligibility requirements for its development support. For example, for any African country to enjoy the benefits of the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the country must be striving to improve human rights, labor standards, and rule of law, among other things. China's distinctive approach that does not have such requirements was what put its aid under scrutiny. China also has a low-interest rate loan and sometimes, natural resources are used for repayment for loans, for instance in Angola (Adebayo, 2020).

China's loans are tied to infrastructural development. This lending strategy has been criticized by its international rivals, who frame loans as a way to exert influence over poor nations or even take possession of national infrastructure in place of repayment, so-called debt-trap diplomacy (Brennan, 2020). Such an approach has already won China's control of a major port, the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka government said it would be difficult to pay the loans taken from China to build the project. Thus, it agreed to lease the port for 99 years to a venture led by China Merchants Port Holdings Co. in return for \$1.1 billion. China has been criticised for setting a trap for poor nations with its loans to take over valuable assets. But pro-China analysts believe using resources to repay loans helps cover critical infrastructural deficits in the continent (Adebayo, 2020). It

also reveals that China-Africa cooperation offers a “win-win” situation, seen in the case of trading abundant resources for rollback infrastructural deficit. At the 2019 National People’s Congress, spokesperson and former foreign affairs vice-minister Zhang Yesui defended China’s lending practices saying that China would “neither force others to cooperate on projects nor create any traps” (see Brennan, 2020). It has also been argued that Western aid has its flaws such as interference in internal affairs of the recipient states, lack of accountability, and no market-based mechanism to know whether funds provided are used in the ways intended or not (Rebol, 2009). This is because many African countries that have been receiving Western support have not fared any better. Arguments and counter-arguments for and against Chinese and Western aid to Africa have been going on among scholars as well as political and economic analysts, but it is important to reiterate that such debates are outside the scope of this paper. The focus of this paper is to analyse the politics of China’s soft power diplomacy using China’s COVID-19 aid to Nigeria. While China’s aid to Nigeria is not new, its COVID-19 aid has raised a new and distinct kind of issue about the politics involved in China’s soft power diplomacy.

There is no gainsaying that in a threatening and uncertain international milieu, states have little choice but to put their interests above those of others in the international system. National interest is key for states in international relations. Every state determines its foreign policy in line with its interests. State donors also have certain interests that they either want to promote or protect when giving aid. The United States’ Marshall Plan, for instance, was mainly initiated to counter the spread of communism. Some of its assistance and roles played in Africa and the Middle East in the name of development assistance was (among other reasons) to maintain its global leadership or consolidate its hegemonic role. Chinese lending is also at the heart of its Belt and Road Initiative, described as a “Chinese Marshall Plan” designed to connect China to Africa and Europe via six land and maritime networks (Brennan, 2020). Estimated to cost \$900 billion, the BRI project will stimulate economic growth and supercharge Beijing’s political influence (Brennan, 2020). It is not new that States use aid as a political tool to further their interests. Thus, as the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic that was first reported in China, China emerged out of the pandemic strong and positioned itself as a global leader in offering assistance to nations. China’s COVID-19 aid is part of its soft power diplomacy used to improve its image, especially after it failed to be transparent about the emergence of the COVID-19 virus in Wuhan. China faced international criticism for the late disclosure, initial downplaying, and strict control of information related to the COVID-19 Wuhan outbreak (Rudolph, 2020). Due to the allegation that China hid the information on the impact of the virus, “political virus” has been spreading in the media (especially from the US Trump-led administration) condemning China’s mishandling of the spread of COVID-19.

As a result, it became imperative for China to redeem its image, and reverse the negative perception around the world. Thus, the re-awakening of China’s soft

power diplomacy amid COVID-19. Chinese President Xi Jinping argued that it is natural for China to offer assistance to countries that either supported it during its trying times (when it was battling with the virus); countries overwhelmed with the rising cases or South-South countries finding it difficult to manage the pandemic. But beyond Xi's reasons, China needed to boost its image in a competitive world or lose its "position" among the comity of nations. According to Jacinto (2020), the race for world power dominance is up for grabs. In an era where US global leadership is to a certain extent "diminishing", other emerging powers such as China are using every available opportunity and soft power strategies to win global influence. For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has already penetrated over 130 countries. It has been argued that BRI is one strategy that China wants to use to dominate the world (Osondu-Oti, 2019). China is increasingly investing in different countries of the world backed with Chinese loans and supported by Chinese skilled workers. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, China's aid outlay to Africa grew rapidly, rising to its largest figure of \$15 billion in 2018 (Dahir, 2019). For China, its aid has been part of a geopolitical tradition seeking to avoid "donor" status but presenting itself as a friendly developing country and broker of South-south cooperation (Osondu-Oti, 2015). China dismissed the notion of charity and instead stresses the idea of friendship (Osondu-Oti, 2015).

In doling out these packages, President Xi Jinping has stressed the condition-free nature of the assistance and how Beijing was not seeking "selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation" (Dahir, 2019). How true is Xi Jinping's assertion that China is not seeking selfish political gains....."? This paper further analyses the politics of China's soft power diplomacy using China's COVID-19 aid to Nigeria as a reference point. At its initial announcement, China's intention to send medical team/medical doctors (medical doctors and medical teams are used interchangeably here) to Nigeria to support the country in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic was met with strong resistance from the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA). The NMA is the largest medical association in the West African sub-region with over 40,000 members from 36 state branches and the branch from the Federal Capital Territory with about 19,000 in the Diaspora. In a Press release, signed by the President of NMA, Dr. Francis A Faduyile on April 5, 2020, some major points were noted. First, distaste at being "subjected to the ignominy of not being carried along in arriving at such a decision by the Nigerian government. Second, the existence of "a large pool of General Medical and Specialist Practitioners who are either unemployed or underemployed that can be engaged" in the fight against the pandemic.

However, the NMA's resistance did not stop the Nigerian government from welcoming the "Chinese doctors", who according to the Minister of Health, Dr. Ehanire Osagie were to share experiential strategies of how China curtailed the spread of the virus. But, the NMA saw the so-called support "unnecessary" and as an invitation with a political motive. This is because as at April 8, 2020, when

the Chinese medical doctors arrived Nigeria, COVID-19 cases reported by the National Centre for Disease Control were 276 cases and 6 deaths, which begs to question the motive behind the sending or the invitation of a team that their services were not needed. In a personal interaction with the President, NMA, Dr. Francis Adedayo Faduyile on May 19, 2020, this is what he has to say:

The medical workforce in Nigeria did not show any sign of incompetence, overstretched, and there were no identified gaps that the Chinese were coming to fill. The NMA was yet to use 1 percent of its manpower. Thus, the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) described the move as “a thing of embarrassment to the membership of the Association and other health workers who are giving their best in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

For the Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Zhou Pingjian, China's COVID-19 assistance was a way to reciprocate the friendship and kindness offered by Nigeria to China. It is important to note that there were two types of assistance that China brought to Nigeria: medical doctors (?) and medical supplies. The invitation of medical doctors attracted criticism, but donating medical supplies to Nigeria was welcomed because Nigeria was just starting to produce personal protective equipment (PPE) and definitely would not have enough to distribute to its large population (almost 200 million). Nigeria had earlier received medical supplies from Jack Ma Foundation without any controversy. The consignment from Jack Ma, which includes 100,000 Masks; 9,999 Face Shield; 20,000 Test Kits and 1000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as hand groves (FMoH, 2020b) were sent through the African Union, where the supplies were distributed to all countries in Africa. There was another donation by a group of Chinese Companies in Nigeria which includes PPEs and other medical consumables, with one million surgical masks for health workers and also ventilators valued at over \$100,000 (FMoH, 2020a). The aspect of Chinese companies and individual's Foundations assisting aside from the government was a new and welcomed development. It was clear that COVID-19 changed how China administers aid. China broke its typical aid structure coordinated by the state, which means it has to engage with the private sector and Chinese citizens and the media (Li and Musiitwa, 2020). China's channels of administering aid are expanding and its companies and individuals becoming ambassadors and projectors of China's go-global-policy and China's soft power diplomacy.

Concerning the Chinese medical team sent to Nigeria, there was an element of politics and propaganda embedded in the support. As the cases of COVID-19 continued to rise in Nigeria, the absence of Chinese doctors (already welcomed in Nigeria by the Minister of Health) in the fight against the pandemic attracted public attention. At the Daily Presidential Task Force Media Briefing on COVID-19 on May 14, 2020, journalists asked about the whereabouts of the Chinese medical team because at that time Nigeria had 5142 cases and 167 deaths. This is the Minister of Health, Dr. Ehanire Osagie's response:

I would be glad not to be asked about the whereabouts of the medical team. I want to explain that first of all, I think not all of them are doctors and I heard that some of them are technicians but they are the staff of CCECC. The Ministry of Health is not their host, so we cannot always explain what happened to them or where they are. There seems to be a lot of interest in these doctors but they are the staff of a company. I would be very happy if you do not ask me where they are. I repeat, they are not our guests in that sense but we have been able to learn some things from them. We shared ideas of what they did in their country in managing COVID-19. The medical personnel are not guests of the federal government but CCECC, a construction company (Nigeria's Minister of Health, May 14, 2020)

These statements from the same Minister that announced the arrival of the medical doctors to Nigeria and also received them at the airport in Nigeria to a great extent revealed that the initial announcement was nothing but propaganda. While Chinese nationals were seen at the airport welcomed by the Minister of Health, the Nigerian government could have engaged in "such political lies" to win favour from the Chinese government. At the time the Muhammadu Buhari's government was reaching out to China for another loan and with the fall in the crude oil price (Nigeria's major source of revenue) Nigeria desperately needs Chinese loans more than ever. Another contradictory response from Nigeria's Minister of Interior, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola who tried to clarify the whereabouts of the Chinese medical doctors to the journalists validates that there is hidden political agenda with regards to China's COVID-19 aid to Nigeria. This is what the Minister of Interior said:

Active, inquisitive, and curious Nigerian journalists who will want to get into everything and expose everything. It is good for democracy and we thank you for it. Indeed, 15 Chinese "*nationals*" came into Nigeria on April 8, 2020, and from everything, we have heard and said, they were here on the bill of the CCECC, a Chinese company working in Nigeria and conjunction with some Nigerian companies, agreed to support us in the effort to respond to the pandemic. At Idu, they participated in installing critical, essential, and sensitive medical equipment at the isolation centre there. They equally worked in the Dome project that was handled by NNPC consortium in conjunction with ThisDay. Those were the two locations they worked. They came on a 30-day visa issued in Beijing but they are still here, not because they have not completed their job but because there is a restriction on travel in Nigeria occasioned by the COVID-19 protocol (Minister of Interior, May 14, 2020).

From the Minister of Interior's first statement "..... journalists who will want to get into everything and expose everything.....", one can infer that there is something hidden that the government believes the journalists were trying to expose. Moreover, the two Ministers' explanations are contradictory and there is a change in narrative. For example, the change in narrative that the Nigerian government is not the host of the team that the Minister of Health welcomed them at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Abuja is a clear indication of political rhetoric. If not, how then can one explain the government opening its doors to



a Company staff in the guise of the medical team when a travel ban is in place in Nigeria? And how can one explain the Chinese medical team the statement that “Chinese medical team has completed their jobs when COVID-19 cases<sup>4</sup> in Nigeria are rising? The team invitation was purely a politically motivated action by both governments. There is a further contradiction in the Chinese Consul’s statement. In an interview with Vanguard, the Consul General of the Peoples’ Republic of China Consulate in Lagos Chu, Maoming has this to say:

In addition to directly assisting the Nigerian government and people, the Chinese government calls on the Chinese businesses and nationals in Nigeria to extend a helping hand and contribute to Nigeria’s fight against the pandemic in various forms and through different channels. At the request of the Nigerian government, a Chinese company, the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), through its subsidiary CCECC, collected a batch of medical supplies in China for the Nigerian side. At the same time, considering its large number of employees in Nigeria, CCECC at its own cost, dispatched a 15-member technical team from CRCC. 12 experienced medical professionals have relevant experience in the prevention of the COVID-19. The primary purpose of the technical team is to provide CCECC employees with critical and necessary healthcare assistance. Under the directive of the Chinese Embassy in Abuja and response to the Nigeria Government’s request, the technical team may also share with Nigerian medical teams effective methods on how to contain the COVID-19 and provide advice on the use of relevant medical equipment. They would stay in Nigeria for about 30 days. Along with the technical team, 16-tons medical equipment and goods are delivered to Nigeria, including ventilators, disinfection machine, disposable medical masks, N95 masks, medicines, rubber gloves, protective gowns, goggles, face shields, infra-red thermometers, and other critical care items. Those goods required by the Nigerian Government will be handed over to relevant authorities after checking and sorting (Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Lagos, April 14, 2020)

The two italicized sentences above as drawn from the Consul General’s statement “at the request of the Nigerian government.....” and “the primary purpose of the technical team is to provide CCECC employees.....” arguably are purely political. How possible is it that the Nigerian government will make a request (as the Consular explained above) for the medical team to come and provide the CCECC employees (only) with necessary healthcare assistance when the fight against COVID-19 is not only to protect Chinese citizens in Nigeria? China’s COVID-19 aid was announced to the world as a support for the country and not any company. Different and varied reasons can be attributed to both governments’ “political actions.” On the part of Nigeria, the country’s rising debt could cause the country to adopt a propaganda strategy to win over China’s heart to get debt relief. Nigeria missed out on the IMF debt service relief. On April 14, the IMF approved \$500 million to cancel six months of debt payments for 25 countries,

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<sup>4</sup>At the time of printing this Journal on August 3, 2020, COVID-19 cases in Nigeria stood at 43, 537 and number of deaths were 883 (see <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>)

19 of which are in Africa (Sun, 2020). The countries that received the debt service relief are seen as the poorest and the most vulnerable and these are Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, D.R., The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Togo, and Yemen. African states expect a devastating impact on their economies this year from the COVID-19 pandemic and are appealing for relief from repayments on billions of dollars in outstanding debt to cope, and Nigeria is one of them. It is still unclear how Beijing will respond to calls for debt relief amid the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic (Nyabiage, 2020). China, only maintained that the basic commitment articulated in the G20 statement has China's support.

Thus, Nigeria has to play its cards well and ensure China gets a red-carpet welcome. It is known that public debt as a percentage of GDP has doubled in more than a quarter of Sub-Saharan African countries like Angola, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria (Mishra, 2020). Estimates by Johns Hopkins University stated that between 2000 and 2017, about \$143 billion was lent to African nations by the Chinese government, banks and companies (see Brennan, 2020), and African countries are seeking debt relief worth over \$100 billion US dollars. Besides, the Nigerian Senate recently approved a \$22.7 billion loan request by President Muhammadu Buhari, bringing Nigeria's external debt stock to nearly US\$50 billion. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari needs the approval of the loan as Africa's largest economy returns to the international debt market to shake off impacts of recession and finance the deficit in the 2020 budget (Adebayo, 2020). Also, China is a large financier of projects in Nigeria, and the Nigerian government would not want to forget that fact in a hurry. It is doing everything in its power to draw China closer to itself. This could also explain why the government is not taking any significant action on Chinese maltreatment of Nigerians in China.

On 10 April 2020, a group of African ambassadors in Beijing came forward with a formal complaint about the treatment of the continent's citizens and, three days later, the African Union (AU) asked the Chinese authorities to take steps to avoid any over-the-top behaviour (Caslin, 2020). Perhaps the most surprising COVID-19 PR defeats came from Africa as such "bold actions" of calling China to take steps from African governments were unexpected and rare. A video also circulated where a Nigerian diplomat in China was criticizing Chinese officials' actions. The disapproval of discrimination against Africans in China is not new but re-ignited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigeria's House of Representatives had earlier raised the issue for investigation but suddenly went quiet on it, probably due to pressure from Chinese embassies in Africa and perhaps even calls from Beijing (see Claw, 2020). The Nigeria government has failed to deal with that issue appropriately just like other African governments. One of the reasons is China's soft power attraction. China is too important as an economic and political

partner in most African countries.

On the other hand, Chinese officials also aided the propaganda of the Nigerian government. The reasons are also clear. Nigeria is China's largest market in Africa and a major target for investment by its companies. Thus, China would also keep Nigeria to its side in the event of winning over allies. Chinese companies have invested in all sectors including oil, telecommunication, agriculture, construction, etc. More than 200 Chinese companies are currently operating in Nigeria, thus making the country the largest recipient of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – about \$15 billion out of its \$26.5 billion investments in Africa as of 2016 (Raji and Ogunrinu, 2018). Third, only to Algeria and Angola, Chinese companies generate their highest revenue from Nigeria (Ekeruche, 2018). On employment, about 64,500 Chinese workers are employed locally (Ekeruche, 2018). Another reason that can be attributed to the politicization of China's COVID-19 aid is China's global push for dominance. According to Lee Seong-hyon, the Director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the Sejong Institute in Seoul, the Chinese government is trying to “establish itself as a global hero that saved many people both in and outside China” (see Larsen and Gramer, 2020); and to position itself as a country that is “out there helping the world, whereas the United States is in ‘America First’ mode” (see Larsen and Gramer, 2020).

With regards to China's COVID-19 aid to Nigeria, it may not be too early to extrapolate that the Chinese medical team to Nigeria was not what the world thinks it is, as the aid was highly politicized. According to Callick (2020) politics and especially the push for rejuvenation is upstream of all else in Xi's (Chinese President) “New Era.” However, it is important to state that more facts and information would be available in further study. At the moment, a member of Nigeria's House of Representatives Hon. Dachung Bagos, representing Jos South on May 19, 2020, raised a motion for the Chinese doctors that came to Nigeria to be investigated. He called on the House to adopt the motion for the medical team to be investigated for the country to know who they are, who invited them, and what their mission in Nigeria was. The House of Representatives also wants to know how the 15 medical teams (as Nigerians were told upon their arrival) turned into technicians to fix or install equipment at some isolation centers as the Minister of Interior explained. That motion was adopted and the investigation is ongoing at the time of submission of this paper. What could have been an opportunity for Beijing to display prudent, thoughtful leadership in addressing the novel coronavirus devolved into diplomatic self-defeat (Rubin and Lancaster, 2020). China's soft power diplomacy backfired in Nigeria leading to reputational damage for China among the local populace as they questioned the legitimacy of China's aid. For many locals, China appears to them at this time as a “double-faced” partner that offered Nigeria aid at home and at the same time maltreating its people on Chinese soil. The resistance to Beijing's soft power diplomacy in Nigeria reveals how China's soft power diplomacy understood in the context of global power ambitions is increasingly colliding with the local perception of China.

To the Nigerian government, China is still the preferred partner and all-weather friend that does not “impose” its will on others. Moreover, when compared to Western and European aid, “can one believe that the development aid offered by Europeans is without a hidden agenda?” (Vairon, 2020). Every foreign aid has a motive. It remains for the recipients to strike a balance. China’s aid is “easier” to access, and without stringent conditions. Bureaucratic European policies seldom allow emergency interventions such as the one led by China in Africa (Vairon, 2020). But arguably aid can be politicized by both the donor and the recipient, based on the interests they want to promote or protect. For China, the politics of China’s soft power diplomacy is paramount and for Nigeria, China is an important political and economic partner. However, China’s medical team to Nigeria was a “failed political venture” due to other factors. China is confronted with many accusations both at home and overseas - racism, lack of transparency in its initial handling COVID-19 viral disease, and now aid propaganda in Nigeria. Before the pandemic, China has often been seen as a threat to the country’s domestic economic development, particularly in the manufacturing and construction sectors, where Chinese goods and firms have taken over the market respectively. As noted by Rubin and Lancaster (2020), responses to China’s post-COVID overtures are largely falling along pre-existing political fault lines. African attitudes are closely in line with prior attitudes toward China. Among a sample of countries (Nigeria inclusive) targeted by Beijing’s post-COVID-19 diplomatic and propaganda push, COVID-19 pandemic and the Chinese government’s international response have primarily reinforced pre-existing relationships and sentiments (Rubin and Lancaster, 2020).

For the local populace, it is still unclear if China will be able to reposition itself as a “trusted” “partner” or if this medical team issue, among other untreated issues such as maltreatment of Nigerians in China, displacing of local producers with Chinese goods, would diminish China’s image. For the Nigerian government, China is a country that cannot be ignored. As the world’s number two economy and biggest trading nation, comprising 28% of global growth in the five years from 2013 to 2018, China is very important in international economic relations. In international politics, China’s veto power counts for Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, China emerged as the saviour of the world, sending medical supplies and teams to different countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. While European and Western countries were battling to contain the pandemic, China’s successful containment of the pandemic saw China applying its soft power diplomacy to gain global influence. In the case of Nigeria, China announced the provision of medical supplies and medical doctors to help Nigeria fight the pandemic. The Chinese medical doctors caused a lot of controversies starting with the rejection of the team by the Nigerian Medical Association. Also, the Chinese medical team that was announced, as later gathered

was just government propaganda to boost China's image. In essence, China's soft power diplomacy in the COVID-19 was embedded in political rhetoric. The politics of Chinese aid to Nigeria was played two ways- both by the Chinese government and the Nigerian government. China suffered reputational loss as the local populace became skeptical about China and its aid to Nigeria. No doubt soft power diplomacy could backfire, and lead to resentment and scepticism on the country's goodwill.

Thus, it is recommended that China in its application of soft power diplomacy must work assiduously to be genuine to avoid boomerang. Also, the Nigerian government should work towards ensuring transparency in its relations with China to avoid serious backlash from the public, which might work against the Chinese citizens or lead to unfriendly attitudes toward the Chinese population in Nigeria. The Chinese government should also pay attention to civil society and address the origin of any unfavourable attitudes towards China. For example in Nigeria, where medical professionals opposed the visit of a Chinese medical team, the Chinese government could have asked for the Nigerian government to dialogue with them to understand the logic behind their resistance and the best assistance that would be acceptable.

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# THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS AND PEACEBUILDING: A POSTCOLONIAL GLOBAL NORTH HEGEMONIC AGENDA?

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## Abstract

Development economics or international development aid emerged to channel economic resources from the Global North to the developing world for development purposes. Critics have persistently drawn attention to how development economics or international development aid and the more recent approaches to peacebuilding have become conservative if not neo-colonial enterprises. The imperialist/colonies' interaction had existed before and served as harbingers of, the donor/recipient interaction. Some scholars have argued that the colonial policy and the territorial cum-economic expansionist mindset foregrounded by Europe's feudal-capitalist ideology, were designed to support its industrial revolution. There is still great suspicion among critics that there has not been any significant departure from this historic past and "colonial" mindset, and what obtains or characterise today's economic aid transactional dynamics. What informs this paper, which among other things, is to confirm, or confute the veracity of this claim, or justify the rationale of the allegations. Besides, the study intends to determine the extent to which the socio-economic dynamics have changed, if at all. Through secondary data analysis and archival studies, the paper explains the classic narratives of internationalisation of development economic aid, the original design, and objectives, the praxis, benefits or outcomes for the Global North, and the implications for the developing world (Global South). The methodology engages the various critical approaches to international development and where these neo-colonial sentiments may have originated from as well as the informing rationale. The paper draws on how the field of peacebuilding relates to the field of international development and provides escape routes for its many challenges.

**Keywords:** International Development Aid, Development economics, Peacebuilding, Colonialism, Neo-colonialism

## Introduction

Some of the critical opinions on development economics or international development aid suggest the intention to increase the West's involvement in Africa. Development economics or international development aid constitute the 'anti-thesis' of, and a veritable "damage control" to, the colonial psychosocial

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and economic experience of the colonised. The consequences of imperialism in postcolonial spaces cast a shadow on postcolonial interventions exerted through foreign aids. Scholars, including Harry Magdoff, David Birmingham, and Ebenezer Obadare (2010), argue that Africa “being former colonies, continue in different ways to display the imprints of European colonialism.” They suggest that there are residues of colonial mind-set in former colonies, one of which is the dependence that international development aid or development economics amplifies. Development economics or international development aid and the free market are two contrasting and reinforcing ideas. As Heathershaw and Lambach (2019) explain, “international actors make intrusive interventions into sovereign space of a given state” (pp. 269-290). By ‘Intrusive’, it connotes action taken without consent.

Thus, under colonialism intervention(s) were made without sufficiently considering the culture of recipients’ sovereignty. In comparison, Newman and Richmond (2009) opine that “peacebuilding activities are not neutral in their normative orientation or impact” (p.9). Their idea suggests that interventions are not altruistic, bearing in mind that within the confines of the free market, the Haute finance is largely about ‘interest’ more than anything else. For instance, Joseph Stiglitz (2006), opines, “I was convinced that the advanced industrial countries, through international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ...and the World Bank, were not only not doing all they could to help these countries but were making life more difficult” (p. ix). Likewise, Sahin Kirdin (2017) argues, “since there is no formally recognized supreme authority among equally sovereign units, states generally act in ‘self-help’ to maximize their national interest” (pp. 615-632). It is not far-fetched to conclude that economic development as an approach to international development is a tool that perpetuates the interests of interveners. Existing relevant literature on post-independent Africa has demonstrated that there is always interest in interventions.

The terms, “development”, “global north” and “global south”, as used broadly in this context, define economic indicators. They characterise, on the one hand, developed and rich system economy, and on the other hand, underdeveloped and poor system economy. The emphasis is not on ‘economy’ but the foregrounding **‘systems.’**<sup>6</sup> Systems are influenced by certain ideological orientations that run through the socio-economic and political landscape of the two worlds. Therefore, the intersectionality of the developing economy and colonialism is what we see between the Global North and Global South. Dimitar Toshkov’s critique of the designation as misleading, and at best, “descriptively inaccurate, even when they

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<sup>6</sup>Jennifer Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism” *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, (June, 2010) Margaret Moore, *A Political Theory of Territory* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 227. Olatunji Oloruntimehin, “The Nature of Local Power Under Colonial Rule” *Presence Africaine* 3, no.4 (1982): 161-169. All wrote about colonialism as a system of government. By the virtue of that system that subjects sovereign states under imperial rule, that in itself speaks to a level of development that underscore whatever ‘development’ is at the time in Africa.

refer to general notions such as (economic) development” (Toshkov, 2018) is apt, and further underscores the significance in this context. Toshkov contends that they are, “homogenizing, obscuring important differences between countries that are supposedly part of the Global South and North Groups.” Despite the overlapping ramifications of their use, Lemuel Odeh (2010) asserts, “while the Global North represents the economically developed societies of Europe, North America, among others, the Global South represents the economically backward countries of Africa among others.” Odeh’s classification resonates with the intentions of this paper for clarity.

The imperialist/colonies interaction had existed before and served as harbingers of, the donor/recipient interaction that characterizes today’s transactional dynamics. The colonial policy and the territorial cum-economic expansionist mindset foregrounded by Europe’s feudal-capitalist ideology were designed to aid Europe’s industrial revolution. Through colonialism, Africa presented an opportunity to advance Europe’s economic interests consequent upon the partitioning of Africa at the historic Berlin conference of 1884-85. Meanwhile, precolonial African space had had its state formations and conducted businesses in line with, and peculiar to, the dynamics of its cultural space and traditions. As Thea Buttner (1970) explains, “In the precolonial period, many peoples in Tropical Africa attained a relatively high standard of development which by every measure compared favourably with that of the other people” (p. 275). The critic cites ancient Ghana, Mali, and especially, the City-States of Benin and Ile-Ife (now, in Nigeria), as representatives of this idea of developed African societies. Nevertheless, imperialists dominated Africa through its established institutions which deliberately obliterated existing African institutions through enforced, direct, or indirect assimilation. Gareth Austin (2008), Walter Rodney (1972), wrote extensively on the pressure that the burgeoning industrialised world had on Africa.

The dislocation of a thriving pre-colonial Africa was well-orchestrated for reasons of the proper administration of Europe’s imperial policies. The consequences were immense, including loss of originality of ideation, warped perception of reality, and incapacitated mental processing of challenges and innovations. It results in total dependency of Africa on foreign aid, in particular, the post-independence Africa (p.15). Rodney argues that the system and processes that could have aided Africa’s development in the age of globalisation were truncated by hangovers of colonial legacies, and persistent foreign interference in postcolonial Africa. Notwithstanding the misinformed vilification of Africa’s pre-colonial development as backward by colonialist Europe, Africa’s loss of manpower was at the heart of its colonial interaction with Europe. Rodney attributes the slow development that Africa grapples within the 21st century as a direct consequence of the labour loss. Rodney (1972) criticises Europe’s “civilizing mission” (p.322), categorising it as a narrative that had an overwhelming influence of racism. The reality of Europe’s “civilizing mission” is the “loss of development opportunity ...the lines

of economic activity attached to foreign trade were either destructive, as slavery was, or at best purely extractive” (p. 105). Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson also reference the imperialists’ strategic execution of models that stunted Africa’s ‘development’. Similarly, Matthew Lange, James Mahoney & Matthias vom Hau (2006) suggest, “colonialism reversed levels of development in much of the non-European world” (pp. 1412-1462). Lange, et al., concludes that “the economic models of the colonizing nations affected the reversals of fortune in these spaces” (p. 1412). At the core of the criticism against development economics or international development aid, is the consistent furthering of the Westphalian hegemony. It can be extrapolated within the confines of colonial imperialism which has always been the relationship between the two global economies as a neo-colonial enterprise.

### **Development Aid, Intention(s): A Rationale for Counter-discourse**

Foreign aid is one of the approaches to international development. The flurry of conflicts in the Global South is one of its significant markers. Thus, Africa’s conflicts have been the rallying point for the West’s renewed post-independence interventions. Thus, the various approaches to international development, including peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and development initiatives have since been West’s alibi for occupying underdeveloped or developing spaces. Christiana Sherman (n.d) critiques this apparent continuum stating, “despite this level of donor contribution and the trillions of dollars that have come before it, billions of people still live on less than two dollars a day, millions don’t have access to clean water and millions of children still aren’t able to go to school.” While it is the common narrative to position international development as tackling poverty, conflicts, and improving education and addressing the issue of inalienable human rights, the system seems to be failing. But these are all traceable to, and consequences of, colonial activities and the culture of the international aid organisations which translates as the culture of dependency. The amalgamation of independent and incompatible societies is also germane to protracted conflicts in many former colonies. Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and so on, experience crises due to the colonial fusion of unlikely nationalities within a geographically defined space. The amalgamation, primarily for ease of colonial administration, and the prospects of democracy have increased the tendency for ethnic-based policies and governance, as well as a basis for demands and agitations. There is the preponderance of the usually favoured ethnic majority that is detrimental to their minority counterparts.

Paul Zeleza (2000) opines, “There is hardly any zone of conflict in contemporary Africa that cannot trace its sordid violence to colonial history and even late nineteenth century.” One can deduce from the submissions of Acemoglu, et al., that the differences in the way colonisers governed their territories, also form the basis for the consequences on how colonies transit into independence and post-independence (p.1373). Francophone and Anglophone West African

countries exemplify this, as Alain Faujas (2012) opines, “French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging behind English-speaking African... countries belonging to the mainly French-speaking Economic Monetary Union of West Africa have been growing at an average rate of 3.4 percent per annum... while those of the mainly English-speaking East African community have registered a 5.4 percent growth rate.” Current trends are suggestive of the diverse colonial orientations. In Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson’s (2012) *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, the economy and political institutions are pivotal to development. Former funded Europe’s industrial revolution, the latter legitimises imperial policies. It is these two areas that the approaches to international development attempt to address but the historical narrative flaws the rationale of foreign interveners.

There is a growing contention between critics and those who contend that development economics or international development aid is intended for the good of the Global South. Critics have argued that development, as understood by either side, ought to be within the confines of a given experience and culture. In other words, “development” is as perceived by a worldview, but it has been the Western culture influencing preferred or selected images that it projects on the Global South. Likewise, the Global South’s culture influences its perception of the interventions from the Global North. Thus, the conception of development in the Global South differs from how it is conceived in the Global North. James Ferguson in *The Anti-Politics Machine* argues in favour of defining ‘development’ concerning post-conflict spaces. He insists that it allows for a proper (re)evaluation of what ‘development’ is, or is not, within that space (p. xiv). Andre Gunder Frank (1969) expressed similar sentiment stating, “the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have not always defined their contexts as ‘developed’ or not” (p.73). And yet, interventions, despite abounding contentions are constantly initiated with interveners’ ‘theories of change’. This is not only indicative of gaps between interveners and recipients but the power dynamics evident in the relationship. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Mali, among others, continue to demonstrate this.

Pamina Firchow (2018) argues, “Current international peacebuilding efforts are not very effective at achieving peace by local standards because attention is paid to reconstruction, governance, and development assistance with little attention paid to community ties and healing.” (p.28). She gives insight into the intersectionality of development and peacebuilding, on the one hand, and criticises the models of engaging peacebuilding and development in underdeveloped or post-conflict spaces by foreign interveners. Firchow suggests a methodology that draws indicators of peace, conflict resolution, and development from the ‘local’ population (p. 110). Perhaps, it should be emphasised that western-centric perception of development can only respond adequately to, or proffer necessary solution to, western-centric problems, but might prove grossly inadequate for non-western challenges, given the peculiarities. The realities that call for Firchow’s everyday peace indicator are the failed interventions based on rather presumptuous ‘theories of change’ for

underdeveloped countries' constantly trying to project the image of what they are not. Lederach de-emphasises the function of power and authority as emphasized by Virginia Fortna. For Fortna, effective peacebuilding and development interventions are absolutes and a function of power. In today's international development the prevalent power asymmetry has not yielded expected outcomes. Susan Woodward (2007) stresses, "the cause of the failure or less than adequate outcomes is the failure to address the 'root causes' of conflict" (pp. 143-170). Woodward's idea underscores the view that the apparent failure of international development is traceable to its deliberate disregard for the effects of colonialism in the various former colonies.

From the foregoing, the various approaches to international development and peacebuilding underscore the importance and the presence of conflict. The approaches provide post-conflict solutions, and it was only after the Cold War that peacebuilding and international development rose to prominence. This is not to say that Africa was at the centre of the Cold War, but the continent was and still is a pawn. Development and peacebuilding in the Global South are largely post-colonial phenomena, though post-World War II Europe had this form of intervention with America's Marshall Plan. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development were tools intended for post-World War II development but are now being used for international development in the Global South and guided by their culture. For instance, Stiglitz states "the head of the World Bank, charged with promoting development, has always been appointed by the President of the United States (without even consulting his Congress). American politics, not qualifications, are what matters." Hence, peacebuilding is recognised as "an activity that has come to involve a major role for development and development actors." (Berdal, 2014, 362-378).

Irene Bono and Beatrice Hibou (2017) explore the multidimensionality of development and conflict. They describe development as, "a complex social relationship, involving a vast constellation of actors, interests, logics, spaces, causalities, and temporalities" (pp.3-36). Hence, while it can be argued that the colonial era legitimises imperialism that developed Europe, the Cold War, on the other hand, legitimises the Eastern and Western power blocs' plundering of the already broken systems in Africa. Independent African countries was a response to the brewing cold war between the major ideological blocs. Jesse Heitz (2016) states, "in the interest of avoiding a full break-in Anglo-African relations and the possible infusion of communist influence into African struggles, the British fast-tracked their withdrawal from Africa, starting on the Gold Coast in 1957" (pp. 427-430). Benjamin Talton quotes then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's *Wind of change* (1960) "the growth of national consciousness in Africa is a political fact and we must accept it...if we cannot do so we may peril the precarious balance between the East and West on which the peace of the world depends." His idea undercut the West's interest in Africa, one which was done by offering development aids.

Richard Miller (2000) opines, “the ethics of humanitarian intervention cannot be readily subsumed by the ethics of just war without due attention to matters of political and moral motivation” (pp. 3-35). While Miller draws on the ethics of humanitarian intervention, Solon Simmons analyses the dynamics from the angle of a narrative. The idea of interventions as opined by Miller and Heitz are similar, but from different perspectives, hence, drawing on the notion of subjectivity. Simmons (2019) explains subjectivity as a narrative that thrives on the abuse of power. He identifies “four paradigmatic representations of the abuse of a kind of institutional power ....” (p. 5). Within the purview of power, is the question of influence on interventions, and perceptions of recipients. What influenced colonialism is a function of one of the four narrative imaginations discussed by Simmons. Basis of the methodology erects narratives some of which question the West’s altruism as projected by their various interventions. For instance, the tenet of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Ghana, Nigeria, and other developing countries is a case in point. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the IMF saw the economic downturn of countries that bought into it. Stiglitz (2006), for instance, states that “countries seeking foreign aid were specifically asked to meet a large number of conditions; ...the enormous number of conditions often distract governments from more vital tasks” (p.14).

Francis Ogbimi (1998) explains that this was because the liberal peace model represented by the haute finance “is incompatible with the structure of developing economies” (pp. 23-30). It ties to Stiglitz’s opinion on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. According to him, “many developing countries face a huge burden of debt. In some, half of some or more of their government spending has to be used to service debt, taking away money that could be used for schools, roads. . . . Development is difficult as it is; with the debt burden, it becomes virtually impossible” (p. 15). That case resonates with the realities of the liberal peace model of governance--democracy. If precolonial African societies were portrayed in literature as underdeveloped in the Westphalian attribution of development, such descriptions, validate any form of intervention that the Western narrators think is appropriate to alleviate Africa from its underdevelopment. Basil Davidson (1995) contends, “African history and development had been measured by the European concept of development” (p. 57). In other words, “development,” is what Europe projects on Africa, through its lens. Davidson describes pre-colonial economic activities in Africa as vibrant. The foregoing is indicative of the rather curious narratives that revolve around the issue of development in Africa and how interventions, however subjective. Through the lens of interveners, they are appropriate because it ties to the master narrative of Africa’s gross underdevelopment. These narratives of an underdeveloped Africa induce the various approaches to development economics or international development aid like peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and development initiatives earlier mentioned.

## **Approaches to International Development: The Neo-Colonial Twist**

There are various approaches to international development some of which will be mentioned here. However, these approaches have over the years evoked strategic responses. There is the idea that interventions in today's globalised economy are an extension of how the Global North engaged the Global South in the colonial period. For instance, Keri Phillips' (2013) assertion that international development aid began with European colonialism is apposite here. According to him, "foreign aid structures that began with European colonialism have become tied to shifting economic and political interests, as well as a growing humanitarianism movement." What previous colonies are benefitting from today like the rail, roads, and ports were initially meant to facilitate the movement of raw materials like farm produce; cocoa, palm oil, groundnut, coffee, and so on, from the interior. In other words, it was primarily to further the exploitation of the colonies. Even when research grants were given, they were skewed in favour of the social sciences, not in core sciences or medicine. The granting agencies, like Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, determined and decided the direction of the research interests, usually, data gathering on physical and human geography (local demography, cultural temperament and general sociology of the people, including their occupations, forms, and content of trade and commerce, location of natural mineral deposits, etc.). All of these are suggestive of tracking and mapping possible areas that were good for the exploitation and prospecting of natural resources.

Therefore, the argument is that provision of aid in colonial time was a means to an end, furthering the exploitation of both natural and human resources of the colonies. The goal of development economics or international development aid, as an intervention model, is peculiar against the ironies brought to the fore by Ehiedu Iweribor. He describes development aid as one "characterized by European institutions that were designed to develop African economies as primary-product exporters." The intentions of colonialism stem from the economic, political, and social factors that were at play at the time. By the foregoing, development interventions are tools of the West to maintain hegemonic influence on recipients. The irony becomes more obvious in Patrick Manning's (1998) expression of the colonial experience, in which "the government continued to receive more in tax from Africa than it spent in Africa" (p.123). Douglas Rimmer (1992) also notes that African farmers were forced to save "in British government bonds, and this assisted the British metropolitan economy to recover from the post-war dollar shortage" (pp.41-42). The above description would seem as development economics or international development aid in reverse because it undercuts the idea of what development economics or international development aid espouses today.

There is a consensus of models for engaging international development that ties to globalisation. However, the consequences of globalised inequalities have always created controversies on what the initiative gives the most effective results.



For instance, the culture of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its conditionality for a bailout, has been described as one that often puts the economy of recipient developing countries at risk. Stiglitz states, “The world’s developing countries owe roughly \$1.5 trillion to creditors including the World Bank and the IMF and despite debt forgiveness, the level of indebtedness by low-income countries continued to increase” (p.15). Scholars in support of the positive attributes of globalisation suggest that globalisation processes have reduced global inequalities, for example, Malaysia, and China, to mention a few. Stiglitz rather argues, “the history of development economics is marked by the proverbial ‘Don-Quixotic’ quest to find ‘the answer,’ disappointment in the failure of one strategy leading to the hope that the next will work” (p. 26). Some contrast the notion, arguing that globalisation invokes modernisation that sets underdeveloped countries back. For instance, Chuck Thiessen & Sean Byrne (2018) reference Afghanistan’s economic aid, stating, “international intervention in Afghanistan has served a powerful elite in Kabul who have economically benefitted from the injection of foreign resources” (p.4).

Globalisation can be described as an extension of the late 19th-century industrial revolution, hence (Richard Baldwin, n.d) opines, “globalization leaped forward in the late 19th century when steam power slashed the cost of moving goods internationally.” Baldwin states, “old globalization was especially beneficial to today’s rich nations. . . .Britain was the first industrializer maintaining a significant lead until 1900.” So, while the paradigm has shifted, and the taxonomy has changed, the informing objectives, functions, and processes associated with the industrial revolution have not. Hence critics of globalisation faulted its continuing salience and the consequences associated with it.<sup>7</sup> Bonaventura de Sousa Santo (2019) says this of globalisation, “far from being consensual, is a vast and intense area of conflict for various social groups, state, hegemonic interests on the one hand, and social groups, states and subordinate interests on the other hand and, even within the hegemonic camp, there are greater or lesser divisions of this” (p.118).

Therefore, international development and its models are a variety, or aspects, of globalisation. The critical school of theorists contends that “development aid as part of neoliberal development agenda, opens up poor countries in developing world to economic exploitation by industrialized nation.”<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the pro-development theorists argue that globalisation advances colonial traditions, and it is on this assumption that neo-colonialism finds its root (p.78). Roger MacGinty, Andrew Williams, and Peter Uvin contend the propensity of development aid to induce violent conflict in developing countries. Mary

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<sup>7</sup> Manuela Boatca and Ishaku Lere have argued against the seeming positive attributes of globalization.

<sup>8</sup> Thiessen & Byrne, 6. The authors cites the work of Jeffery Sachs. Sachs’ progressive idea against globalization is critical of the intentions of the haute finance, stating that they open vulnerable nations to economic exploitation in through development intervention.

Anderson explains the practice that can create a deliberate balance between the evils and goods of development intervention. According to her, ‘to do no harm’ is to constantly seek the balance between aid and conflict. She opines that while interveners seek to be neutral and impartial, the impact of an intervention is not neutral about whether it escalates or de-escalates conflict. The images or notion that the idea of development suggests is indicative of the ‘Othering’ between the Global South and the Global North. The ‘Othering’ as exemplified by the term has made one view or the other in its respective image, (Odeh, 2010). Thus, neo-colonialism through Othering defines and determines the ways that concepts like “development” and “peacebuilding” have been fabricated and deployed. It creates a system of dependency and promotes false hope of utilitarianism. So while it may seem that “development” is used in a semiotic or conversational sense, the ascription of the term is, on the one hand, consequential to the constant positioning of developing economies and, on the other hand, engenders the age-long subjugation of the Global South to the whims of the Global North.

As used in the field of International Relations, development legitimises post-colonial phase of the transactional relationship that exists between the two worlds. One that benefits immensely from the status quo at the detriment of the ‘Other’. This perpetuates the persistent grip that former colonial ‘masters’ have on developing economies and the absolute dependence of the latter on the former for interventions through financial aid. Ferguson (1994) explores the solution to this in detail. Independence is clothed in neo-colonialism characterised by heavy reliance on aid and other forms of interventions; this undermines and compromises the rather quasi sovereignty. William Brown (2013) controverts this position, arguing that “sovereignty as a right to rule constitutes the very basis of the aid relationship, and endows African states with the agency with which to contest the terms of aid deals” (p. 282). He presents a differing reading of the politics of aid, unlike Christopher Kilby (1999) whose justification of aid is based on its humanitarian merits by striving to do good and consciously do less harm (pp. 79-92). Clemens Six explains that “The idea of development is a product of a long-term relationship between Europe and non-European parts of the world that has for centuries been determined by colonial power relations.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Western Hegemony, Peacebuilding, and International Development Aid**

William Zartman (1976) stresses the ever-present political and economic influence that Europe exerts on the African continent. From the military proliferation of Europe to a high level of aid and investments, trade and constant flow of human capital from the developed to the underdeveloped countries of Africa, are classic examples of neo-imperialism in the continent. He notes, “the attainment

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<sup>9</sup> Clemens Six links the idea of development to certain interpretation of history, actors and the power relations that exists. He posits this process as on—going and within which there was a paradigm shift. The shift establishes the binaries between two worlds; European societies and non-Western counterparts.

of political sovereignty masks the reality of continued dependence on world economic structures, and calculations of power and interest within dependency relationship explain underdevelopment.” That is, in the context of the Eurocentric use of the term “development”, Africa, regardless of its sovereignty, is yet to come of age. It is within this relationship of dependency that building peace is explained. The notion of development and underdevelopment is a functional construct that does not necessarily speak to the realities at play in underdeveloped spaces. Rather, a system that legitimises continued the relationship between assumed politically sovereign nation and its developed counterpart. To further explain this, Zartman asserts that “dependence analysts locate the source of the new nations’ developmental problems not in these nations’ incapacities but the constraints of international politics and economics.” Accepting foreign aids can tantamount to ceding sovereignty. The statement is illustrative of the construct and overarching designs that perpetually constrain postcolonial spaces, manifesting in subtle indoctrination of African elites to think ‘Western.’ By so doing, they are cut off from the realities of their own spaces and, therefore, are made to depend on the West for as long as their psyche remains warped and clouded.

## **Conclusion**

The realities of the post-Cold War have seen the intersectionality of peacebuilding and development, thus, becoming tools that have continued to draw Africa’s attention to the West. The donor/recipient dynamic is relevant and favourable to the West’s maintaining its hegemony, either through its system of government, (democracy) or economic emancipation that ironically poses a challenge to developing spaces (free market). In the same vein, the complexities suggest that the question of the relevance of development economics or international development aid to recipient-nations cannot be resolved in isolation. It has been established that it was part of Europe’s policy to create colonial empires to aid expansions, create avenues for trade, and reap the dividends at little or no cost to the imperialist. The nuance of that master-servant narrative still holds because developing countries are yet to transcend that space. It is revealed in this study that economic development or international development aid is consciously skewed in favour of imperialism, to the detriment of the unsuspecting, and often emasculated, recipient-colonies. The study also reveals that international development aid is, among other things, a schemed agenda that is meant to serve, in a rather subtle way, as an imperialist tool to perpetuate and sustain the unbridled exploitation of the colonies. Other findings include, specifically, the fact that it is unarguably beneficial, primarily, to the lending nations. This is also considered legitimate in the former colonies where colonial structures were in place.

To establish the linkages between peacebuilding and development economics or international development aid, the paper recommends that interventions must be tackled in a manner of a multi-layered praxis to draw nuanced suppositions. Interventions like peacekeeping, peacebuilding, economic empowerment,

to mention a few, are not new strategies to the Global North. However, the manifestation of interventions in post-colonial dispensation should be made to serve the same purpose that the Global North has over the years claimed it was meant to serve. Having taken on its own life, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, and its consequences cannot be overemphasised in the realities of generations that were handed the history of the colonial experience. Conceding that economic development or international development aid are complex processes, the research has brought to the fore its colonial root as the classic form of intervention and development economics or international development aid as the continuation of the classic narrative of the Global North hegemony.

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# FOREIGN POLICY DYNAMICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: AN ASSESSMENT OF UNITED STATES-NIGERIA BI-NATIONAL COMMISSION

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## Abstract

This article explores the potentials of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission for influencing positive change in a variety of diplomatic settings, including governance, anti-corruption, economics, security and technology in the diplomatic relations of the United States and Nigeria. This study assesses the use of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission as an instrument of foreign policy dynamics. The study adopts a survey research design and qualitative method. It relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. For primary data collection, the instruments of In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were employed. The study anchored the Neo-Marxism theory of State to explain the relationships between the developed and developing countries that represent unequal partners in international relations. The findings showed that the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission, although symbolised inequalities in relationships, it however enhanced cooperation, and promoted the national interests of the two countries since its establishment in 2010. The study, therefore, recommends, among others, strategic use of the Bi-National Commission for the political, technological, industrial, and economic growth of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Bi-National, commission, foreign policy, United States, Nigeria

## Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War (1945-1990), the nonaligned foreign policy orientation of developing countries has changed somewhat. It has become possible for the countries in the Southern hemisphere to relate openly and freely with countries in the Northern hemisphere. The freedom of choice of foreign policy in the post-Cold War era has significantly made contemporary international relations more complex and dynamic (Fajimbola, 2019). The complexity of international relations, seemingly, reflected in the actions and reactions of the major powers that are competing among themselves for global influence, while the emerging

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global powers are constantly challenging the political and economic stimuli of the major powers beyond borders. The multifaceted problems associated with developing countries in the system have further compounded the complexity and dynamics of international relations as countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are confronted by abject poverty, bad governance, corruption, and insecurity. The United States government signed a Bi-National Commission agreement with the Nigerian government on 6th of April, 2010 in Washington, D.C. (U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria, 2019) representing a dynamic instrumentality of foreign policy to address major problems militating against national development in Nigeria and for promoting cooperation in all domains. However, since the establishment of the Commission, literature has not explored adequately the use of the Commission as a dynamic instrument of U.S.- Nigeria relations in contemporary international politics. Even though many observers perceived that the Bi-National Commission appeared to be a paradigm shift in the U.S.-Nigeria relations, scholars of international relations and diplomacy are yet to pay considerable attention to the efficacy of the Commission in their studies. The objective of this article is to provide a backdrop for the Bi-National Commission as characteristics of the foreign policy of a Developed Country (United States of America) and a Developing Country (Nigeria). The paper is divided into the following sections: introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, findings and analysis, conclusion, and recommendations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Ashiru (2012) affirmed that Nigeria's foreign policy required dynamism. In Nigeria, democracy and development have been challenged by weak structure, weak institution, and weak leadership that required integration of domestic policy with foreign policy to ensure a transformation that would move the country forward (Agagu, 2011). The attempt to address the domestic challenges of Nigeria through the instrumentality of foreign policy partly informed the establishment of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of U.S.-Nigeria relations in 2010. However, a critical assessment of the Bi-National Commission is still scanty in foreign policy literature, thereby, underrating the significance of the instrument. This gap potentially undermines the value and influence of the Bi-National Commission as a foreign policy instrument of the United States and Nigeria. This paper attempts to fill the gap in the literature and as an important issue in relations between the two countries.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the foreign policy dynamics of the United States and Nigeria and the objectives of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission?
- ii. How have the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission enhanced bilateral relations and cooperation on international affairs between the U.S. and Nigeria?

- iii. What are the elements of inequalities in the policy and activities of the Bi-National Commission?

## **Objectives of the Study**

- i. Examine foreign policy dynamics of the United States and Nigeria and objectives of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission;
- ii. Investigate achievements of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission in the enhancement of bilateral relations and cooperation on international affairs between the U.S. and Nigeria;
- iii. Interrogate characteristics of inequalities between the United States and Nigeria in the context of the Bi-National Commission.

## **Foreign Policy Dynamics**

An Analysis of the dynamics of foreign policy has become an important issue that occupied the attention of scholars of contemporary international relations and diplomacy (Carlsnesnaes, 1993; Lebo & Moore, 2003). From the scientific point of view, dynamics is a term in physics that deals with forces and their relation primarily to the motion but sometimes also to the equilibrium. The concept of dynamics of foreign policy or “foreign policy dynamics” in international relations is a construct that defined the process of change, variation and contrast in the intensity of foreign policy of one country towards another country. Dynamics in this study is operationalised in the context of international relations that portrayed the change and variation in the strategy adopted to pursue foreign policy objectives. Broadly defined, the term “foreign policy” constitutes the assemblage of propagated ideas and actions taken by a country which have bearing on its territorial boundaries (Akinyemi, 2014). Foreign policy is habitually self-interest strategies preferred by the government of a country to protect the national interest and accomplish goals within the international relations setting (Omole & Omotosho, 2010). In this regard, foreign policy is described as a process of a state decision towards the external world and the maintenance of national interest. Foreign policy suggests the interests that a state intends to realise at the international level and it is the country’s goal-values being sought on the world stage. It further connotes the nation’s general behaviour towards other states and non-state actors (Ajayi, 2004).

Thus, Sipho and Silva (2017) affirm the role of Foreign policy in promoting development. They cite Brazilian and Turkish Cases to establish that the dynamics of foreign policy is a matter of great importance for understanding national trajectory, particularly in a developing country. The scholars maintain that there is a positive correlation between the dynamics of foreign policy in developed countries and developing countries, in line with their common national interests. These dynamics affect several areas, including trade promotion, investment policy, economic, financial, and commercial negotiations; resources exploration

rights; and international cooperation. In their submission, current international dynamics have been greatly influenced by the emergence of middle powers, or emerging powers, whose main goal both domestically and internationally has been to promote their development and to increase their projection (Sipho & Silva, 2017).

### **Features and Substance of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission**

Ate (1998) emphasised that decolonisation and dependence significantly influenced the development of U.S.-Nigeria relations. Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy since independence anchored the dependency paradigm (Kolawole, 2004). In another perspective, social, cultural, political, security and economic issues formed the features of Nigeria's foreign policy towards the United States. Onuoha and Ugwueze (2014) focused on United States Security Strategy and the Management of Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria and observed that security and need to arrest the spate of insurgency in Nigeria contributed to the formation of the Bi-National Commission. Besides, the economic interest of the United States in Nigeria provided further justification for the establishment of the Commission to enhance peaceful cooperation between the two countries.

The scholars opined that Nigeria enjoyed cordial relationships with the United States over the years, based on economic interest, notably, oil politics. Nigeria's economic diplomacy has been closely linked with its national interest (Asobie, 2002). So, Onuoha and Ugwueze (2014) further believed that massive oil deposits in Nigeria, which America depends on for its economic development, has made Nigeria become an important strategic partner to America. In other words, any disruption to peace and security in Nigeria would be perceived as a disruption of American economic interest. This is why the issue of terrorism in Nigeria accelerated the establishment of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission. Arguably, the strategic policy to combat terrorist activities in Nigeria and protect U.S. economic interests can be attributed to the motive for the joint agreement of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission in 2010 (Onuoha & Ugwueze, 2014). The importance of democratic governance in Nigeria as observed by Ogwu and Olukoshi (2002) constituted another major impetus for the establishment of the Bi-National Commission.

The Bi-National Commission is believed to have the political influence and potential to strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria. Ogwu and Olukoshi (2002) contended that Nigeria's foreign policy analyzed solely on economic and security factors without paying adequate attention to the political aspect would be grossly inadequate. The issues of democratic principles, human rights, anti-corruption, elections process, transparency, and the rules of law are equally critical in the Bi-National Commission affairs. Therefore, political consideration and historical connection inspired the establishment of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission. Nnoma-Addison (2010) emphasised this view in his

work on The United States and Nigeria: Celebrating Fifty Years of Friendship and Progress. The work highlights important historical and political events that characterised U.S.-Nigeria relations that later paved the way for the emergence of the Bi-National Commission.

### **Neo-Marxism Theory of State**

The theoretical framework of analysis is anchored on Neo-Marxism. Neo-Marxism is a dynamic approach to Marxist theory that emerged in the 20th-century through critical thinking of a group of scholars that later formed the Frankfurt School. Neo-Marxists attempt to extend and amend the idea of Marxism earlier developed by Karl Marx. It looks at class struggle beyond the internal configuration of a country to the imbalances caused by economic inequality in the international setting. The theory draws from the existentialism of Jean-Paul, critical thinking, and psychoanalysis (Blackledge, & Anderson, 2004). Other prominent theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse and Erik Olin Wright contributed to the proposition, readdressing the deficiencies of orthodox Marxism that focused majorly on dialectical materialism.

The relevance of the theory to foreign policy dynamics of developed countries and developing countries, as well as to the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission is justifiable. It is justified in its succinct explanation of social inequalities caused by differences in status and power between the developed countries and the developing countries within the international system. Neo-Marxism theory of the state itemised basic assumptions that explain imbalances in the structure of the international system (Solo, 1978).

### **Basic Assumptions of Neo-Marxism Theory of State**

- i. International relations are focused on economic contrasts among countries.
- ii. Historical circumstances are the cause of the capitalist division of labour at the global level.
- iii. There is interdependence-dependence of the periphery on the core.

These basic tenets of neo-Marxism present an interrelationship in the world economy, divided into core, semi-periphery, and periphery. It is assumed that the United States will, expectedly, play the role of the “*core*” while Nigeria will be subjected to the notion of the “periphery” in the Bi-National arrangement. The United States has occupied the strategic core in the arrangement of the Bi-National Commission because it is capable of importing raw materials, including crude oil, from Nigeria and exports manufactured goods such as military equipment, technological facilities, cars, and other medical and agricultural equipment to Nigeria. The United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission thereby serves as the instrument of consolidation of American power and influence, being the higher partner in the relationship.

## **Methodology**

Survey design method is adopted for the study. A survey is a kind of research design used for the collection of information from different subjects within a given population, having the same characteristics of interest. A survey is designed to collect a wide range of data from a given population to find out attitudes, opinions, perceptions, behaviour, awareness, and practice (<https://www.sideshare.net>). The study partly relied on the primary source of data, gathered by the researcher between 2017 and 2019 through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). The participants of the IDIs were interviewed face-to-face and through telephone interviews. The study also used the instrument of Key Informants Interviews (KIIs). The population comprised of Foreign Service experts working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja. It also includes diplomats, researchers, and scholars in fields of Political Science and International Relations in Nigerian. A sample size of 20 participants considered as representatives of the entire population, purposively selected, using snowball techniques. They were sampled to analyse their opinions, perceptions, and reactions to the dynamics of the foreign policy of the United States and Nigeria, in relation to the Bi-National Commission. The participants were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study, expertise in the subject matter, contributions to knowledge in the discipline. It also made use of the online documents, accessed from the websites of the United States Embassy in Nigeria, the U.S. State Department, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It is qualitative research and the method of data analysis is descriptive and comparative.

## **Assessment of United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission**

This section presents data generated through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) sessions and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) sessions using the three research questions raised.

**Research Question One:** What is the nature of foreign policy dynamics of the United States of America (developed country) and Nigeria (developing country) that informed the establishment and objectives of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission?

In providing answers to this question, the study relied on content analysis of data collected from the websites of the United States Embassy in Nigeria, State Department, and USAID. It also analysed important publications on Nigeria's foreign policy. The findings show that the dynamics of American foreign policy are important in maintaining leadership globally. The result shows that the United States has over the years evolved a foreign policy that made it possible to play a leading role in global affairs and dominate international politics, as the most powerful country in the system. The United States exerts soft power in developing countries, by assisting the poorest countries economically and in humanitarian assistance, strengthening relationships through diplomatic missions and dialogue

mechanism. The dynamics of American foreign policy is further demonstrated in the document of 'American Joint Strategic Goal Framework' aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- i. Protection of America's security at home and abroad.
- ii. Renewal of America's Competitive Advantage for sustainable economic growth and job creation.
- iii Promotion of American leadership through balanced engagement.
- iv Ensuring effectiveness and accountability to the American taxpayer.

In the document, it is revealed that America has high regard for the promotion of the welfares of America's citizens at home and abroad. The United States foreign policy functions in a way that counters instability, transnational crime, and violence that threatened U.S. interests. This is done by strengthening citizen-response governance, security, democracy, human rights, and rule of law in developing countries. Also, the national interest of the United States is promoted by increasing capacity and strengthening resilience, particularly, with its strategic partners to deter aggression, coercion, and malign influence by state and non-state actors. The U.S foreign policy is also exhibited in the protection of the economic and political interest of the U.S. citizens abroad (USAID; US-Nigeria Binational Commission-US Department of State Archive, 2018). The American foreign policy is pursued in a way that propelled American leadership, with balanced engagement. By influencing governments through a transition from assistance recipients to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners, the United States planned to make actors understand its values and foreign policy goals aimed at more equitable burden-sharing. This is possible by projecting American interests through a strategic partnership with the private sector, civil society organisations and in using USAID to mobilise support and resources to shape foreign opinion.

On the other side, Nigeria's foreign policy integrated economic diplomacy and "citizen diplomacy" as a single policy, to further enhance external relations under the administration of President Jonathan. Professor Bola Akinterinwa's exposition on Nigeria's foreign policy under Jonathan's government stressed a foreign policy that has transited from traditional discontinuity to a more specific, measurable, and achievable goal in the transformational agenda of the government. Nigeria's foreign policy focused considerably on reciprocity as the core value of diplomacy (Akinterinwa, 2014). The country's foreign policy is aimed at professionalisation of the foreign service; partnerships with specialised institutions and government agencies; use of mass media to promote national image at the global level; introduction of the principle of reciprocal treatments; transformation agenda; economic and citizen diplomacy: building external relationships; the quest for Direct Foreign Investment (DFI); promotion of trade and commercial relations; empowerment of the foreign missions; collaboration with the Organized Private Sector (OPS); and engaging the Nigerian diaspora community. Therefore, Nigeria's foreign policy under President Jonathan is believed to have paved a way

for the infusion of American national interest and Nigeria's national interest in the framework of the United States Nigeria Bi-National Commission. The specific objectives of the Bi-National Commission are:

- i. Promotion and coordination of the diplomatic, economic, military, commercial, technical, social, and cultural cooperation between the two countries;
- ii. Addressing areas of mutual interests and/or concern and develop strategies for tackling these issues with assistance and coordination from both Governments;
- iii. Assisting in the implementation and follow-up of Agreements and all other legal instruments already concluded or to be concluded between the Governments;
- iv. Creating favourable conditions to carry out cooperation programmes and projects as may be decided by mutual consent, and help to resolve any difficulties that may arise in carrying out any such programs and/or projects; and
- v. Evaluating the development of cooperation between the two countries, as well as initiatives from each Government aiming to expand cooperation to new areas (<https://ng.useembassy.gov>; US-Nigeria Binational Commission-US Department of State Archive, 2012).

The Commission established four working groups to implement specific objectives, listed as:

- i. The Governments intend for the Good Governance, Transparency, and Integrity Working Group to support robust progress on electoral and election preparations to achieve free, fair, and peaceful election in Nigeria; and to build Nigeria's institutional capacity to fight corruption through improved prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of corrupt elements.
- ii. The Governments intend for the Energy and Investment Working Group to improve transparency, administration, and performance of the power generation and hydrocarbon sectors.
- iii. The Governments intend for the Food Security and Agriculture Working Group to increase reliable access to food in Nigeria and the region through improvements in agriculture and trade policy.
- iv. The Governments intend for the Niger Delta and Regional Security Corporation Working Group to support plans to provide tangible development and economic opportunity to the people of the Niger Delta as well as augment partnerships on regional security (<https://ng.useembassy.gov>; US-Nigeria Binational Commission-US Department of State Archive, 2012).

**Research Question Two:** How does the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission enhance bilateral relations and cooperation on international affairs between the U.S. and Nigeria?

In providing answers to this question, primary data were collected from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja, through the instrument of Key Informants Interviews (KIIS). The Key Informants declined public disclosure of their identities. So, for ethical consideration, they are represented in the study as Key Informants. The following indicators were used as a measurement of the assessment:

- i. Rate of meetings facilitated by the Bi-National Commission between 2010 and 2018;
- ii. numbers and nature of economic and social projects facilitated by the Bi-National Commission from 2010 to 2018;
- iii. Frequency of interactions of state and non-state actors, visit of delegations for promotion of bilateral relations facilitated by the Bi-National Commission from 2010 to 2018;
- iv. Rate of collaborative diplomatic activities facilitated by the Bi-National Commission from 2010 to 2018;
- v. Amount of financial assistance drawn through the Bi-National Commission from 2010 to 2018.

According to one of the key informants, the Bi-National Commission agreement was signed under President Jonathan's administration in 2010 by the representatives of both the Nigerian and United States governments. In Nigeria, it was meant to fit primarily into Nigeria's foreign stance of economic diplomacy and citizen diplomacy. The Bi-National Commission, signed on 6th April 2010 comprised of Working Groups, namely; Good Governance, Transparency and Integrity (GTI); Energy and Investment; Agriculture and Food Security; Niger Delta, and Regional Security Cooperation has been active since inception. Another Key Informant disclosed that in the meeting of the Bi-National Commission held in Washington D.C. in March 2016, the compression of the Working Groups was made from four (4) to three (3), namely: Security Cooperation Working Group; Governance and Democracy Working Group; and Economic Growth, Development and Humanitarian Partnership Working Group. An Informant said that through the Good Governance, Transparency and Integrity Working Group, the United States Government provided wide-ranging support to key stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigeria Police Force, and Civil Societies in preparations for the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. Through the facilitation of the Commission, Nigeria's relations with the United States improved in some areas, especially in exchange for diplomatic visits and bilateral talks at various levels between the Nigerian leadership and American leaders.

Nigeria secured assistance from the United States in the areas of intelligence gathering, defence cooperation, capacity building and training of the Niger Delta ex-militants. The United States also assisted the EFCC, INEC, and the Nigerian Police to make the institutions more effective and efficient. The workings of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission produced more positive results in many other areas of national development, including political and economic



interactions for the benefits of Nigeria. Another Key Informant noted that the Bi-National Commission has made inputs in the development of Nigeria, and the promotion of cordial relations between Nigeria and the United States. Since the signing of the Bi-National agreement, both countries have not reneged in their cooperation. The two countries consider each other as strategic partners in regional and global affairs. It is important to note that Nigeria and the United States of America have, over the years, shared common values in terms of principles of democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

In the contribution of another Key Informant, the United States anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria are complementing efforts and focusing on capacity building and assistance to civil society, support watchdogs, journalists, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary. These efforts were meant to help Nigeria prevent new corruption; expose corruption; investigate corruption, and prosecute acts of corruption. The United States government increased its support for Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and also encouraged the judiciary to investigate and prosecute complex corruption cases. In the words of a Key Informant, the United States engaged religious communities, to join in the fight against corruption in the belief that corruption should be fought not just through technical assistance, but through widespread social change.

**Research Question Three:** How has the arrangement of the Bi-National Commission demonstrated the elements of inequalities between developed countries and developing countries?

In providing the answer to this question, primary data were collected to examine the views and opinions of academia through in-depth oral interviews. A political scientist, Dr. Pious Adebisi opined that the framework of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission assumed that America is superior to Nigeria in the Bi-National relationship. The scholar described the Bi-National arrangement as "a commitment between husband and wife in the context of the African family where the husband is given the upper hand". America assumed the position of higher power because it presented itself as a country that has a lot to offer Nigeria, particularly as a mentor in good governance and anti-corruption. The asymmetric relationship obtained in the Bi-National Commission enabled the higher partner to have close access to Nigeria and get more information about the domestic affairs of Nigeria. Thus, the U.S. is exerting the capability of shaping and influencing domestic policy in certain areas of strategic interest in Nigeria.

The Director of American Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Professor Jonah Onuoha, affirmed that the relationship between the United States and Nigeria since the return of democracy has been epileptic and it has not been very smooth. So, the Bi-National Commission was designed to repair the deformed relationship. The scholar noted that hardly can one identify continuous trajectory in Nigeria-United States relations since the independence of Nigeria in 1960.

This is because the relationship is majorly dependent on the mood and nature of the incumbent leaders of both countries. However, Onuoha noted that in terms of trade, in terms of foreign assistance, in terms of tackling insurgencies, the Bi-National Commission has played a significant role in fostering the recent cordial relationship between Nigeria and the United States. This means that the Commission enhanced the promotion of Nigeria-United States relations in the democratic setting. He submitted that the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission was designed purposely to encourage Nigeria to imbibe and re-invigorate the culture of democracy. And indirectly, this would ensure that the United States has the privilege of monitoring Nigeria's democratic governance closely. It further ensures that Nigeria is made to implement important decisions that promote good governance, anti-corruption, fight against insurgency, and other areas that the United States feels that Nigeria would need to be monitored. In his view, an international relations scholar, Dr. Tunde Oseni observed that most of the issues highlighted in the framework of the Bi-National Commission were consistent with American strategic interests Nigeria, such as the issues of democratisation, anti-corruption, electoral process, Niger Delta development, and regional cooperation. Kolawole (2004) admitted that regional powers, in the developing world, such as Nigeria, can only effectively influence policies within their environment than they can affect world politics. And the problem is compounded by the 'unipolar' nature of the international system that makes the United States more or less, the sole deciding factor of the direction of international politics. This position has been corroborated convincingly by the participants the framework and workings of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission.

## **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The assessment of the United States-Nigeria Bi-National Commission based on the findings of this study revealed that there is a reflection of equalities in the relationship between the United States and Nigeria. However, international relations experts opined that developed countries and developing countries tend to maintain an asymmetric relationship because of disparities in the nature and structure of the global system. Disparities in domestic settings in developed countries and developing countries often show great divergence and contradictions (Agagu, 2015). However, this paper discovered that the Bi-National Commission has significantly contributed to the promotion of cooperation in international affairs between the United States and Nigeria. Giving the findings and conclusions reached, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. The United States and Nigerian officials should strengthen the Bi-National Commission as a dynamic instrument of foreign policy by keeping it more active to enhance and sustain cooperation in all domains and improve on the dialogue mechanism.
- ii. The Bi-National Commission should be used to facilitate direct investment, job creation, cultural and educational exchange, trade and investment promotion,

and be a transformational tool for the technological, industrial and economic growth of Nigeria through assistance from the United States, as the higher partner.

- ii. Finally, there is the need for increasing local, national and international awareness of the activities of the Commission through academic research, conferences on issue-areas of the Commission.

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# **NIGERIAN MISSION AND HAJJ OPERATIONS AS ISSUES IN NIGERIA – SAUDI ARABIA RELATIONS: A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS**

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## **Abstract**

Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina and other holy places in Saudi Arabia is pivotal to Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations. This study aims at examining issues that emanate in Hajj operations, the impact on Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations, and the role of the Nigerian Mission in managing them. Through structured interviews with diplomats and Hajj administrators and library and archival searches, the paper interrogates the issues emanating particularly from Nigeria's Hajj operations and how they affect the relations between the two States. The study adopts the Organisational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Models as a framework of analysis. The study shows an aspect of cooperation in international relations, especially of the Global South based on cultural template around a particular religious ritual, the Hajj. Saudi Arabia's behaviour demonstrates the use of institutional structural power as against wielding relational power in its relations with Nigeria (Keukeleire and Shunz, 2015). Nigeria's improved Hajj operations through the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), proved Hudson (2014) right about how foreign policymakers can use organisations without being undermined. The relevance of this study lies in the fact that Hajj management is a global phenomenon; more studies in this area are needed to further enhance our understanding of how states with this type of relations behave. In particular, about Hajj, it hopefully will reinforce Oluwatoki's (2018) call for a global network for global management of Hajj.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Hajj operations, Mission, Foreign policy, Issues, Global phenomenon.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are leaders in their given regions. Nigeria got its independence on 1st October 1960 after a century of British colonial rule. British involvement with Saudi Arabia was through patronage, encouragement, and recognition of a dynasty that made a modern state out of Bedouin Arabia that started in 1932 (Lacey, 1981; Oluwatoki, 2011). The two countries are members

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of several international organisations: the United Nations Organisation (UNO) – Saudi Arabia was among its first fifty signatories in 1945, Nigeria joined as its 99th member in 1960; the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), where Saudi Arabia was among the founding five members on 14th September 1960, Nigeria joined in 1971 as its 11th member. The two states are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Nigeria's relations with Saudi Arabia like the other Arab states are largely religious tilted, especially in the case of Saudi Arabia, most importantly on Hajj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina and other holy places in the country. Within six months of its independence, Nigeria had eleven diplomatic missions abroad (Adeniji, 1990); Sudan and Saudi Arabia were among the first states with which Nigeria established diplomatic relations in 1961. Its missions in Jeddah and Khartoum are among the oldest of its missions abroad. These missions, primarily opened for Hajj matters before independence, served as nuclei of the subsequent Nigerian Embassies in Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

Hajj stood (at independence) and still stands as the prime mover of Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations (Oluwatoki, 2016a). The Nigerian Diplomatic Missions in Saudi Arabia (Embassy in Riyadh and Consulate-General in Jeddah) make efforts to “steer the bilateral relations between Saudi Arabia and Nigeria away from the monolithic cul-de-sac of Hajj matters” (Lawal, Chancery, Nigerian Consulate-General, Jeddah, Interview by email, 10-06-2005). This diplomatic guarded understatement betrays a lack of keenness at expanding relations on the part of the two states. Nigeria – Saudi Arabia's trade relations are very negligible; the little existing is in Saudi Arabia's favour. The bulk of the trade (informal) between the two states takes place around and through the annual Hajj. Nigeria-Arab Association (NAASS), registered in 1983 and the Nigeria-Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NACCI) inaugurated in 2001 have worked tremendously to boost the trade and economic aspects of Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations (Oluwatoki, 2011). Many results have not come out of these efforts. Saudi nationals have very little presence in Nigeria's economy. Nigeria and Saudi Arabia have not signed any trade agreements with each other. Their relations are still fixated on Hajj and the issues in their relations linger around Hajj and its operations. It is against this backdrop that this paper sets out to examine the Nigerian Mission and Hajj operations in Nigeria to interrogate issues in these relations; to determine why there has not been an expansion to other beneficial areas in their long relations and what can be done about this.

## **Hajj Operations and Issues in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia Relations: An Overview**

The Nigerian Embassy in Saudi Arabia is located in Riyadh, the capital. Mecca, which hosts the Ministry of Hajj, is the hub of Hajj operations. Jeddah is the entrepot of the Hajj traffic. The Nigerian Hajj Mission (in Jeddah) was conceived as a subordinate office under the (Nigerian) Embassy to oversee all the operational ramifications of the annual pilgrimage, to Mecca and Medina. This affects every Nigerian pilgrim (Lawal, 2005) in collaboration with the Nigerian Consulate-General in Jeddah. Hierarchically, the Hajj Mission is tied to Riyadh and not to (the Consulate General in) Jeddah, which for consular reasons should ordinarily oversee the activities of the Hajj Mission. But the Nigerian Diplomatic Mission does not operate the Hajj; officials on the Nigerian side do enjoy the “enabling environment” provided by the Mission in Riyadh. Just as Hajj is the pivot of Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations, most of the issues (in whatever form) in the relations between the two states emanate from the hajj operations. Some of these issues are symptomatic of Nigeria’s Hajj Management; Nigerian pilgrims’ conduct in Saudi Arabia and the fallout of the pilgrimage among others.

In the years up to 2006, there had been lapses in Nigeria’s Hajj management – failure to grapple well with the annual ever-increasing number of pilgrims, delay in uplifting pilgrims to and from Saudi Arabia, shortage of aircraft, lackadaisical attitude of pilgrims to flight schedules among many others. Between 1968 and 2006, a total number of 1,653,728 Nigerians have performed the Hajj (Oluwatoki, 2011) (See Chart I). Under the auspices of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), 1,074,792 pilgrims (including officials) performed the Hajj between 2007 and 2019; an average of 82,676 (actually 82,676.307) (NAHCON Records, 2020) (See Table I). Hajj 2020 was restricted to pilgrims residents in Saudi Arabia due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. NAHCON, which took off effectively in 2007 was established under the Nigerian Hajj Commission Bill passed into law in 2006; the bill repealed the Nigerian Pilgrims Act of 1989.

**Table I: Actual Number of Pilgrims of States' Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board/Agencies and Tour Operators That Performed Hajj Including Officials, 2007-2019**

YEAR	STATE PILGRIMS	TOUR OPERATORS	TOTAL
2007	82,185	10,000	92,185
2008	85,272	10,000	95,272
2009	85,397	10,000	95,397
2010	85,240	10,000	95,240
2011	88,366	7,484	95,850
2012	85,673	10,000	95,673
2013	66,456	10,000	76,456
2014	66,415	9,650	76,065
2015	65,414	9,700	75,114
2016	62,739	10,000	72,739
2017	66,349	15,677	82,026
2018	39,418	18,818	58,236
2019	45,195	19,344	64,539
GRAND TOTAL	924,119	150,673	1,074,792



Another Hajj related issue concerns destitute Nigerians in Saudi Arabia. Hajj is one of Nigeria's earliest institutions with its operations (and Nigerians' attendance) spanning more than nine hundred years (HAMON, 2004, p. 27). For centuries, the Hajj traffic overland flowed (terminating at the Red Sea), with the Sea route (Lagos-Alexandria) taking its share of the traffic (Palmer, 1919). The centuries of the migratory movements of the pilgrims had led to many thousands of them staying back in Sudan and Saudi Arabia. Two demographics are discernible in this phenomenon: Diaspora Nigerians in the Middle East who have taken permanent residence in Sudan and Saudi Arabia and destitute Nigerians, poor and helpless who would rather go back home. Saudi Arabia arguably has the highest concentration of Nigerian Diaspora in the Middle East, who Yusuf (1994, p. 228) estimated to be more than a million and resulting from the Hajj exercise. Destitute Nigerians, on the other hand, are stranded pilgrims who are often too poor to get back home on their own. In the 1920s the British colonial Government-assisted destitute pilgrims back home through the Nigerian Reparation Fund (ROP, 1929).

The Nigerian Government has discarded the colonial reparation scheme since its taking on Hajj operations in 1958. The Government might have assumed that since pilgrims now mainly take the air route to go on Hajj, they will not easily fall into destitution. These destitute Nigerians turned illegal aliens live a life of hide and seek and doing menial jobs. It must be noted that Saudi Arabia repatriated 4000 destitute Nigerians in 1975 at its own expense (New Nigerian, July 18, 1975, p. 1). Thirty years after in 2005 Saudi Arabia asked Nigeria to repatriate about 27,000 Nigerians in this category with a threat to downsize the country's Hajj slot the following year (Daily Trust online). (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200504150206.html> 4/19/5.p.1of3). These Nigerians were alleged, rightly or wrongly, to have breached Saudi Criminal Law. According to Oluwatoki (2011), Nigerian pilgrims sometimes fall victim of mistaken identity as illegal aliens from Saudi Security agents. While no trade agreements have been signed between the two states, the limited trade there is being in Saudi Arabia's favour, a substantial volume of informal trade goes on between the two states during Hajj, often duty-free. Trade becomes an issue because, given the length of their diplomatic relations and the efforts already put into fostering trade and economic relations, trade remains a low point in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations.

## **Review of Literature and Framework of Analysis**

The promotion and protection of national interest are one of the cardinal principles of Nigeria's foreign policy (CFRN {Promulgation} Decree, 1999). Taking care of the welfare of the citizenry wherever they maybe are one of the core values that constitute a state's foreign policy (Aluko, 1981). According to Quandt (1981), without legitimacy by Islam, the Saudi regime would enjoy less prestige at home and abroad. Islam has been more important in the implementation of Saudi Arabia's policies (Piscatori, 1983, Niblock, 2006). Nigeria's foreign policy decision-makers consider Islam as a factor in the state's attitude to events in the

external environment, especially as it concerns the Middle East (Akinyemi, 1974; Gambari, 1980; Chazzan and Le Vine, 1994). Hajj Pilgrimage, according to Oluwatoki (2016a), is the most visible issue in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations. Saudi Arabia relates to the pilgrims as hosts to guests. The Saudi monarch is the custodian of the two holiest shrines of Islam in Mecca and Medina (K.S.A.M.P., 2008; Bianchi, 2004). Oluwatoki (2018b, p.110) has explained that the Kingdom's goal in facilitating the pilgrimage through elaborate preparation and huge expenses is “to make the pilgrimage easy for the pilgrims (Duyuf al-Rahman) – Guests of the Merciful Allah”. Hajj serves different purposes in the foreign policies of states; it is used to defuse the volatility of domestic politics (Nigeria), it is used to present a friendly face to the Middle East and the Muslim world while Muslims are suppressed internally (erstwhile the Soviet Union) and in Saudi Arabia, to consolidate the state's Islamic legitimacy internally and enhance its leadership of the world of Islam (Oluwatoki, 2011).

The component domestic events that makeup Hajj operations (arrivals and departures of pilgrims, the rites of Hajj, etc.) in Saudi Arabia and (airlifting of pilgrims, processing travel documents, exchange of foreign currencies, etc.) in Nigeria as with other states bring forth certain issues. They include issues such as pilgrims' welfare, health standard, and security (of pilgrims), etc. These domestic events and issues are ‘internationalised’, as Oluwatoki (2011) put it since Hajj and its operations involve hundreds of states in the internal system and millions of people from around the world. Alli (2010, p. 229) listed security and socio-economic welfare of the people, among others, as domestic challenges that shape the national interests that Nigeria's foreign policy is meant to pursue. This state obligation exists both within and outside the state. Saudi Arabia's national interest concerning its image as host tied to its security and national survival. It is as well entwined with Nigeria's realisation of its foreign policy goal of the security and welfare of its nationals while on Hajj. As Oluwatoki (2016b) contend, how Nigeria fits into Saudi Arabian Hajj operations arrangements is an issue of concern in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations.

It must be noted that most other issues and challenges in the relations between the two states emanate largely from or are rather related to the annual Hajj and ‘Umrah (Lesser Hajj) and their operations (Oluwatoki, 2016b). Nigeria is no doubt a leader in Africa and an important actor in the international system. To further strengthen its leadership role, Annan (2004) has called for its continued domestic efforts at good governance among others and to create and sustain an educated and informed public on Nigeria's role in contemporary international affairs. This will put Nigeria in league with Saudi Arabia whose leaders have the duties to make the state an ‘Omni-balancer’ (Nonneman, 2005), balancing between threats and resources within and between the domestic, regional, and global levels simultaneously. Understandably, there is national partisanship over Hajj management: Saudi Arabia – privileged as host. For instance, in the rivalry between Saudi and Iran, the latter see Hajj is an issue for all the Islamic world

and not just for Saudi Arabia. For Nigeria, Hajj is a social barometer domestically. But as Bianchi (2004) put it, without imaginative international cooperation, the most resourceful Hajj administration will fail. To Saudi Arabia, all Muslims are welcome to make the Hajj. In responding to this perceived attitude, Nigeria, like other states, is conscious of the impact of the conduct of its pilgrims on its relations with Saudi Arabia, just as the latter is appreciative of the states that are compliant to its grand Hajj operations (Oluwatoki, 2011, p. 93).

Given the unprecedented fatality of the 2015 Hajj accidents, Oluwatoki (2018) has called for a global network for global Hajj management. There are three major perspectives (paradigms) of studying foreign policy – the realist, the behavioural, and the Marxist political economy (Asobie, 1990). The decision making analysis spans the three paradigms. The realist paradigms and the models deriving from it (balance of power, national role, rational actor model, etc.) are fixated on power and are relevant for studies concerned with conflict and security issues. They are theories derived from events and issues in the global North and out of sync with the reality of the global South (Ayoob, 1998). Roberts and Rosenberg (2005) considered realism as meaningful while explaining international conflict aside from its other flaws. In any case, the realist perspective is not relevant to the inquiry involved in this study. Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are not in power rivalry or mutual suspicion. Their spheres of influence do not in any way overlap. They have cooperated rather than conflicted in their relations. To the Marxist political economy approach, the international society is characterised by movement and dynamism explained in terms of the contradictory nature of social existence. The economic factor is its primary focus of analysis (Asobie, 1990). Its instrumentalist and structuralism models explain differently how the state serves the interest of the propertied ruling class. The perspective does not apply to this study.

The behavioural perspective develops general theoretical models to explain human behaviour as applied to international politics (Asobie, 1990; Jackson and Sorensen, 2003). We have adopted the behavioural perspective for this study. It affords an inquiry into the behaviour of the decision-makers whose actions and reactions actually ‘symbolize’ the state (Snyder et al, 1969). As Rosenau (1971) put it, behavioural patterns refer to the way attitudes are expressed in the form of concrete actions. This approach allows the analysis of groups, organisation, or states, recognised as structures of roles occupied by individual people. The first heads of state of Nigeria and Saudi Arabia – Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa (Nigeria) and King Abd al-Azeez ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Saud (Saudi Arabia) shaped the foreign policy of their respective states in the beginning. The behaviours of the states have not changed towards each other even though leadership has changed several times in the two states.

Hajj is the basis of Nigeria’s foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia. The cultural interests of a part of the civil society whose private interests have been raised into collective objectives of the state (Oluwatoki, 2011). The behaviour of the state

can be understood at the group level; Hajj is a group thing in Nigeria. Aside from the centrality of the Head of State to shaping the state's foreign policy, the political elites, the bureaucracy, the mass public, and other non-governmental actors in the (two) states cannot be discountenanced. Monarchical Saudi Arabia has a royal family with a perception of state security linked with the survival (regime security) and Islam as a basis of its legitimacy. Nigeria is a federal republic with, in the First Republic, a coalition government of more or less opposing ideologies. Their respective bureaucracies are reflective of their respective political system. Both Nigeria and Saudi Arabia share the common factor of having a role for Islam in their foreign policies. For Saudi Arabia, hosting the two holiest shrines of Islam and needing Islam for regime legitimacy are both symbolised in Hajj and its operations as a state duty. Muslims constitute arguably the largest percentage of Nigeria's population. A large number of Muslims make the annual Hajj to Saudi Arabia. Nigeria's government is fully involved in Hajj operations. In effect, Islam generally and Hajj specifically binds Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations in a way no other issue does (Oluwatoki, 2011).

This study adopts the Bureaucratic Politics Model as the main framework of analysis with a tinge of its 'cousin', Organisational process. This means a resort to the twin of the triad of models in the decision-making process – rational actor (traditional realist paradigm), organisational process, and bureaucratic politics (Genest, 1996). Much of the processes involved in Hajj operations involve many government departments and organisations with the imprint of their performance on Hajj operations. As Hudson (2014, p. 90) pointed out, "organizations interpret orders according to their existing understanding and capabilities". The result is an implementation gap between policy decisions and organisational acts in executing executive orders. Bureaucratic politics is a complex intersection of small group dynamics, organisational process, domestic political forces, and the personal characteristics of relevant individuals (Hudson, 2014). It is a game, competition, played by political leaders (men and women) who occupy positions on the top of critical organisations (Allison, 1967 in Genest, 1996). The pulling and hauling of this intra-national political game, at the apparatuses and bureaucracies of states, represent the actual faces of the states in international politics and not the "rational decisions" of any man or woman. Issues converge on each player in these bargaining game. "The character (of emerging issues) and the pace at which the game is played converge to yield government 'decisions' and 'actions' as collages", Allison contended. These two models of foreign policy analysis are capable of capturing the intersection of dynamics that come to play to understand Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations, especially as they concern the Hajj policies of the two states.

### **Hajj Operations and Issues in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia Relations: An Analysis**

Three broad issues can be identified as emanating from Hajj operations that are relevant to the relations between the two states:

- i. Hitches in Hajj operations and Saudi Arabia's response.
- ii. Destitute Nigerians and Nigerian Diaspora in Saudi Arabia.
- ii. Hajj and trade in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations.  
Two other issues are tangential to Hajj operations, which, however, are instructive in the overall discussion of Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations. They are:
- iv. Problems and politics of Ambassadorial appointments to Saudi Arabia (and other Arab states).
- v. Rows/Impasse in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations.

The most obvious of the issues, with potential to impact on Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations, concern the hitches in Nigeria's Hajj operations that cause lapses in the latter, dovetailing appropriately into Saudi global Hajj operations. Many of the hitches as discussed in the Overview indicate the problematic of Hudson's "Implementation gap". Hajj 2006, perhaps the most well planned till that point in time, still ended in a fiasco. Hired airlines disappointed and thousands of Nigerian pilgrims were stranded and traumatised (Oluwatoki, 2011). Airline problems had always been there coupled with a host of others some of which emanated from this one lapse. Organisations are necessary to government, as Hudson (2014) reminds us, yet they produce unintended negative consequences regularly and often at the most inopportune moments. Saudi Arabia's response to this challenge is most instructive. Rather than get agitated, the host has almost always found accommodation for this perennial shortcoming; having one Ministry of Hajj, so to speak for Nigeria and another one for the rest of the World (Opeloyeru, Personal Communication cited in Oluwatoki, 2020). This lapse on Nigeria's side never caused a rift between the two states. Keukeleire and Shunz (2015) have related structural power – institutional and 'deep' structural power to the foreign policy actor's perception. For foreign policy implementation, Institutional Structural Power means not imposing choices (of decision) on others as against wielding relational power. This is essential in the analysis of foreign policy in the age of globalisation.

Saudi Hajj (Foreign) policy discards power relational to others even though it is a foremost Muslim state; custodian of the Holy places of Islam and arguably the richest Muslim state with perhaps widest reach in influence and administrative capacity for managing Hajj. Nigeria's Hajj (Foreign) policy aims at getting its nationals to and from Hajj in Saudi Arabia, catering to their (consular and boarding) well-being, and avoiding national embarrassment. The presence of other actors in realising the objectives of the two states brings in global governance, vis-à-vis Hajj, and multiple actors (all the other states, airlines, states' ministries, and boards cognate to Hajj operations, customs and immigration, World Health Organisation, etc.). Hitches in Hajj operations are handled by Saudi Arabia in the use of institutional and structural power – for the objective of displaying spirit (of self-esteem rather than showing the relational power of pressurising the other states into compliance. Hence, within the possible stretch of limits, Saudi Arabia relaxes

deadlines (actually giving lifelines, helping to evacuate ‘abandoned’ pilgrims, etc.). This is showing a generous, accommodating, and responsive host of the guests of the Merciful (Allah), bestowing a great honour (high esteem) on the Saudi Arabian state and regime. They spend greatly to constantly improve on facilities/structures. They reinforce institutions for the implementation of Hajj policies and allow individual pilgrims to feel the atmosphere of truly one global Muslim/Hajj community. And for their “sending states” to feel the respect and accommodation extended to them as co-governors in the global Hajj Management.

Destitute Nigerian pilgrims are, strictly speaking, relics of the past with contemporary nuisance value. Poor stranded pilgrims of the colonial period got a respite from the Nigerian Repatriation Fund instituted in 1922 by the British colonial government. These indigent pilgrims constitute the core of the Takruri (Saudi’s common name for West Africans). They are a substantial part of the Nigerian Diaspora in the Kingdom. However, the absconders (some call them absconders) are not destitute. They deliberately stay back after Hajj, adroitly escaping the authorities. They are the illegal aliens that constitute a sore point in the relations between the two states because they are always in breach of the law. There is no evidence that Saudi Arabia ever made good its threat, in 2005, to reduce Nigeria’s slot for the next Hajj, if the latter failed to repatriate about 27,000 Nigerian illegal aliens in Saudi Arabia. Yahaya (1999) traced the presence of African Diaspora in the Middle East. Of the four factors identified by Abdullah al-Ilori (1971) cited in Yahaya, religion, Hajj, in particular, holds the prime of place. That is what took Africans, especially Nigerians, into the Diaspora in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia in particular.

If official trade relations between the two states remain negligible, the Hajj has helped to keep the tempo of the informal trade (Oluwatoki, 2016b). The apathy of Nigeria’s government to develop formal trade is also seen in the way Nigerians have neglected the enormous trading opportunities in the desert Kingdom. This is obvious in their failure to exploit the over 3 million-strong market during the Hajj to share with other states, for example, in the sprawling market for clothes, textiles, and fabrics, and house utensils to mention just a few. There is a peculiarity to Nigeria’s diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and, indeed, other Arab states. The choice of the Head of the Nigerian Mission to Saudi Arabia (and other Arab states) has always been a Northern Nigerian Muslim. Diplomats have attributed this practice to the need for accessibility, effectiveness, and penetration (Ambassadors Assayouti and Adeyanju, MFA, Abuja, 17-03-2003, and Ambassador Falola (Rtd.), Lagos State University, Ojo, Personal Communications, 20-09-2003). Perhaps so. Meanwhile, the envoy is covered by the 1961 Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations to represent his/her state effectively through his/her training, experience, and the cooperation of the staff of the Mission within the provision of International Law. There has never been a female ambassador to Saudi Arabia and perhaps to any other Arab state.

According to Trevelyan (1974, pp. 22, 25), proficiency in the local language of the receiving state and cultural affinity will be of advantage to the diplomat. Nevertheless, to make religion the prime criterion for the choice of the ambassador is a typical Nigerian practice. Meanwhile, Nigeria has never looked for a Hindu to send as an ambassador to India, a Buddhist to send to China or a Zen Taoist to send to Japan. In any case, Nigerian ambassadors to Saudi Arabia have all come from Northern Nigeria and largely of a particular ethnic stock. There are Muslims of equal qualifications and competence from other parts of the country; no South West Muslim or someone of any other ethnic stock. There is a Hajj-related origin for these anomalous diplomatic appointments. E.J.V. Williams, Assistant Secretary for External Affairs was among the Nigerian delegation to the in 1956 to discuss and negotiate Hajj operations. In his mission's recommendation, drawn largely from his interview with the Honourable Alhaji Isa Kaita, Minister for Local Government Affairs, A Nigerian Pilgrims Office should be opened in Jeddah to be headed by a Northern Nigerian (NAK/ASIV/141, PP. 4-5). The Nigerian Mission grew largely out of a Northern enterprise and the officers that had initially worked on Hajj (abroad) were mainly from the North.

**Table 2: Nigerian Ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, 1979 – 2020**

S/N	AMBASSADOR	TENURE
1.	Ambassador Dahiru	1979-1983
2.	Ambassador Ado Sanusi	1983-1987
3.	Ambassador (Prof.) Shehu Ahmad Sa'id Galanchi	1987-1996
4.	Ambassador Ahmad Al-Ghazali	1996-1997
5.	Ambassador Magaji Mohammed	2000-2003
6.	Ambassador (Senator) Ibrahim Musa Kazaure	2003-2007
7.	Ambassador Muhammad Garba Aminci	2007-2011
8.	Ambassador Abubakar Shehu Bubu	2011-2015
9.	Ambassador Isa Dodo	2016 till date

**Source:** Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Victoria Island, Lagos, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja.

**Note:** Due to the dearth of records in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nigeria's Ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, 1961 – 1978 could not be located.

It is instructive that political power in Nigeria has largely been concentrated in the Northern Muslim hand. Perhaps this has helped to institutionalise what was an aberration *ab initio*. The closest other ethnic group has come is Alhaji Saka Fagbo (Yoruba) who was once the Consular General in Jeddah. The choice of a Northern Muslim being the ambassador to Saudi Arabia is arguably a reflection of Nigeria's domestic politics. Rows/impasse in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia's diplomatic relations have occurred largely concerning how Nigerians are treated in the Kingdom. On 20th February 2007, a Nigerian identified as Omar was convicted and executed by the sword in Saudi Arabia for bringing cocaine into the Kingdom (AFP, 18-02-2007 sourced from official news agency SPA). In 2009, twenty-three Nigerians have been convicted for possessing narcotics and psychotropic substances in Saudi Arabia and would be executed soon. These convicts were arrested between 2016 and 2017 at airports, having concealed the banned substances in their rectums. Saudi Arabia is among many states whose laws prescribe capital punishment for a range of crimes. The Federal government of Nigeria condemned the execution of its nationals (yen.com.gh, 2020).

On 15th June 2020, Amnesty International (AI) released a report excerpt on "Saudi Arabia: Execution of Nigerian men and women." It referred to a 1999 review by Human Rights Watch (HRW) that: "The government of Saudi Arabia 'violate a broad array of civil and political rights...and capital punishment remained the norm in both political and common criminal cases... with executions and amputations of the hand'" (<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/>). (Execution of Nigerians is a common phenomenon in Saudi Arabia). The grouse of the Nigerian press is always that suspect Nigerians "must be presumed innocent until a court of competent jurisdiction rules to the contrary through a free and fair trial" (Daily Champion, Editorial, June 26, 2002, p. 10). Some diplomats are unanimous in their opinions that "Nigerians should learn to obey the laws of a country when they get there." This is because "Not all countries condone the compromises that are possible in Nigeria" (Ambassador A. Sodipo, Director, MFA, Abuja, Personal Communication, 17-03-2003). Ambassador Magaji Muhammed explained that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not mistreat Nigerians. When residents get themselves into trouble, they are given the short leashes through Saudi laws, with which the Saudis do not joke (Daily Times, 06-01-2001, p. 23).

It is in this context that one can comprehend the row over Nigeria's diplomatic passport and the detention in the Kingdom in 2002 of Alhaji Sanni Baruwa, a member of the House of Representatives from Zamfara State, Nigeria. Baruwa was detained in prison for allegedly attempting to bribe security officials to effect the release of his uncle, Alhaji Ruwan Derowa, who was in detention in Saudi Arabia for alleged money laundering. Baruwa, the intercessor was also alleged to have attempted to import fake United States dollars to Saudi Arabia (Vanguard, June 18, 2002; New Nigerian, June 21, 2002). To Nigeria, the diplomatic passport carried by the legislature should not only have guaranteed him immunity from arrest and detention but earned deportation to face trial in Nigeria. The



fact that he was not permitted a consular visit from the Nigerian Mission in the Kingdom was more disturbing (Daily Champion, Editorial, June 26, 2002; The Comet, Editorial, July 11, 2002).

In response to these diplomatic rows, Nigeria threatened to downgrade its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. It refused to accept the letter of credence from the new Saudi ambassador, Ali al- Adli. In the negotiations that followed, Nigeria asked for the release of over two hundred Nigerians wrongfully arrested by Saudi Arabian authorities (Vanguard, June 18, 2002). It was an opportunity for Nigeria to send signals to the world that it would not tolerate the harassment of its citizens and their rights being trampled upon around the world. Nigeria gave a two-week ultimatum to Saudi Arabia to release the detained legislator and offer a public apology to Nigeria. Baruwa spent more than four months in Saudi detention and was eventually released on the orders of the Saudi Crown Prince, Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud. Ali al-Adli presented his credence on July 3, 2002, as the negotiations went on. In this case, Nigeria effectively used Ambassador Ali as a pressure point. Perhaps quiet diplomacy could have resolved this matter better (The Comet, Editorial, July 11, 2002, p. 13). The incident was a gauge of the influence of the Mission against the tenacity of Saudi authorities concerning their laws, rightly or wrongly. As Saudis do not joke with their laws, Nigeria's diplomatic passports should not be issued indiscriminately. There is the need, The Comet observed, to restrict the issuance of diplomatic passports to those whose characters can be vetted and guaranteed.

### **National Hajj Commission of Nigeria: Making A Difference**

Since its inception in 2007, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has worked to improve on the country's Hajj operations. It has curtailed the national embarrassment of the past thereby improving Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations. Both onshore (on the Nigerian side) and offshore (Saudi Arabian side) operations are now well-coordinated with little or no hitches for over thirteen years. A few factors account for the improvement in the operations. These include the e-track system, heightened public enlightenment, the committee system, Taraddudiyyah Transport System, and other continuous improvements (in Saudi Hajj operations). Among these are aggressive public relations (on the part of NAHCON), quality leadership of NAHCON and its staff, and the “Never Again” commitment of the Nigerian Government (Danbaba, 40t, S.A. (Technical) to Chairman, NAHCON, Abuja, Personal Communication, 05-07-2020). In the thirteen years of NAHCON Hajj operations, an average of 82,676 Nigerians have performed Hajj yearly. This almost doubles the yearly average of 43,519 in thirty-eight immediate pre-NAHCON years. Yet the perennial hitches – delay in outbound airlift, pilgrims not coming for flight, stranded pilgrims on the return journey, pilgrims' rowdiness at airports, etc. – have just disappeared. This development will delight Liman who in his Travel Notes (1996) lamented the agonies, confusion, and frustrations that Nigerian pilgrims went through in

the 1990s. Nigeria has almost always used up its Hajj quota of 95,000 pilgrims yearly since NAHCON started operations.

Saudi Arabia works toward attaining complete Automated Hajj Services by the year 2030. Nigeria has keyed in fully to this digital Hajj operations; pilgrims' embarrassing fight, rowdiness, and trauma of the past have been removed. According to Danbaba (2020), the problems of absconders have improved; most of those who abscond now are pilgrims who come through Tour Agents and they do in collaboration with the Takruris. Whereas one thousand pilgrims are said to have absconded in the years 2016 to 2018, only nine were reported in 2019. NAHCON even contested these to be only six, according to its records. The fact that 80% of the minimum \$800US (Eight Hundred US Dollars) BTA per pilgrim is spent in the Kingdom and goes into Saudi Arabia's economy, makes Nigeria important in the bilateral relations. The quality of leadership of NAHCON cannot be overemphasised in its achievements even though the Commission still faces some challenges. Its first Chairman, Alhaji Muhammad Musa Bello was former FCT Minister. He laid a solid foundation for the success of the Commission. The second Chairman, Alhaji Mukhtar Muhammad worked as a director under Bello as part of the pioneering Board. He consolidated on what had been achieved. The incumbent Chairman, Alhaji Dhikrullah Hassan, a seasoned lawyer, and the cleric has wide experience in Hajj operations. He chaired Osun State Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board for eight years before taking on the present assignment. According to him, he is committed to the three pillars of NAHCON's stronghold: expertise, experience, and discipline (Hassan, 50+, Chairman/CEO, NAHCON, Abuja, Personal Communication, 16-06-2020).

## **Conclusion**

It is almost a millennium of the institutionalisation of Hajj in Nigeria. In the same vein, the Hajj management tradition in Nigeria is in its 60s. Nigeria's Hajj operations have gone through three phases: (i) 1958-1968 when touts and agents predominated. Hajj operations were out of the control of the Pilgrims' Boards; (ii) 1968-2006 when the Federal and the States' Pilgrims' Boards coordinated but the operations were often fraught with hitches and lapses; (iii) 2007-2020 when NAHCON has been effectively coordinating Nigeria's Hajj operations. NAHCON's success story is a plus for Nigeria's public administration. Aside from the ceasing of the bungled Hajj operations with their nuisance value in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations, Nigeria, like other pilgrims-sending-states around the world contribute something of importance to Saudi Arabia's economy. In terms of pilgrims' quota, Nigeria is second only to Egypt in Africa and it is the fifth in the world. It is recommended that the government and people of Nigeria give NAHCON the utmost support to continuously improve on its Hajj operations. This, it is hoped, will further cement the cooperative relations between the two states, makes Hajj a more satisfying experience for Nigerians and provide their two peoples the enabling environment to further benefit from one another.

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## **GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF MIGRATION EXPERIENCES**

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### **Abstract**

For a long time, men have been the subject of migration studies. They are often the primary decision-maker of the choice to move. A point of departure, however, is in the dearth of research on male migration in literature today. Women's migration experiences now surface more in literature. However, women migrate (perhaps far more) for the same reasons men have been migrating, thus the emergence of writings on migrant women. Gendered dimension of migration suggests that the experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by both men and women in the process of migration can be similar and yet different, and should be studied side by side. This research employs gender difference theories to explain the origin of differences between the male and female, while also exploring different views and opinion on the differences in the migration experience of men and women in Africa. Data were collected from primary (interviews) and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Gender, Perspective, Migration, Experiences, Africa

### **Introduction**

Migration is a broad concept referring to population mobility and a component of population change at different places and at different times. It involves the movement of people, or animals, from one place to another either temporarily or permanently. It is also a determining factor for the creation, expansion, and continuity of communities particularly through the activities of the migrants (Nail, 2016). Indeed, migration is a historical phenomenon necessary for human existence and continuity (ICRC, 2012). People often migrate to seek protection from war and conflict, to escape hunger and poverty, to find new economic opportunities and employment. Sometimes, people also flee from religious intolerance or political repression, to trade and even to see new places (StrikingWomen, n.d.). Research shows traces of migration in Europe, Asia, and

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Africa as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries. Throughout its history, Africa has experienced important migratory movements, both voluntary and forced that have contributed to its contemporary demographic landscape. In many parts of the continent, communities spread across two or three nation-states, as political boundaries do not limit movement. In pre-colonial Africa, people migrated for hunting, agriculture or pastoralism, security and subsistence to escape natural disasters and warfare, for trade and pilgrimage (StrikingWomen, n.d.). By the end of the 18th century, mass migration had occurred in Africa in the form of the slave trade, especially in West Africa. The development of transportation systems further made this possible (StrikingWomen, n.d.).

Over time, women and men have been migrating together and separately from place to place, but their migration experiences differ as much as the decision to migrate (Donato & Gabaccia, 2016). E.G Ravenstein's Law of Migration sheds light on the difference in migration experience for both genders. His research showed that even though men accounted for the larger proportion of migrants, women are more migratory than men are. They also showed that men travel a longer distance while women tend to travel within a short distance (Ravenstein, 1885). However, from the 1960s, data began to show more women travelling longer distances and often unaccompanied by family members. By the 1980s, women began to surface in migration literature because of the emergence of feminist writers. The emergence of feminist and gender researchers in migration brought the experiences of migrant women into academic purview. As such, women are therefore no longer identified as just 'accompanying their husbands and parents', or 'left behind' by migrant husbands but individuals with their migration reasons, experience, and trajectories (Villares-Varela, 2013). The objectives of this study are to examine the differences in the migration experiences of men and women in the migration process in Africa and to situate these differences within a theoretical understanding. Thus, this study answers the following questions: (i) is the migration experiences of men and women different? (ii) what are the theoretical explanations for gender differences? In the following sections, the author discusses the existing understanding of women and men in migration, gender experiences in a theoretical framework, the research methodology used in this study, the discussion, and summary of findings.

## Literature Review

### *Women in Migration*

Women represent an integral part of migration all over the world, although with a varying degree from one continent to another. Between 1970 and 2000, women migrants decreased significantly in the Asia (46.6% to 43.3%), North America (51.1% to 50.3%), while Africa (42.7% to 46.7%), Latin America (46.8% to 50.2%) and Europe (48% to 51%) recorded a differential increase in the number of migrant women (IOM, 2017). The World Migration Report 2018 identified 244



million international migrants in 2015, 52% of these population were male and 48% were female (IOM, 2017). These statistics, however, fall short of credibility, as they do not account for migration within countries and regions. For instance, Nigerian and Ghanaian women now engage in international migration, leaving their spouses at home to care for the children. Female nurses and doctors have been recruited from Nigeria to work in Saudi Arabia, while their counterparts in Ghana are taking advantage of the better pay packages in the United Kingdom and the United States to accumulate enough savings to survive economic difficulties at home. In 2013, the Southern African region recorded over 4 million migrants, excluding irregular migrants, of which 44 percent were female and 20 percent were under 19 years of age (Adepoju, 2004; Omelaniuk, 2005; IOM, 2017). These statistics show that women are involved in migration as much as men are and they would have different factors motivating their migration.

This paper identifies different categories of women migrants based on conditions surrounding their migration. These include the following:

- i Women who migrate in response to gender-specific labour demands;
- ii Refugee women and girls; and
- iii Trafficked women and girls (UN Division for the Advancement of Women)

For most of these women, motivation migration continues to be a strategy for family survival. They migrate for the sake of increasing the economic capability of their household thereby maximizing and diversifying the household income through remittances. Some others migrate to gain economic freedom and opportunities absent at home. Thus, pull factors of waged employment, security, assurance of better life are motivating factors for migrating (IOM, 2009). The search for a better health system that guarantees their survival serves as another factor that motivates women to migrate from poor African countries. Some educated women who migrate in the search of better health care could be integrated into the health sector of the host countries to work in the hospitals as nurses or hospital aides (Omelaniuk, 2005). Access to education or the lack of it can also inform the decision to migrate. In Ethiopia, for instance, better-educated females tend to migrate elsewhere than men. Uneducated women also face challenges (lack of resources, access to information) that limit their participation in migration. Rural women, for instance, with little education will be more drawn to low-skilled jobs as the global demand for labour rises in a highly gendered area such as domestic work, health, child, and elderly care.

Unlike urban women migrants, rural women can migrate to escape traditional gender roles, gender-specific discrimination, or gender-specific violence. Survival is also the goal of migration for these women (IOM, 2009). The restrictive role of women in their home country forms another determinant of women's migration. People generally feel comfortable to stay in places where they are accepted and have free access to certain opportunities that others have. When this element is missing, there is a tendency for them to migrate. On the other hand, this

restrictive factor can equally restrain women from migrating. In Tanzania, women are compelled to migrate for work or marriage because the culture excludes them from land inheritance (Omelaniuk, 2005). Nightingale (2002), in a working paper on condition of women labour migrants from Nigeria, identified that the patriarchal system that gives more opportunities to men than women, including exclusion from promising profession, motivate women to move out of their country. Similarly, in the labour market, women earn lesser than men earn and only engage in low-income businesses and jobs (Nightingale, 2002).

As such, women generally face different challenges and opportunities in many areas than men that are in a similar situation. Women migrants are often vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, abuse, employer violence, insecure working condition, trafficking, sex trade, and often-clandestine migration. Kawar (2004) asserts that migration presents women with vulnerable circumstances than it does to men. For instance, the case of 26 African women migrants who died on the Mediterranean Sea. Several reports reveal that these women had experienced violence, torture, and sexual abuse from gangs they board the ship with going to Italy (Kawar, 2004). The majority of these women came from sub-Saharan African countries of Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Gambia, and Sudan (FIDH, 2007). Migrant women, forced to move because of conflict, natural environmental disaster, or persecution, are often the most vulnerable to social and physical aggression coupled with displacement. Student migrants often face the challenge of acceptance in the host community. They are often related to the assumption that they are not as knowledgeable as students from the host countries are. Interactions with friends and relatives who have migrated abroad to study are often filled with stories of segregation by citizens (IOM, 2017). In contemporary times, African women in the urban area migrate in pursuit of opportunities to excel in their various careers to support themselves and their families. Women are taking initiatives to get involved in humanitarian services and giving back to humanity via volunteering in regions with disasters in some African countries. Single African women are more open to migrating with or without anyone accompanying them. However, some still face the challenge of a language barrier, discrimination, acceptance, health, and so on, in the community they find themselves. These are factors that impair maximal delivery of their potentials, access to education and career opportunities, and changes in the socio-economic positions of women.

### *Men in Migration*

Migration in the 1960s and 1970s predominantly concerned the movement of men for employment and eventually settling permanently because of restrictions on employment and travel. Because of this, women whose husbands had migrated began moving to reunite their families. This increased the appearance of women in migration literature (Gödr, 2006). Literature discusses migrant men in terms of labour markets, family transformations, domestic and sexual violence, youth

criminality, or culturally specific crimes (Griffiths, 2015). The media also play a large role in presenting migrant men as dangerous, especially if they have migrated into societies that have a different ethnic identity to their home country. For instance, the influx of migrant men has been treated with certain prejudice in Europe, and their presence is seen as contrary to the gender equality agenda of the continent (Wojnicka & Pustulka, 2019).

Donaldson and Howson (2009) expressed the view that, while men often gain more in the process of migration, they are likely to need more welfare support in the host country. And they could also be victims of intolerance, violence, and discrimination. The authors explored the challenges and changes that might occur to men in the host country. For instance, they might have to redefine their masculine identity and practices. This could either lead to changes in gender relations and roles or even reinforce existing masculine identity and gender relations. Male responsibilities like being the breadwinner might, however, remain constant as found in many societies around the world (Donaldson & Howson, 2009). This idea of the breadwinner has often motivated many men to migrate. For many young men across Africa, in particular Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, migration is equal to success. They assume that getting to Europe will make them successful, as life is better in Europe. Therefore, they leave their families behind and head towards Europe through Italy in pursuit of jobs or other opportunities (Guilbert, n.d.).

## Research Methodology

In carrying out this research, the researcher focused on civil society groups and researchers that focus on gender-specific issues. 10 people were interviewed (6 NAPTIP officials, 1-IOM official, 2-professors of sociology and history, 1-Project Alert Official). The researcher employs an unstructured interview method. This allowed the interviewer to ask a follow-up or supplementary questions that may not have been part of the questions originally prepared. In other words, the interviewer asked questions based on responses given by the respondents. Thus, respondents from the IOM and NAPTIP responded to 5 questions, Academics responded to 5 questions and the civil society organization (Project Alert) responded to 5 questions. The findings from this interview are analysed using the content analysis method.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

**Research Question 1:** Are there differences in the migration experiences of men and women?

The findings of this study established the fact that all migrants (men, women, and children) are faced with many dangers. However, the migration experiences of men and women differ as a result of gender differences and reasons for migration. According to the IOM, gender influences the reasons for migrating, who migrates and destination as well as the networks, opportunities, and resources used in

the course of migration and at destination (IOM, n.d.). Arguably, gender has the greatest impact on the migration of women, men, boys, girls, and persons identifying as lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex. Similarly, gender norms can influence the experience of women and men in migration and their gender norms can also change as a result of the migration process. However, there is little disaggregated data by gender, age, or sexuality (Migration Data Portal, 2020).

Both push factors-low wages, poverty, land dispossession, insurgency, social marginalization, climate change, economic hardship, and political unrest, and pull factors - perceived better opportunities, good social security measures, positive economic situation, political and social stability, and so on, oftentimes account for the motivation for migration of both men and women. Adeniyi (2009) noted that poverty, high rate of unemployment, poor governance, porous borders, social injustice, loss of family and moral values, distortion of information on the reality of life abroad, the desire to make quick wealth, and a warped educational system amongst other factors, contribute to the increasing number of people willing to risk their lives and the little they have in a bid to migrate to developed countries (Adeniyi, 2019). However, most women more than men are at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. One of the respondents expressed that:

“...There are certainly dangers faced by both men and women migrants who migrate irregularly...evidence shows that women face greater risks of death while migrating irregularly. Many contributing factors for this exist, including gendered social practices within family groups and countries of transit as well as smuggling practices.”

Another respondent claimed that

The gender of individuals, the social class of individuals, the place they work, how they work all shape the trajectory of migration...Scholars have established that women are mostly trafficked into sexual exploitation, forced to work against their own will in brothels while males are trafficked in a different form; often in mines and factories. Sexual violence is unique to female forms of migration than other forms of violence.

We can, therefore, attest to the fact that the roles, expectations, and power relations linked to being a woman or a man can affect the migration process and be affected by migration. The gender of the migrant can also shape their risk, vulnerabilities, and needs in the course of migrating (IOM, n.d.). Thus, respondents express that one of the major areas of difference in the migration of men and women is in terms of vulnerability to sexual exploitation at different stages of migration.

Vulnerability is quite high on the side of the women for prostitution than men due to the standard that African societies and cultures live by. Though there are

instances of male prostitutes, women are more vulnerable as sex objects than men. This is so because of the quest for variety amongst men. Men tend to want to have sexual experiences with diverse women, of different colors and tribes and sometimes can pay any amount for it. Furthermore, in the quest for economic freedom, women become more vulnerable to trafficking trying to get what they want with what they have as often as the assertion is.

Indeed migration patterns have always been gendered. Historically, it was assumed that men often migrated for work and education, while women migrate for marriage or to reunite with their family. Today, both women and men migrate for education, employment, and family reunification. Conflict situations and climate change have also created new dynamics in the gender distribution of migration. Migration also can give women a higher degree of economic and social autonomy and opportunities to challenge gender roles that are restrictive (Bridge, 2016). African women in developed communities oftentimes take up job opportunities and roles that they would otherwise not be able to take in their home country. For most of these women, they also enjoy a large degree of financial and social freedom and can send money back home to support their family thereby making them contributors to economic development. Thus, migration can also pull down restrictive gender stereotypes that see women as dependents and lacking decision-making power. However, Marinucci (2007) claimed that migration can also entrench stereotypes against both genders and create less autonomy.

The risk of disintegrating the traditional family relations; the extremely vulnerable situation that many migrant women find themselves, in the crossing moment or entering in the arrival country; the double discrimination in the workplace, because they are women and foreigners; the social pressure related to the traditional gender role; the problems with visa related to the husband dependence. More often than none, women who emigrate alone have the responsibility of supporting their kids and/or their relatives. In this context, female migrants live a vulnerable and dependent situation originated with the necessity of sending remittances and, in many cases, of paying her traveling debts. Thus, sometimes, they are obliged to tolerate hideous violations of their rights to keep a job. It is a situation that produces more subordination than autonomy (Marinucci, 2007).

Respondents also express the view that women face greater risks of death while migrating irregularly. For instance, women and children travelling on the Mediterranean Sea are usually kept below the deck or in the middle of the boat in an attempt to protect them during the crossing. Evidence shows that this can have tragic consequences as it can be difficult to escape from the boat in times of distress, leading to suffocation from toxic fumes. The IOM further reports that even though more men die in transit holistically, more women tend to drown at sea more than men, with bodies often unrecovered or unidentifiable. The differences in migration experiences of males and females are orchestrated by gender differences accompanied by gender discrimination. However, the

consequences of these experiences cannot be addressed in isolation of each other. Migration, therefore, has an ambivalent feature for both men and women: It can be an empowerment space, but also a space for infringement of rights.

**Research Question 2:** Are there theoretical explanations of Gender Differences in Migration?

Gender difference theories are situated specifically within two schools of thought: Gender essentialism and Social construction of gender. Essentialism is the view that objects possess certain properties (essence) that distinguish them from another (Manicom, 2015). Witts described this as kind essentialism. Essentialism about a kind (group) holds that there is a property or properties that define membership in that kind (Witt, 2011). Speake (1979) also identified that some objects have essence (certain properties) that gives them their existence and characteristic. Essentialism is applied to gender differences based on the belief that the difference between women and men resides in an essence (Manicom, 2015). In other words, certain characteristics or properties determine who is male and who is female. At the root of essentialism is the belief that gender is an unchangeable essence that defines a person. That is, gender differences are essentially driven by biological sexuality (the presence of male and female genitals). Feminist theorists, however, criticize the claims of gender essentialism. They express the view that gender is a social construction and biological sexuality cannot account for the differences in males and females across all human societies and cultures (Diehl, 2018).

Social construction is, therefore, an alternative to gender essentialism. This school of thought sees gender differences as a social construction, mainly as a reflection of the different social positions occupied by women and men in society. To this school, gender is constructed by the structures of culture and societal norms (Brym & Lie, 2012). The idea of the social construction of gender comes from sociologists. They affirm that gender identities are constructed all through our lives, using the cultural elements we find around us. Sociologists also perceive gender as an institution. Gender is not a possession that you get through socialization and have for the rest of your life. It is part of the institution and organisation we create as human beings. For instance, certain professions dictate that we act in gendered ways. A soldier is expected to be stoic and aggressive (either male or female), on the other hand, a nurse is expected to be gentle and kind (either male or female). This means that a female soldier or male nurse will struggle to fit into the gendered dimension of their profession. This proves that gender is woven into the fabric of the social structure and represents one of the many ways in which social activities are organised (Kimmel & Aronson, 2009). West and Zimmerman in an article titled 'Doing gender' published in 1987 popularised the idea that gender is constantly produced through interaction with each other as a way of making sense of the world and letting it work. They explain that at birth, a baby is born with some biological sex configurations. However, the baby is assigned a sex category based on what the attending adult interprets as sex. After that, everyone

around the baby begins to act in ways considered appropriate to the sex category assigned. Each person in interaction, therefore, holds each other accountable to ensure consistency (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2008).

In another sense, cultural feminism as a theory of gender difference falls within the essentialist school as it identifies the distinctive characteristics of women from men. It is a branch of feminism that recognizes that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women and that women's differences are special and should be celebrated. Cultural feminism underscores the biological differences between men and women. Therefore, it ascribes the oppression of women to their biological construct (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2008). The woman's body is a mechanism of procreation and the woman's sexuality therefore controlled by the man through institutions such as marriage and family. Thus, sexual freedom must be equally gained by men and women, and the patriarchal system that promotes sexual control must be addressed. Cultural feminists also used biological differences to claim that 'women are kinder and gentler than men thereby suggesting the popular assumption that if women ruled the world there would be no wars.

This theory of gender differences is used to provide an answer to the claim that the experiences of men and women in migration are different. The biological and anatomical features of women can make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation more than their male counterparts. Cultural feminists' emphasis is on institutions such as marriage, family, prostitution, and that heterosexuality exists to perpetuate the sex-role system. However, Contemporary variants of this theory argue that biological differences are not enough to distinguish the male and female (Lengerman & Niebrugge, 2008). Flowing from this premise, we can agree that the experience of male and female are defined and determined by the interactions and structure of the society more than biological sex category.

### *Summary of findings*

The study establishes that all migrants are faced with many challenges at departure, transit and arrival, however, the migration experiences of men and women are different in several substantive ways due to gender differences and reasons for migration. Push factors such as low wages, poverty, land dispossession, insurgency, social marginalization, climate change, economic hardship, and political unrest; and pull factors such as perceived better opportunities, good social security measures, positive economic situation, political and social stability, etc often time account for the motivation for migration of both men and women. The desire 'to make it big', and gain an improved standard of living, is, therefore, a major factor that motivates irregular migration. More than men, however, women are more at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. The reason for this is attributed to the sexualization and objectification of the female body. The study also established that the differences in the migration experiences of both men

and women can be theoretically explained through gender difference theories and feminist theories. While gender essentialism claims that both males and females have innate essence that differentiates them from each other, often time, biologically differences, sociologists on the other hand express that gender is what any society says it is. That is what is male and female is determined by how society constructs it and that this construction affects how systems work in such a society. Cultural feminism, while aligning with gender essentialism, on one hand, claim that each gender has a uniqueness to it that makes their experiences different, on the other hand.

## **Conclusion**

This research established that migration is a concern for both men and women because of the economic and security factors. It is important for the creation, expansion, and continuity of human society. It is also clear that men and women could migrate for the same reasons or similar reasons but their migration experiences often differ from each other. Gender essentialism and social construct of gender identified the origins of gender differences as biological and social, and they are instrumental to the experiences of both genders. Cultural feminism explains that these differences in experience can be linked to the biological and socially constructed differences between both genders. Specifically, women often experience exploitation of a different kind, especially sexual exploitation either as a regular or irregular migrant. Men, on the other hand, often experience the challenge of settling into the cultural lifestyle of the environment, discrimination, and intolerance. This research suggests that more research needs to be carried out, especially on male migrant experiences and how these affect gender roles and relations, while constructively applying the findings to migration policy. Illegal migration should be discouraged because of the danger and dehumanization involved.

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# INTERNATIONAL BORDER, TERRORISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF RISING INCIDENCES OF TERRORISM IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Against the background of the rising incidences of terrorism in northeast Nigeria, the paper examines the national security implications of the porous nature of Nigeria's international borders with her immediate neighbours. Data is drawn from secondary sources, and with the aid of content analysis. The paper argues that despite efforts by the Nigerian border security managers to maintain adequate border security, socio-economic, geographical, and institutional factors have made it impossible to achieve security along Nigeria's international borders. These challenges have created a corridor for terrorist activities in the country. Boko Haram's active presence in Nigeria has opened a window for the influx of other terrorist groups in West Africa, culminating in the rising incidences of terrorism in the country. The paper, therefore, recommended, amongst other things, the re-evaluation of Nigeria's relations with her immediate neighbours, especially on the free movement of people across the borders to improve Nigeria's border security. It also recommended for the extension of the government's presence in the border communities because most of the border communities are largely ungoverned spaces and, thus, constituting a conduit/harbinger for terrorist activities.

**Keywords:** International Borders, Border Security, Terrorism, National Security, Northeast Nigeria.

## Introduction

One of the basic characteristics of a nation-state is the possession of a defined territory. Accordingly, the territory defines the international boundaries or borders of every sovereign state with its neighbours. International boundaries mark-off the area of jurisdiction among nation-states and its integrity lies in its maintenance by the security managers, which by extension is an inextricable part of a country's national security objectives. To maintain the territorial integrity of a nation-state, border security managers have to ensure the effective and efficient manning of the international borders. This would avert activities that threaten national security such as trans-border crimes and terrorism. Nigeria is bordered by land with the

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Republic of Benin in the west, Cameroon and Chad in the east, and the Republic of Niger in the north. It shares maritime borders with Equatorial Guinea, Ghana and Sao Tome and Principe, as well as the Lake Chad Basin in the north. With an extensive land and maritime borders of about 4,037km and 853km (452nm) respectively (Map of Nigeria, 2019 as updated). With such a vast expanse of land borders and waters, Nigeria is faced with several cases of functional boundaries, of which over 200 ethnic groups leaving within these boundaries have cleavages across the borders with neighbouring countries. Among these ethnic groups with cleavages across Nigeria's borders are major ethnic groups like the Hausa, Yoruba, Kanuri, and Efik (Asiwaju, 1990). Indeed, Nigeria's international boundaries, though geographically delineated, are sociologically undefined. Activities are freely carried out by inhabitants of the border communities across borders by virtue of their ethno-religious leanings and socio-economic interests.

The ethno-religious cum socio-economic links among trans-border communities are traceable to longstanding history that spans across centuries. The links constitute major weaknesses of border management and security in Nigeria. They permit illegal activities such as the illegal movement of persons, smuggling of arms and ammunition, explosives materials and monies across Nigerian borders. Subsequently, they are deployed for acts of terrorism in the country (Onuoha, 2013; Opanike and Adulujó, 2015). Coincidentally, the exigencies of globalisation and information communication technology, which have created a much more borderless international system through the cyberspace, have complicated the fluidity and complexities of activities along international boundaries. To that extent, almost no country has absolute control over its territory. However, of particular concern to this study is the physical international boundaries that demarcate Nigeria and her neighbours, and its contribution to the rising incidences of terrorism in the northeast of the country.

The Northeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria consists of six states which are Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. The region is bordered internationally by Niger, Cameroun, and Chad, with more than 200 illegal routes (aside from the official routes) from the neighbouring countries to Nigeria (Parrandang, 2014). Adamawa state alone has more than 80 illegal routes to other countries like Cameroun and Chad that have borders with the Central African Republic (Nigeria Immigration Services, 2014). The illegal routes provide the conduits through which Boko Haram terrorists have continued to sustain and strengthen its activities through the coordination of its activities across the country. These activities include the smuggling of sophisticated arms and weapons that have exacerbated terrorism in the region. The presence of regional/international terrorist groups such as Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), Al Qaida in Maghreb (AQIM), and the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) in collaboration with the BHT has strengthened their operations in the Northeast. The sophistication of their attacks and the fatalities that have accompanied them are evident to the effect of the porous nature of Nigerian international borders and terrorism

in the Northeast. The movement across the borders around the northeast has been free and easy, thus, making it easy for illicit trans-border transactions and smuggling of illicit arms and weapons to take place. Between 2011 and 2015 the activities of terrorism actively represented in the Boko Haram Terrorist Group in the northeast affected 14.8 million people, displaced 2.3 million persons, 80 percent of whom are women, children, and youth (FGN, 2015:36). Moreover, estimates show that between 2016 and 2018 approximately 2.1 million people have been displaced by the conflict, while 7 million need humanitarian assistance, and over 20,000 civilian deaths recorded (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The import of this paper is to evaluate Nigeria's international borders in relation to the rising incidences of terrorism in the northeast geopolitical zone of the country. To achieve this objective, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section is the introductory remark. The second is the conceptual clarification and theoretical framework, while the third addresses the methodology. The fourth section dwells on the overview of Nigeria's international borders and the rising incidences of terrorism in the country between 2011 and 2018. The fifth section concludes by making recommendations on how to strengthen border security in Nigeria to curb the rising incidents of terrorism in the country.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### ***Border***

Borders could be defined as geographical boundaries of political entities or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, and other subnational entities established through agreements between political or social entities that control those areas. The creation of these agreements is called boundary delimitations. Borders can either be domestic or international. The international border is the demarcation between politically sovereign territories. The international boundary line demarcates a country from another. This includes land, sea, and air borders which serve as entry points to the country. International borders are used to bring in what is needed for the economy, security, and well-being of the nation. The boundary lines or demarcations indicate the limit within which a sovereign state can exercise its sovereignty (Ajala, 1983). As a member of the global community, Nigeria depends on other nations for things she cannot produce. Items such as arms and ammunition, drugs, machinery, cars, etc., are imported and transported through the borders lawfully. It can also be used to smuggle restricted or prohibited items into the country with grave consequences on national security and economy. Criminally minded individuals and organisations can exploit the weaknesses of accessibility availability through the border to procure, smuggle, and dump items that portend danger for any nation if adequate measures are not taken to manage the borders. Nigeria's boundaries with her neighbours, whether on land, sea, or air, are what is referred to her international borders. It is these borders that define Nigeria's territorial integrity, and therefore should be maintained. Any attempt to alter the boundaries by any force, be they state or non-state actors, without

authorisation from the leadership of the country constitutes a national security threat.

### ***Border Security***

According to Okumu (2011), border security is an inextricable aspect of border control and management. Border control and management involves the measures taken by a state, or bloc of states, to monitor its borders and regulate the movement of people, animals, and goods across the border. Border security measures involve border control policies adopted by a country or group of countries to fight against unauthorised travel or trade across its borders, to limit illegal immigration, combat transnational crime, and prevent wanted criminals from travelling (the United States Homeland Security, 2018). The partially imposed border closure by Nigeria in August 2019, to facilitate a joint operation, named ‘Swift Response,’ involving customs, immigration, police, and the army, is a border security measure. Border security is an aspect of national security objectives recognised under international law. It entails the ability of a nation-state or group of sovereign states to secure its/ their international borders and ensure the security of its territories and people. It is part of the criteria used to classify states as either strong, weak, or failed in the international arena.

### ***Terrorism***

There is no universally agreed definition of terrorism (Schmidt, 2011). Moreover, governments have been reluctant to formulate an agreed-upon and legally binding definition. Difficulties arise from the fact that the term has become politically and emotionally charged. However, one thing common with the act of terrorism is violence to create fear in the people. The dictionary of Political Science published by Chaturvedi (2006) defines terrorism as the use of violence or indulgence in violent activity for any political end or to put the public in fear. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Fact Sheet No. 32 (2008) defines terrorism as an act of violence that targets civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims. In legal terms, although the international community is yet to adopt a comprehensive definition of terrorism, existing declarations, and resolutions and universal sectoral treaties relating to specific aspects of it, define certain acts and core elements. For instance, in 1994, the General Assembly’s Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, as set out in its resolution 49/60 stated:

Terrorism includes criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes and that such acts are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, and religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.

Also, the Security Council Resolution 1556 (2004), referred to terrorism as

Criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.

Later in the same year, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change described terrorism as any action that is "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act" and identified several key elements, with further reference to the definitions contained in the 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004). The United States in its Title 22 Chapter 38 U.S Code 2656f defined terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents. However, the General Assembly is still working to come up with a comprehensive convention against terrorism. This would complement the existing sectoral anti-terrorism conventions and layout a universally accepted definition of terrorism with full legal consideration and intention. From these definitions, the core elements of terrorism comprise the following: the use of violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political, religious, ideological, or social objectives. It involves acts committed by non-state actors or by undercover personnel, serving on the behalf of their respective governments. And acts reaching more than the immediate target victims and also directed at targets important in the society. In Nigeria, such acts have been identified with the activities of Boko Haram, ISWAP, and their international collaborators actively operating in Northeast Nigeria.

### *National Security*

The elusive and ambiguous nature of the concept of national security has made it a subject of many reviews and modifications over the years. It attracted a variety of definitions aimed at clarifying the concept, thus leading to reconceptualisation of national security from a purely military concept to encompass all other facets of national security as they emerged. Wolfers (1952) has suggested that national security points to some degree of protection of values previously acquired. Lipmann (1943) in Rom (1993) observed that a nation is secured to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war and is able, if changed, to maintain them by victory in such war. Lippman's observation underscores Wolfers' suggestion that national security points to the protection of nation-states' core values. In a broader context, the National Defence of India (1996) defined national security as an appropriate and aggressive blend

of political resilience and maturity, human resources, economic structure and capacity, technological competence, industrial base and availability of natural resources, and finally, the military might. This definition projects national security as an all-encompassing concept aimed at national development and progress. Similarly, the Nigerian Grand Strategy for National Security, which is the major security policy document developed by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2000, defines National Security as the aggregation of the security interest of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities and institutions in the territory of Nigeria (Grand Strategy on National Security, 2000). The Strategy went further to state:

The primary objective of national security shall be to strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to advance her interests and objectives, to contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth, and improve the welfare and well-being and quality of life of every citizen (Grand Strategy on National Security, 2000).

These components are aggregated into elements of state power, including economic and social development, defence, foreign policy, law and order, and information management. This document, however, took into consideration the peculiarities of the Nigerian State in drafting the national security policy. In keeping with this idea, the latest National Security policy document known as the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2019, which replaced the NSS 2014, underscores the centrality of national security. It generally acknowledged the view that security is a guarantee of the well-being of citizens and the stability of the state. The notion of security adopted by the Strategy, however, reflects the contemporary paradigm shift away from the state-centric focus of security, to one which is comprehensive and emphasises human security (National Security, 2019: IV). Some of the contemporary security challenges driving the Strategy, as emphasised by the NSS 2019, can be grouped under the following security threats: terrorism and violent extremism, armed banditry, kidnapping, militancy, and separatist agitations, pastoralist-farmers conflicts, transnational organised crime, piracy and sea robbery, porous borders, cybercrimes, and technology challenges. Others are socio-political threats, fake news and hate speeches, environmental threats, public health challenges, economic challenges, regional and global security challenges. The National Security Strategy 2019 conception of Nigeria's National Security emphasises in clear terms contemporary security challenges in Nigeria as the basis of its national security concerns.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts the realist theory of international relations with a specific focus on national interest, national values, and national objectives. In international relations, realism encompasses a variety of theories and approaches, all of which share a belief that states are primarily motivated by national interest and national



objectives. This idea which is traceable to works of realist scholars like Carr (1956), Waltz (1959), Raymond (1967), Northedge (1974) found eloquent expression in the works of Hans Morgenthau. Hans Morgenthau, a leading proponent of the school of realism, once contended that the behaviour of states in international politics is determined by their national interests (Morgenthau, 1978). Therefore states are likely to fail if they fail to define their national interests and pursue them as well (Julian, 2010). For a state to play an active role in international politics and be respected among the committee of nations, it must first consider its security. This gives primacy of importance to a state's national interests; the interests of other nations, or national institutions, such as the UN, AU, ECOWAS. Thus, Non-State Actors or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with transnational interests, become secondary or tertiary. National interests are central to realist theory and usually rooted in whatever a state considers necessary for maintaining its survival. A state is expected to act according to the logic of national interests, and especially in defence of them when its survival is at stake. In this regard, the free and unregulated movement across the international borders of Nigeria in the face of the rising incidences of terrorisms and other trans-border crimes is not in the interest of the Nigerian state as it jeopardises the country's national security interest.

### **International Borders and Rising Incidences of Terrorism in Northeast Nigeria**

Nigeria lies between latitudes 40 and 140 N and longitudes 20 and 150E. The country covers a total area of 923,768 km<sup>2</sup> (356,669 sq mile) (Wikipedia.org), making it the world's 32nd largest country by landmass. It shares land borders of 4,037 km with Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and a coastal line of at least 853km (Map of Nigeria, 2019 as updated). Nigeria's claim to the territorial sea (offshore space) rose from 3 miles of the continental shelf and about 200 miles on exclusive fishing zones from 1958 to 1978 as a country signatory to conventions on the continental shelf despite its inability to determine its extent of the claim (Prescott, 1975). Nigeria lays claim to a 200 mile wide exclusive economic zone in October 1978 as part of her reaction to the United Nations Conventions on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) on jurisdictional zones and claims to the territorial sea, continental shelf, and exclusive fishing zones. Among West African countries, Nigeria is seen as the most industrialised in the sub-region.

Across the over 4000km land border, Nigeria has 84 official land borders and over 1400 illegal borders which are not manned (Parradang, 2014). Available data to the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) indicate that the number of illegal routes to the country is 100 times more than the number of the approved routes (NIS, 2014). According to the record, Adamawa State, for instance, has about five control posts but about 80 illegal routes. Studies conducted by Osimen, et al. (2017) confirmed the massive nature of Nigerian borders with hundreds of footpaths, crisscrossing to neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and

Niger with links to Mali, Libya, and Sudan. The study went further to state that estimates by locals reveal that there are well over 250 footpaths from Damaturu/Maiduguri axis that link or lead directly to Cameroon, Chad, or Niger. These paths are mostly unknown by security agencies, which make them unmanned and unprotected and, thus, serve as leaky routes for arms and ammunitions trafficking in Nigeria. They are among the many routes that have been aiding the operations of BHT and their collaborators in the northeast. They have remained the major channels through which smuggling of arms, weapons, and ammunition, vehicles, and other equipment use by the terrorists are brought into the country. Over 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa were reported to be in Nigeria. More so, the majority of these weapons found their ways into Nigeria through the neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In 2018, the minister of interior in Nigeria, Lt Gen Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau, noted that about 350 million out of about 500 million illicit arms circulating in West Africa found their ways into Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2018). This arm smuggling is indexed by the intermittent seizure of various types and calibre of arms by security and border control officers. The frequency of their deployment in conflict and crime scenes, and the level of human casualty and material damage recorded in the aftermath of their use in the country is documented (Onuoha, 2011). For instance, on 12 July 2013, soldiers in Kebbi State impounded a petrol tanker loaded with three AK 47 Rifles, one rocket-propelled grenade (RPG)-2, nine AK 47 magazines, two bombs, three RPG chargers and 790 rounds of 7.62mm of special ammunitions in the fuel compartment of the tanker (The Nations Newspaper, 2013). These arms were suspected to have been sent to Boko Haram Terrorists by their collaborators from neighbouring countries.

The effective utilisation of these illegal routes by the terrorists and their cohorts, as well as the multiplicity, are aided by the age-long socio-economic activities and ethno-religious affiliations that spanned many decades. It is a situation that makes it difficult for border communities to see themselves as different people based on geographical demarcations but as relatives and or business partners. This assumed affinity negates the achievement of effective border security in the region. To them, the borders are mere geographical expressions. In addition to the porous nature of the borders, the ECOWAS Free movement Protocol and the economic policies of neighbouring countries have made them even worse. Most of the illegal immigrants do not see themselves as aliens to the neighbouring countries because of these affiliations. Collins (1976) captured it succinctly in Babatola and Ajayi (2015) when he stated that:

Activities of smuggling and tax evasion in cross-border movements across Nigeria-Niger border provides the transnational features of border economic activities, interaction pattern in the border regions and flouting of international laws and convention on border crossing to the detriment of the national interest and invariably the national security in that era. An indication that the porous features of the border region and the prevailing economic policies of the neighbouring

states are tantamount to influence illegal cross border transactions in goods, currency, and other threatening circumstances (Babatola and Ajayi, 2015).

Sadly, this situation has remained unattended for decades as these challenges continued unabated because of the lack of foresight by leaders on the implications. For instance, the records of the Nigerian Immigration Service, as recounted by the Comptroller General of the Agency, show that there are inadequate facilities, such as patrol vehicles and aircraft, inadequate communication gadgets, and scanners to man the borders. According to him, such facilities will help to bridge the gap created by the unconnected nature of the border posts with the electronic pass system (E-Pass System). Another challenge is inadequate personnel and lack of adequate security devices required to effectively man borders. More than 75 percent of African borders are poorly managed and Nigeria is no exception. The Nigerian international borders are poorly controlled and managed due to inadequate personnel and lack of the required border security devices needed for the control and management of the borders. The officially recognised borders cannot boast of the officially required number of personnel to man and control the borders, not to even talk of the illegal routes scattered around the nooks and crannies of the region that are unmanned and unprotected. According to Parradang (2014), the service is short of manpower. The current 22,300 immigration officers are grossly inadequate to carry out the service's mandate. He further stated that the service needs annual recruitment of 5,000 personnel, for five years, to effectively carry out its duties at the borders. The application of up-to-date devices and equipment and the recruitment of more personnel will not only ensure effective border control, but it will also enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness among the border security managers.

This vulnerability has created an opportunity for the BHT to strengthen the capability and sustain its upsurge in the northeast conflict. It has created opportunities for other international and regional terrorist groups like AQIM, ISWAP, ISIS, to extend their cells in Nigeria, courtesy of the BHT. Several studies have reported that the weapons in the armory of late Libyan President, Muammar Gaddafi, (one of the biggest armories in Africa) which was opened and looted in 2011 by rebel forces and mercenaries, scattered around the Sub-Saharan African countries. They found their ways into the hands of terrorist groups like AQIM that have a strong link with BHT (Onuoha, 2013; Osimen et al., 2017). Terrorist groups like AQIM acquired heavy weapons such as SAM-7 anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, transporting them back to the Sahel region (Onuoha, 2013). These arms through AQIM have been transferred to groups like Ansar Dine, ISWAP, and BHT, emboldening and enabling them to mount more deadly and audacious attacks in the northeast. For instance, between 2017 and 2019, the upsurge of deadly attacks by the BHT and other terrorist groups like ISWAP on civilians and government security forces have remained constant with the astronomical rise in death toll and humanitarian catastrophes (BBC World News, 2019; Quartz Africa, 2019). On 27 December 2019, the BBC World News showed a video

by ISWAP killing eleven Christians in Northeast, Nigeria. An act the group said was to “avenge” the death of its leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi during a US raid in Syria in October 2019 (BBC World News, 2019). Similarly, ISWAP within the same period killed four aid workers from the NGO, ‘Action Against Hunger’ who they originally abducted in Damask, Borno State in July (Quartz Africa, 2019). This is to say that the boldness of BHT grew with the easy availability of weapons and arms in the Sahara-Sahel region. The porous international borders in the northeast states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, which are the strongholds of the BHT provided the leeway for the rising incidences of terrorism in the northeast.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The intractable terrorist attacks and the other transnational criminal activities have exacerbated the activities of the terrorists in northeast Nigeria. Such activities include human trafficking, illegal movement of people, arms, and ammunition in the border areas. These have been attributed to the porous nature of the international borders between Nigeria and her neighbours (Chad, Cameroon, and Niger) in the northeast. With about 1400 illegal routes against the 84 officially approved borders across the over 4000 km land border, illegal movements across the Nigerian border will not cease to occur in the absence of effective border security measures. The paper, therefore, argues that the porous situation of Nigeria’s international border has serious national security implications for the country’s territorial integrity. More so, the life and wellbeing of Nigerians are threatened by the activities of these terrorists who have become a nightmare to not only the residents of the region but to the security forces that lose their lives daily through bombings and ambush. However, the problem of border porosity and poor security of the borders are not beyond redemption. The paper recommends the following as a solution to achieving a secured international border in Nigeria.

- i. There is a need for the government to harmonise existing positions in researches to advance knowledge by directing them as initiatives to correct any wrong premise or notion in border security management.
- ii. Governments at the State and Local Governments should look beyond ethno-religious affiliations with the neighbouring countries to assist the federal government to address the issue of unmanned illegal routes which pose a great national security danger to the country.
- iii. There is a need to review Nigeria’s relations with her immediate neighbours (Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger) to strengthen security at the international borders. This would help the country navigate the complex dynamics of the international security environment defined by terrorism, violent extremism, and other transnational crimes.
- iv. There is a need for the government, both state and federal to establish a greater presence in the border communities to promote a sense of belonging in the people. Such a drive will help to monitor activities in the areas and dissuade terrorist intentions and penetration of the areas.

- v. There is a need for more personnel, more equipment, aircraft, and drones application as well as other monitoring facilities and communication gadgets for border security personnel to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency.
- vi. There is a need for healthy collaboration and coordination among the border security managers. The Immigration, Customs, Police, and other agencies that operate within the borders to ensure adequate security of the borders need work together. Lack of coordination and unhealthy rivalry has been one of the major challenges of effective manning of the Nigerian international borders.

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## REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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### Abstract

The call for the reform of the United Nations (UN) has been made repeatedly over the years, causing significant changes particularly in the areas of Charter's amendments, membership expansion, creation of new committees, and commissions among other things. However, in the face of growing menace of terrorist attacks worldwide and raging wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, the credibility of the highest decision-making body of the world remains largely questionable. This desk research relied on secondary data and it engaged the literature on the working of the UN. In the light of the balance of power theory of alliances, the paper found out that beyond an apparent inability of the five permanent members of the Security Council to unanimously respond to the world's urgency for peace and security was hidden a *modus vivendi* within an alliance of powerful nations: keeping the lid on dissent and maintaining the status quo without addressing the core causes of insecurity in the world. It is therefore recommended that poor nations look inward and develop a people-centered model of peace that does not require the Security Council's approval.

**Keywords:** Balance of Power, Alliance, Security Council, Reform, Peace, Veto power

### Introduction

Since its inception by the end of the Second World War in 1945, the United Nations (UN) has undergone a series of transformations in an attempt to make it more responsive to the changing world. Over the years the reform has focused on membership expansion, Charter's amendments, new Committees, and Commissions as well as additional Specialized Agencies. So far, a few amendments have been made to the Charter under the provision of Article 109, with regard to Article 23, 27 and 61. For instance, the membership of the Economic and Social Council expanded from eighteen to twenty-seven in 1965 and it reached fifty-four

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in 1973 (Bailey and Daws 1995). With the independence of the last UN Trust Territory, Palau, the Trusteeship Council formally suspended its operations on November 1, 1994 (Childers & Urquhart 1994). As for the Security Council, a few procedural changes have taken place so far. These include an increase in membership from eleven to fifteen in 1965. In the same year, the Council extended the affirmative vote on all procedural matters to the nine permanent members (formerly seven). However, infidelity with the Charter, the unanimity of votes by the five permanent members (P-5) of the UN Security Council on matters related to peace and security remains sacrosanct. In practice, this potent instrument (unanimity among policymakers) has transformed the P-5 into an alliance of powerful nations, which is exclusive by nature. Against this background, the need to reform the UN becomes even more urgent than ever before given the fact that since September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the US, an increasing number of non-state actors under different labels (rebel groups, liberation movements, militants, insurgents, and terrorist groups) are well prepared to wage asymmetric warfare against state governments, causing untold hardship on civilian populations.

It is worth noting that UN General Assembly Resolution 62/557 of 2008 authorised the launch of intergovernmental negotiations to make the Security Council “more broadly representative, efficient and transparent to enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and the implementation of its decisions” (Patrick, 2019). But it seems that the gridlock has rather taken the place of true reform. The study addressed the question as to how does the politics of alliance downplay the call for the reform of the UN Security Council. The argument is organised around five sections. To begin with, a theoretical framework of the balance of power serves as a useful entry point through which the discussion on the UNSC construed as a grand alliance of winners of war takes place. The paper proceeds with a brief appraisal of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a military alliance of a few powerful nations against the interests of many poor ones before exposing the double-standard intervention of Peace Support Operations (enforcing peace here but keeping the lid on dissent there). In the end, the study highlights some bottlenecks surrounding the reform of the Security Council.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The oldest explanation of alliances as a policy of states’ survival is derived from the balance of power theory (Dwivedi 2012: 227). From a realist perspective, independent states form alliances to maximise their chances of survival in self-help and a hostile environment that characterises the international system. As such an alliance carries both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, states enter into alliances with one another to augment their capabilities. On the other hand, alliance formation helps to reduce the level of threat posed by antagonistic powers. Put differently, strong states enter into an alliance not only to pre-empt any attack from other strong states but also and more importantly to maintain a balance of power. The apparent motive of balancing powers is to prevent any

nation or group of nations from reaching a dominant position (Liska 1962; Snyder 1990; Walt 1987). Snyder (1990) contends that alliances are formed during peacetime while coalitions usually take place during a war. However, both weak and strong nations enter into an alliance to preserve their respective national interests against perceived enemies. They do so either by balancing powers or simply band-wagoning. Balancing consists of allying with others against the prevailing threat whereas band-wagoning is the fact of joining the stronger side for the sake of protection and payoffs (Walt 1987).

In the tradition of alliance forming, the Holy Alliance signed on September 26, 1815, in Paris by the monarchs of Austria, Russia, and Prussia brought an end to the Holy Roman Empire in the aftermath of Napoleonic wars (Cannon, 2002). The idea of keeping France in check later brought Great Britain into the Holy Alliance (Morgenthau 2006: 467). Although it was officially pronounced dead in 1825, the Holy Alliance left the legacy of ad hoc conferences (diplomacy) which evolved into the Concert of Europe, the League of the Nations, and later the United Nations Organization. In the following paragraphs, the study makes a case for the United Nations Security Council as a strong alliance of winners of war that seems to defy any substantial reform.

### **United Nations Security Council as a Grand Alliance**

European history can be summed up as a period during which states were preparing for war, waging war, or recovering from war (Minogue, 1995:52). As far as post-war recovery is concerned, it matters to focus on the end of both World Wars. Towards the end of the First World War, all parties were exhausted and the new world order was needed. Under the impulsion of the United States, the League of Nations came into being in 1920. It was composed of the following political agencies: the General Assembly, the Council, and the Permanent Secretariat. Concerning the decision-making process, both Assembly and the Council had the power to deliberate on matters of common interests, including the prevention of war. It is important to note that membership, in this case, was inclusive, while preponderant power was jointly organised against potential aggressors. However, the invasion of China in 1931 by Japan sent a strong message to Italy and Germany to breach the Covenant at will by aggressing Ethiopia and Poland respectively (Morgenthau 2006: 481). The lack of enforcement mechanism quickly transformed the League of Nations into a toothless bulldog that was unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II (Hanhimaki, 2008).

The Second World War was a truly global conflict, opposing the so-called Grand Alliance headed by the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union to the Axis powers made up of Germany, Italy, and Japan (UN, 2019). In August 1944, delegates from China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom met at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC, to draw up the Charter of the new organisation. Eventually, it was at the Yalta Conference on February 11, 1945,

that leaders of the three major undefeated Allied powers coined a body devoted to international peace and security as the United Nations (Dupre 2010). The new institution that started as an alliance of great powers came into existence when its Charter was finally ratified on June 26, 1945, following the defeat of Germany and the end of the Pacific war between the US and Japan (Hanhimaki, 2008: 13). The UN Charter assigns the responsibility of maintaining peace and security to the members of the Security Council (SC) according to Chapters VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) and Chapter VII (use of force). This highest decision-making body, the Security Council, is made up of 15 member states among which five are permanent (P-5), namely United States, Great Britain, France, China, and Russia whose selection goes back to the Grand Alliance of winners of the war. The ten non-permanent members hold their respective seats for two years only and they are selected by the UN General Assembly to reflect the regional balance. Without any significant power of their own, these nonpermanent members are expected to bandwagon any P-5. Three seats go to Africa while Western Europe/Oceania, Asia, Latin America/the Caribbean get two seats by region and Eastern Europe takes the tenth seat. It is important to note that each year, five of these nonpermanent members leave the SC and are replaced (Hanhimaki 2008: 32).

Interestingly, each permanent member enjoys the veto power or the ability to reject any decision that impinges on their respective national interests. Put differently, all matters require the majority of votes of Council's members but when it comes to critical issues (sanctions, military intervention in conflict zones, admission of a new member, choice of a new secretary-general, and reform of the SC among other things) such a decision must obtain the unanimity of the P-5. This veto power is a reliable instrument for the maintenance of the balance of power construed as a method of conflict management that provides a practical political solution to the problem of coexistence in a decentralised international system (Evans & Newnham 1998). As such the veto game playing among P-5 can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, each permanent member must be always present at the table of decisions if they want to protect their national interests and they must unanimously support any action that has to do with collective security, thus renewing their common stand as a solid alliance of victor nations against the Axis Powers and by extension the rest of the world. On the other hand, the UN is expected to maintain the balance of power among member states instead of becoming, in itself, a supranational power that would run roughshod over its founding members (Mansbach and Rafferty 2008: 486). The claim of the Security Council acting as an alliance of the winners of World War II against the rest is summarised thus:

Today's UN remains essentially dependent on the whims of the P-5 and the specific power constellations among them. At the moment this means that the P-5 is in danger of becoming the P-1, with the United States playing the role of a global hegemon, directing or blocking UN interventions as befits its national interests (Hanhimaki 2008: 69).

Therefore, the prospect of peace as enunciated in the UN Charter (1945) seems to reflect the particular interests of survivors of World War II and their allies throughout the world. A close look at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) sheds more light on the question of alliance making that pays lip service to peace deficit elsewhere in the world.

### **NATO as a Military Alliance**

Four years after the creation of the UN, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom came together and revived the Holy Alliance's tradition by creating the Western European Union on 17 March 1949. This politico-military alliance was meant to keep Germany at bay but in less than a month it had identified new allies: a new Treaty signed in Washington under the name of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) extended its membership to the United States and Canada (NATO, 1949). In a bid to secure its survival in a hostile environment, Russia allied with its satellite states, and together they signed the Warsaw Pact on 14 May 1955. While the end of the Cold War (1990) brought the Warsaw Pact to collapse, it caused NATO to enlarge its membership and capabilities. Today, NATO as the world's most powerful military alliance is committed to the defence of its 30 member states, consisting of 26 European countries; US and Canada in North America; Turkey and North Macedonia recently in Eurasia. Its standing forces on active duty contribute to the Alliance's collective defence efforts permanently (NATO, 2018).

NATO draws its legitimacy from Article 52 which guarantees the existence of regional arrangements or agencies construed as a division of labour, partnership, or delegation of powers between UNSC and such bodies (Fawcett, 2003). However, Lundestad (1998: 167) observes that the founding principle of NATO was to "keep the Russians out, the German down, and the Americans in." In the same way, Rogers (2000: 4) contends that "the function of the Western military is one of keeping the violent peace, being able to project military force anywhere in the world where Western interests are affected." NATO gradually extends its activities to areas that have not been formerly its concerns such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that the NATO intervention in Libya that facilitated the capture and execution of Colonel Gadhafi, by rebel groups in October 2011, was backed by UNSC resolutions 1970 and 1973 (Albert 2013). Unfortunately, it seems that this kind of double standard approach of enforcing peace here and keeping the peace there has become the norm.

### **Keeping the Lid on Instability Elsewhere**

During the Cold War, the East and West Blocs were entangled in proxy wars and as a result, the SC members were unable to develop a joint but neutral military force under the provision of Chapter VII of the UN Charter as earlier discussed. While the Council was bogged down with 'collective suspicion,' the

General Assembly under the presidency of Lester Pearson took over the security agenda and developed the peacekeeping strategy. Given that the concept does not appear in the UN Charter, the then Secretary General Hammarskjöld conceived a technique to be construed as the “Chapter Six and a half” because it was meant to be more robust than Chapter VI but less provocative than Chapter VII (Bailey and Daws 1995: 49; Mansbach and Rafferty: 419; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2005: 134). Initially, UN forces were deployed after warring parties had agreed on a ceasefire and jointly consented to have the UN in-between to monitor the implementation of peace agreements under the provision of Chapter VI. A classic example of this first-generation peacekeeping force took place in 1956, during the Suez Canal crisis when the French and British secretly conspired with the Israelis to drive Egypt away from the territory it had occupied along the Canal (Marten 2004; Ramsbotham et al, 2005).

The UN Emergency Force (UNEF) proved successful as it provided a buffer zone between Egyptian and Israeli forces while forcing the occupying troops to withdraw without admitting defeat. But the same technique could not yield similar results when it was replicated in the Congo crisis in the 1960s (O'Neill and Rees 2005: 57) and thereafter. The 1992 UN Agenda for Peace developed by the then UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali was meant to serve as a blueprint for UN engagement in conflict zones in post-Cold War environment through five stages: preventive diplomacy; peacemaking; peacekeeping; peace enforcement; and post-conflict peacebuilding. The then UN Chief-Scribe had believed in the cooperation of the P-5 that legitimised the joint military operation in the Gulf War to rescue Kuwait from the jaws of Iraq in 1991. Whereas the first four stages of the UN Agenda for peace translate the letters of the Charter (Chapters VI and VII), post-conflict peacebuilding can be regarded as Boutros-Ghali's innovation. According to Richmond (2014), peacebuilding which is akin to a Cold War peace settlement is described as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict.”

However, from Haiti to Somalia, Rwanda, and Angola or Burundi, there was no peace to keep when the Second Generation of Peacekeeping troops arrived with poor logistics and inadequate preparation (Francis, 2006). Marten (2004: 26) argues that “the notion of monitoring simple ceasefires became meaningless in conflicts where the warring parties were not sovereign states but informal rebel groups with factional splits.” Even though the link is not fully established, the humiliation of US troops in Somalia in 1993 led the Clinton Administration, in the national security document, Presidential Decision Directive, PDD-25 to take the hard decision on May 3, 1994, thus prohibiting US troops from participating in any subsequent peacekeeping operation which does not reflect American interests (Gasbarri 2017; Adeshina 2013). The records of the UN since 1997 in the Balkans and elsewhere paint a rather negative picture: peace support operations have become the business of poor nations by poor nations in poor nations. Concerning the protracted conflict in eastern Congo, Stearns (2011:

334) argued that: “NATO sent 50,000 troops from some of the best armies to Kosovo in 1999, a country one-fifth the size of South Kivu. In the Congo, the UN peacekeeping mission plateaued at 20,000 troops, mostly from South Asia, ill-equipped and with little to carry out risky military operations.”

Given that Western Europe and North America have enjoyed an apparent peace since the end of the World War II, thanks to the veto power of the P-5, the continuous production and sale of weapons of war by the same most powerful nations raise fundamental questions surrounding the nature of mainstream peace model propagated by the UN. Chandler (2017) contends that twenty years of external engineering in conflict zones under the banner of UN (1997-2017) have produced a crisis of legitimacy in terms of less democracy and more autocratic regimes, corruption, political instability, and the likes. It is against this poor record that the reform of the decision-making body of the UN is called for.

### **Reforming the UNSC: Some Bottlenecks Exposed**

The apparent end of rivalries in the post-Cold War era ushered in new optimism over the possibility of P-5 to reach unanimity in the decision making processes but tragic events in the Balkans in the early 1990s made a mockery of an assumed happy ending (Ferguson, 2006). In Africa, the 1993 Somali debacle produced a smokescreen that covered the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, thus preventing any concerted action in the Security Council for up to a hundred days (Gasbarri 2017). Persistent calls for reform of the UN over the years have produced membership expansion, Charter’s amendments, new Committees, and Commissions as well as additional Specialized Agencies (Childers and Urquhart 2004). However, Patrick (2019) contends that “the most recent push for UNSC reform occurred around the UN World Summit of 2005.” In his address to the General Assembly on September 23, 2003, the then Secretary General Kofi Annan revisited the issue of reform as he challenged the US unilateral resolve to invade Iraq. He said, “Excellences, we have come to a fork in the road... Now we must decide whether it is possible to continue on the rules agreed then, or whether radical changes are needed (Traub 2006: 204). He went on to launch a sixteen-member High –Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. Introducing the Panel report to the General Assembly one year later, the UN Chief reiterated the call for reform: “The United Nations must be reshaped in ways not previously imagined and with boldness and speed not previously shown” (UN 2005). He argued that a comprehensive reform of the United Nations should include the SC whose membership has been anachronistic or insufficiently representative (para. 165 and 169). In the next paragraphs, the paper identified two major roadblocks surrounding the UNSC Reform, namely membership expansion and the creation of an EU seat.

## **Membership Expansion**

The expansion move proposed by the High-level Panel and endorsed by Kofi Annan in 2005 was aimed at providing more permanent seats, bringing the core group to P-6 or P-7. A member of the G4 (Brazil, Japan, India, and Germany) seems to qualify based on several reasons: Brazil is the largest Latin American nation, India is the world's largest democracy and second-most populous country, Japan and Germany being second and third largest funders of the UN. In the meantime, China sees the US-backed Japan as a rival in Asia and it is prepared to oppose its integration (Mansbach et al. 2008: 429). Together with Russia, they expect the decision about the SC expansion to be consensual, which is an illusion. On the other hand, America does not favour the inclusion of Germany in SC (Traub 2006: 371). From an American perspective, the UN through the SC serves as a tool that helps to manage the world in which the US is the dominant power and as a result, a UN seal of approval is ruled out (USIP 2006). As for one African in Africa, a lot must be cast in favour of Nigeria being the most populous Black nation in the world, South Africa as the biggest economy in sub-Saharan Africa and Egypt representing the Arab League in Northern Africa (Fasulo 2004).

## **EU Seeking a Seat at the Security Council**

The failure of France and the United Kingdom to reach an agreement on the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 indicates that sometimes national interests can clash with the EU's external policy in the Security Council Chamber and it is difficult to know which one comes first. For the EU member states as a whole, the UNSC reform means that the Union should be granted a status of sovereignty and become *ipso facto* a permanent member of the Security Council (Sylvester 2004). The point is that though many EU member states function as one single sovereign State inhabited by about 500 million people with common currency, flag, army (NATO), and territory (Smadja 2006: 371). Equally important is the view of the European Parliament: "One seat would be the logical consequence of the EU's ambition to conduct a common foreign and security policy and to speak with one voice in world affairs" (Leinen 2006: 375).

Meanwhile, the fact remains that the UN member states that must agree on the Security Council reform "are not going to put themselves out of power, nor will US work to get rid of its two best allied, France and the UK, in the Council" (Fasulo 2004: 50). In the same way, former US Ambassador to the UN, John R. Bolton says: "The most likely future role for the UN will be an approximate continuation of its muddled, incoherent and marginally important present status (Dupre 2010: 202). As Patrick (2019) puts it, "In the absence of a global catastrophe, such as a war between major powers, deadlock on UNSC reform is likely to persist." In other words, through concerted efforts among member States, the UN may one day become more democratic, efficient, and transparent as many reports have suggested

but such peripheral changes are far from affecting the way critical decisions are made at the Security Council.

Going by the UN report of the advisory group of experts which recognises a generalised misunderstanding of the nature of peacebuilding itself (UN 2015), sustaining the peace by local actors rather than exporting it into conflict zones seems to be the way forward. Chandler (2017: 7) argues that the UN's shift away from peacebuilding undertaken by Western technocrats to local actors expected to manage their own 'sustainable solutions, stems from a rejection of the interventionist approaches developed and popularised in the 1990s. This shift has the merit of putting people at the centre as both beneficiaries and architects of sustainable peace, contrary to the mainstream approach which requires the UNSC seal of approval.

## **Conclusion**

The creation of the United Nations was not an innovative peace project but a continuation of great powers' practice in the international system to date. This paper has reopened the debate on the UN reform of the UN Security Council and found out that the P-5 would not compromise their respective national interests. The inclusion of more countries from the South for the sake of representativeness and the creation of a brand new seat for the EU are among the suggestions but they both turn the UNSC reform into pie in the sky, as long as the process of reaching unanimity of votes is undermined by the veto power. It appears, therefore, that any attempt to effect positive change to the Security Council is sacrificed on the altar of stability (balance of power). In other words, the five permanent members have entered into an alliance to prevent any nation from having hegemonic powers. At 75, the UN seems to be heading towards its natural death (old age) when it is being overtaken by non-state actors that are capable of waging asymmetric wars against sovereign states under the watch of the Security Council. The study recommends, therefore, a new conceptualisation of peace which is not only culturally rooted and in the reach of the citizenry but also free from the whims of the P-5 and cost-effective.

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# REMOULDING AFRICAN POLITICAL CULTURE: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS' WOMEN

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## Abstract

In terms of natural resources, Africa is the world's richest continent, yet it contains a growing share of the world's absolute poor. The poor have little power to influence the allocation of resources. African Political Culture has been implicated as one of the reasons contemporary Africa is plagued by bad governance. Political culture is a distinctive and patterned form of political philosophy that consists of beliefs on how governmental, political, and economic life should be carried out. The Africa continent has remained underdeveloped due to poor governance. African countries will continue to be racked by conflicts unless leaders demonstrate the political will on how to govern their multi-faceted nation-states. The United Nations have acknowledged that Women are a powerful and yet untapped force. In 2010, therefore, an agency, UN Women, was created (the United Nations entity for gender equality). Against this backdrop, this paper examines the activities of the UN Women, its advocacy for legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to political spheres—as voters, candidates, elected officials. And elections need to uphold women's rights, including the right to vote and campaign, free from electoral violence. The paper argues that women are key to finding lasting solutions to problems all over the world and suggests that there is a need for women's full involvement in remolding the Africa political culture in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** UN Women, Culture, Governance, Political Culture, Elections, Underdevelopment.

## Introduction

Culture, which comprises of philosophy and religion, art and literature, science and technology, social organisation and political administration, is the mirror of the theory and practice of a people (Balasubramania, 2015). It originated, developed, and sustained by the people over some time. Political culture is the traditional orientation of the citizens of a nation toward politics, affecting their perceptions of political legitimacy. Political culture is a distinctive and patterned form of political philosophy that consists of beliefs on how governmental, political, and

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economic life should be carried out. African countries have been characterized by intolerance and tribal and inter-ethnic conflict. The activities of militias, militants, and religious-fundamentalist groups seem commonplace (Akumu, 2015). Muslim-Christian relationships in some countries are not cordial while numerous civil wars and conflicts are still going on in Africa. Political corruption, lack of respect for rule of law, human rights abuses, poverty, and many other social vices have been implicated as some of the reasons behind these conflicts. Despite all the wealthy resources, including human and material in its possession, Africa is the world's poorest continent (Addae-Korankye, 2014). What are the causes? Today, the active participation of women on equal terms, with men at all levels of decision making and political involvement, would be essential to the achievement of sustainable development. The inclusion of their perspectives and experiences into the decision making processes would promote peace and democratic good governance. Fundamental to the constraints that women face is an entrenched patriarchal system in which family control and decision-making powers are in the hands of males (Miambo, Kapinguru & Meissner, 2019). Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected offices, the civil service, the private sector or academia.

This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance. Women face several obstacles to participating in political life. Structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women's options to run for office. Capacity gaps mean women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts, and resources needed to become effective leaders. As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes, "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women." This paper examines these obstacles. It explores how women interact with political structures and how they mobilize themselves to impact the state, society, and legal systems, as well as regional and international systems. Thus, it studies African women's participation in the political arena, their challenges, and struggles for their rights and their impact on their countries' laws and policies, drawing examples from UN Women activism.

## **African Cultural Background**

Discourse on the rights of women has been a major focus on contemporary scholarship in Africa. Many scholars of feminist studies have somewhat been unanimous that aspects of African culture are hostile to women, hence the need for a paradigm shift so that the supposed hitherto marginalised women can be emancipated. Familusi (2012) has suggested that the cultural and gender problem which African women have been facing dates back to their birth, as in many homes the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of enthusiastic reception that is

usually accorded to a baby boy. Thus, the female child is treated with inferiority right from birth. Some of them may perpetually be caught in the web of such treatment. He noted that immediately a child is born, the question that would be posed would centre on sex, not minding the health of the mother. If the baby is a female, the mother will be scolded and treated as lazy and good for nothing woman. On the other hand, if the child is a male, praises will be showered on the mother, not considering the fact that biology has shown that it is the father who determines the sex of the offspring. According to Maluleke (2012), culture is like an umbrella under which some people like to hide from the rain, and also to shade themselves from the sun. But sometimes you need to fold it. Traditional cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others have become harmful to a specific group, such as women. Despite their harmful nature and their violation of national and international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned or challenged and therefore take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practising them.

The multiplicity and diversity of African societies are reflected in the broad literature devoted to the study of women and gender in Africa. They encompass several thousand ethnolinguistic groups and fifty-five sovereign states. Indeed, the global arena is dominated by the popular conviction that Africans require foreign direction in the socioeconomic management of their societies (Lauer 2017). The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a new continent-wide development strategy targeted at halting its underdevelopment. Partnership should not only be limited to just countries but all groups as well, including women groups. But African leaders seem not to have come to grips with the fact that the foreign governmental processes they so cherished had evolved in economic, industrial, political, and social complex state systems. Sometimes there are tensions between the principles supporting governance issues such as an electoral process and the promotion of majority rule. Giving a voice for minority inclusiveness and freedom of expression, the free press, and political culture is often suppressed. In some cases, regional institutions have only paid lip service. Elites amend the constitution to reserve for themselves unfettered discretion of public affairs, often times marginalising the certain groups, including women.

It appears that electoral systems in some African countries have fallen short of the expectation of a democratic process due to non-compliance with the rule of law, lack of the practice of constitutionalism, weak institution, and bad political culture (Chigudu, 2019). The NEPAD policy initiators sought to promote the roles of women in all activities as one of its long term goal of developing Africa through various strategies spelled out under International Development Goal by promoting income generating avenue that can enhance the status of women. But according to Muhibbu-Din (2011), NEPAD policy design, planning, and implementation have

neither been inclusive nor participatory of the views, perspectives, yearnings, and aspirations of women. It does not address women's problems in a way that can facilitate women empowerment. The importance of women in African society is portrayed in a Ghanaian proverb that says, 'a woman is a flower in a garden, her husband is the fence around.' But to what extent is this being appreciated?

African politics is based on high political virility – those who have all it takes to compete in the turbulent environment; those who possess the wherewithal to take it by force when force is required; those that can march violence with violence. This belief that men possess the superiority strength, competitiveness, and self-reliance are held onto and political arena made rather too inclement for women endeavor. As a result, women are considered too passive to engage in politics and governance. This perception is also constructed by societal norms and values, which through socialisation has defined different gender roles according to biological differences. Women's perception of politics as a dirty game and continued fright at the thought of violence has further alienated them from mainstream politics. Agbalajobi (2010) identified factors responsible for low participation of women in Nigerian politics as gender roles, women's conception of politics, lack of financial backing, discriminatory customs and laws, and none implementation of the Affirmative Action quota. Other factors are inadequate knowledge of written and unwritten rules protecting women's political rights, and religious doctrines.

However, there have been several movements to the commitment, both to the personal and social change of women in their status in public life. Through a series of women enlightenment, emancipation and conscious rising of groups on women's movement, women's marginalisation in politics has been reduced to an extent. Women through several of these platforms have played influential roles and this has further spurred more women into politics. Agbalajobi also identified some factors leading to the growth of women participation in politics, women empowerment programs as activities of UN and other International Organizations, quotas, and proportional representations. In his conclusion, he stated that women's participation in politics is an issue of great importance, but that has been put in the background politically for years. This has engendered a consciousness of women under-representation in public life. However, women should participate in politics and support their female folks. This is their substantive responsibility, and it is even on this platform that most women emerge as public office holders successfully.

Be that as it may, there is an increase in women's participation in politics and other male-dominated fields, and women's movements are promising in achieving gender equality and equity. Also, the number of female politicians, scholars, lawyers, and activists is increasing throughout Africa. Women are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, time managers, community organisers, and social and political activist. But despite the major roles they play and their population,

the society has not given recognition to these and to the fact that women are discriminated against. This is due to some cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices, and patriarchal societal structures. They are often targeted for violence of diverse forms based on their positions in promoting transformative politics. Women constitute a high proportion of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally. According to Agbalajobi (2010), in most societies, women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer, and socio-cultural and political activists. Of these roles mentioned, the last has been led by women's movements and attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality. Hitherto the emergence of these movements, gender roles were divided between the male and female sexes. These roles can be broadly classified into productive and reproductive gender roles. Whereas the productive gender roles were mainly associated with male sex, reproductive gender roles were exclusive to their female counterparts.

One aspect of life, affirming the nature of African religion, is the belief about the ultimate control of spiritual beings over fertility. Women play an essential role in the continuity of human society, yet in many African systems of thought women, sexuality is regarded as ambivalently. Women are regarded not only as producers of life but also as sources of danger as expressed in the notion about the polluting nature of blood, especially the blood of menstruation and the blood of childbirth. (Kilson, 2016). Such notions of pollutions underlie rituals intended to separate unclean women from contact with others or to neutralize the source of pollution. Women are, therefore, anomalous creatures intimately associated with the wellbeing of society through their life-giving attributes and deeply threatening to live through their polluting qualities. Traditionally, African religious ideology, therefore, stresses the domestic orientation of women's lives, affirming their reproductive role while disdaining other aspects of their sexuality.

The dualism of African religious ideology, according to Kilson, reinforces the secular social structure. Three basic social principles are affirmed, the subordination of female to male, the separation of male from female, and the complementarity of male and female. In religious institutions, as in secular ones, the male is recognised as generically superior to females, though specific women may be superior to certain males. Therefore, fertility and vitality of humanity and its world represent important religious goals. Such goals reaffirm women's domestic and inferior orientations in society. In and of themselves, therefore, African traditional religious ideologies do not promote social change. Besides, discrimination and subjection of women are further enforced by custom, traditional practices, beliefs, and the law, behind which stood the coercive force of the state. The customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem. The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms, and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in some women and places them at a disadvantage, vis-à-vis their male counterpart in the socio-political scene even in urban centres (Anifowose 2004). Anti (2020) aligned with the

above views by asserting that though women are regarded as producers of life, and they are also seen as spiritual sources of danger. The ritually 'dangerous' nature of women is expressed in notions about the polluting nature of blood, as earlier mentioned. It is such notions of pollution which underlie rituals intended to separate 'unclean' women from contact with others. Thus, in connection with religious functions, menstruating women are banned from the shrines, neither are they allowed handling or touching religious objects or personalities. For instance, among the rules to be observed by trainee priestesses is one which stipulates that she should voluntarily absent herself from the shrine for seven days each month during her menstrual period. This ban stems from the belief that menstrual blood is impure and dangerously harmful to sacred objects. Hence, during this period, women are banned from entering palaces, shrines, and other places where rituals are performed. These entire negative attitudes towards women coming from the concept of 'impure blood' could be eradicated through education.

In this regard, Etim (2015) described religion as the beliefs and practices associated with the supernatural which embrace a creed, a code, and a cult. The creed deals with the philosophy, beliefs, or faith of the people, the code with the ethical dimension, while the cult focuses on the ritual ceremonies of the religion. Looking at how these definitions affect women, we observe from the Oriental world that women are kept behind the veil. Jewish thought, for example, did not regard women as a necessity but merely as helpers to men. The Jews had a rigid masculine concept of God who was the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob', but not the God of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachael. To St. Paul, it was a taboo for women to speak in the church. She was to ask her husband at home if there was anything that she wanted to know. However, today, there are many women religious leaders speaking in churches and various places. In Islam, women could only lead prayers for a congregation of women. And in the mosque women are not to stand in the same row with the men but separately behind the rows of men. Customs die-hard and only conscious and consistent educational programmes mounted at all levels, and on all fronts can defeat the tyranny of obnoxious customs and traditions which discriminate against women. Tracing the historical origin of male domination according to Anifowose (2004) is impossible, but believes that one highly plausible explanation is to be found in physical difference. Men are generally heavier, taller, and even physically stronger than women and, therefore, more capable than women to enforce their will through physical violence and threat of violence. Women on the other hand are vulnerable because of their role in childbearing and nursing.

Gouws and Hassim, (2015) also contended that Africa is a continent where creative experimenting with political orders is omnipresent. He observed that there is a rise of new actors and the emergence of new institutions and ways of conflict resolution. The new African leaders typically were neither personally wealthy nor were they experienced in protecting the economic rights of others. The use of government power as the basis of wealth accumulation, diversion of resources



meant for development into personal bank accounts abroad became the order of the day. The descent into kleptocracy--government by a ruling body of thieves; a nation ruled by thieves, weak sense of common nationhood-- in many parts of African countries like Nigeria and Sudan has been the bane of development. Nigeria is like a castle in the air, the story of Niger Delta, huge manpower yet lack of investment in human capital persist (intellectual flight). Increasing political participation, yet hybrid regimes dominate; more Aid, yet "business as usual" and capital flight. Globalisation and information technology but largely a consumer population, and apparent exclusion of women, all constitute the key problems in African political culture.

Political culture is a dynamic phenomenon. Power, legitimacy, and violence are at its core. (Balasubramanian, 2015). Nonetheless, there are some key aspects of African culture which are also unique to Africa. For example, kidnapping your bride (Sudan), putting a price on the bride (South Africa and Nigeria), spitting your blessings (Kenya and Tanzania), wealth measured in the number of cows (Kenya and Nigeria), and so on. African countries are diverse in many ways, including history and culture, incomes, natural endowments, and human resources. And in considering Africa's potential, it is worth remembering that the region contains Botswana, one of the world's fastest-growing economies in recent decades. An easy conclusion is that the African continent is responsible for its woes due to the kind of political culture they have chosen to adopt and the citizen's lukewarm attitudes towards their predicament. Political culture is key to understand and to explain this process of creativity and adaptation. It includes political actions, normative rules, institutional arrangements, discourses, rituals, and symbols.

## **Theoretical Framework**

It is customary to review the body of theories underlying the concepts under consideration in a study like this. Therefore, in examining and understanding issues of culture and how women are affected, the Modernization theory would be very important. Modernization is a process that changes society from a traditional economic model to an industrial one. As a result of this economic change and empowerment, the people in the society are forced to change to adapt to new norms and way of life. It is a model of a progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional to modern society. Some of the positive effects are enhanced medical facilities, smart cities, quality of communications, etc. This theory will not only explain the relationship that exists between the various factors being studied but also enhance a better understanding of the working of these factors. It is generally believed that the spread of modernization and western ideas offered women greater opportunities and improved social status. According to Brown (1988), three assumptions are influenced by gender differences. The first assumption is that within a given society, economic growth is gender-neutral or blind and as such, both men and women will benefit equally from it. The second

assumption is that within households in any society, the burdens and benefits of wealth and poverty will be distributed equally regardless of gender. The third assumption is that the traditional western model of a “household” in which a father, a mother, and children share common interests and work towards common goals is applicable in all societies. Unfortunately, none of these assumptions hold. This study will provide evidence that the problem of gender inequalities cannot be fully explained by theories of development.

It is argued that some traditional cultures, and especially the religious ideas that underpin the values, norms, institutions, and customs of the developing world, ascribe status based on gender. In practice, this means that males are accorded patriarchal control and dominance over a range of female activities and, consequently, women have little status in developing societies. (Thompson 2017). Modernization theorists note that gender equality is generally greater in more developed countries and believes that there is a relationship between modernisation, economic growth, and greater gender equality. The World Bank appears to be a strong proponent of this view today. Therefore, modernization theory leads to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, failing to take into consideration the context of the western society in which it developed and that of the pre-modern societies. Furthermore, the establishment of commercialized agriculture contributed to the loss of women’s economic power. In Africa, commercialization often led to the granting of government titles to the land, credit, and technical training. (Anunobi, 2002). Consequently, there was a transfer of farmland that had been controlled by women to male ownership. Also, as family moved from subsistence agriculture to commercial one and as commercial plantations were developed by foreigners, men were more into farming unlike before. Modernization has not always been politically beneficial to the mass of underprivileged African women. Traditional cultures sometimes portray women’s organisation negatively and deprive them of organisational benefits that they may have access to enjoy.

The modernisation and commercialisation of agriculture, and the resulting decline of traditional labour relations, have further deprived rural women of their specialised labour functions. As a result, these transformations may at least in the short run, reduce women’s political influence and power. The debate on the state, democracy, and civil society in Africa as engendered by modernisation has tended to ignore the gender dimension and has mainly adopted a gender-neutral approach. For instance, elections, campaigns, and party politics have been perceived as a gender-neutral process that affects both men and women equally. Similarly, the democratic process has further been treated as a gender-neutral process, in which men and women have equal access to the opportunities, resources, and instruments that enhance their participation and winning elections, but that is not always so.

## **Women and Politics in Modern Africa**

Etim, (2015) noted that Nigerian women are still some distance away from gender equality and balance, despite some of the policies put in place to assist gender mainstreaming. Because men have refused to act in ways that can accelerate the attainment by women of the 35% Affirmative Action, whether now or in the nearest future. Etim, therefore, concludes that the 2015 general election in Nigeria was “of men, by men and for men”. The exclusion of women in politics has been identified in recent times as one of the major setbacks for economic development. (Orisadare 2019). Women’s groups are a strong pillar for grassroots politics. And a drive for more women participating in politics at the grassroots still faces a lot of challenges, making it difficult for them to harness available opportunities for economic development. The case of Women in Nigeria (WIN) has shown the importance of associational autonomy.

Feminism in Nigeria in its present form, consistent, organised with clear objectives and ideology came into being with the inauguration of WIN (Madunagu. 2008). When the Nigerian elections were annulled in 1993, WIN together with human rights and pro-democracy activists launched a campaign against human rights abuses. WIN contributed to the restoration of civil rule. According to Nelson (2016), it is often difficult to build movement coherence, particularly when personality and power conflicts take over organisations. Women’s organisations in Africa have a different foci – that of improving leadership skills, promoting women’s leadership, demanding legislative changes, and political involvement. Others are involved in advocacy groups, organise around violence, against rape, reproductive rights, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation. In these issue areas, women’s groups form networks and alliances and more stable interest clusters.

African states have ratified several human rights instruments, protecting the human rights of women in Africa with the solemn commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination and harmful practices against women. Such declarations include the African Charter on Human and People’s Right, set up in Addis Ababa and Maputo protocol in Mozambique; yet women in Africa continue to experience human rights violations. Most African women are denied the equal enjoyment of their human rights, in particular under the lesser status ascribed to them by tradition and custom, or as a result of overt or covert discrimination (Ssenyonjo, 2017). As stated by Skinner (1988) in his work on African political cultures and the problem of governance, “There is also general agreement in most African countries that coups must end, corruption must be rooted out, and economies must be restored . . . .” But there is less agreement among Africans about the meaning of democracy. Many Africans believe that the larger issue of governance is related to the general conditions in African countries.

Some African scholars have stated that there were traditional forms of democracy, autocracy, monarchy, and oligarchy in state-organised societies as well as stateless societies in their pre-colonial history. They assert that African traditional political systems functioned, “not because of their forms, but because they fulfilled felt needs in societies”. Skinner submits that the problem of governance in contemporary Africa is to recognise and to satisfy the goals and aspirations of different groups and their leaders. Women’s organisations were able to organise across ethnic boundaries but their links to ruling parties prevented them from having autonomous agendas. Women are key to finding lasting solutions to problems all over the world. Discriminatory laws and practices, for example, pregnancy discrimination act, employment laws, age discriminations hold women back, and limits on education. Moreover, income and time away from caregiving and also the extent to which women can obtain political access is largely influenced by a society’s political culture. Cultural attitudes, identity politics as well as the economic barriers accompany gender roles (Gouws and Hassim (2015). In Nigeria, for example, there are just six female parliamentarians out of one hundred and nine in the Senate. While women have made inroads in many areas, at the current pace of change, there is still gender parity in governments, parliaments, and peace talk tables.

As presented by UN Women (2015), The Beijing conference agreement, known as the Platform for Action, dubbed women in power and decision-making one of 12 critical areas of concern. It made two essential commitments to change. First, it called for measures ensuring women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Political quotas or positive measures are examples of these. By reserving seats or candidacies for women, they have driven dramatic increases in the number of women leaders in some countries. For example, in Rwanda, 65% of the legislatures are female. Second, the Platform urged steps to increase women’s ability to participate. Training on leadership, public speaking, and political campaigning, for instance, grooms women to compete, win, and be good leaders who can inspire others. Women have the right to equal participation. Once in leadership roles, they could make a difference that benefits whole societies. According to the UNW (2015) report, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has noted that women politicians give more attention to social welfare and legal protections, and improve trust. Taking up the Beijing commitments and rallying around women’s leadership could accelerate progress towards equal participation now.

It is also important to note that for women to achieve their political objectives, women need to develop different platforms that will serve as a strong interest group that is capable of influencing government policies in their favour and resist the temptation of being boxed into a difficult situation. There is no gainsaying the fact that women empowerment campaigners have engaged issues that border on cultural, economic, social, and political subjugation over the years without much progress. For example, there has been a campaign that “the solution to hire more

women is just to hire more women” (Nelson, 2016). This is so much easier said than done. Bringing women to the forefront of technology is much more than just hiring more women. Young girls need to be inspired to go into technology, and they need to see themselves in leadership roles. If men are still the majority on technology panels and are most of the world’s coders and engineers, then young women are not able to easily see themselves in those positions. There is certainly progress with how many women work in technology around the world, but so much work still needs to be done. As a result, there is a need for a paradigm shift; individualism would be jettisoned for collectivism. Specification of office for the women should be de-emphasized to enable wider aspirations. Women should form a common front and fight as one. It is within this context that women could achieve much needed socio-economic and political equity.

## **UN Women: Goals, Functions, and Interventions**

UN Women’s programs on leadership and participation are guided by a history of international commitments to women’s representation. The Convention on ‘the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women’ upholds women’s right to participate in public life, while the Beijing Platform for Action calls for removing barriers to equal participation (UNW, 2015). The Millennium Development Goals measure progress towards gender equality, in part, by the proportion of women in parliamentary seats. Towards these ends, training is provided for women political candidates to help build their capacities, and offer civic education and sensitisation campaigns on gender equality. Gender equality advocacy is backed in calling on political parties, governments, and others to do their part in empowering women. Other initiatives encourage young men and women to engage in advocacy around making gender equality measures central to public policymaking. UN Women advocates for legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women’s fair access to political spheres-as voters, candidates, elected officials, and civil service members. They collaborate with UN country teams and work with civil society on programs so that elections uphold women’s rights, including the right to vote and campaign free from electoral violence. (UN Women, 2015).

National plans, policies, institutions, and budgets are where governments begin to translate commitments to women into practical progress towards gender equality. Too often, however, they overlook measures to ensure that public services respond to women’s needs and priorities. Viewing these dimensions of governance through a gender equality lens means putting aside the conventional assumption that they are gender-neutral. It entails comprehensively assessing gender gaps and identifying actions to close them. Changes to promote gender equality need to be backed by adequate funds, and systematically monitored for progress in reducing gender discrimination. (Jekayinfa, 2009). UN Women works across aspects of governance that can most readily accelerate progress towards gender equality. They help bridge disconnects between national development strategies and gender

equality plans. To reform public institutions, they support steps such as cultivating the capacities of public officials to integrate gender equality measures in plans and budgets and select performance indicators for oversight. They advocate transparent and adequate public financing for gender equality, including through the adoption of gender-responsive budgets that channel adequate resources to both women and men. Engagement with gender equality advocates helps strengthen their skills to influence public decision-making and hold governments accountable. At the UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on the Status of Women and elsewhere, they play central roles in supporting a stronger normative framework for financing for gender equality and strengthening public sector capacity and accountability. (UN, 2014)

Further reports by UNW (2015) stated that in Kenya, the 2013 elections had the number of women legislators rose to more than 20 percent, more than double compared to the previous elections. UN Women contributed to this result by providing training to nearly 900 female candidates in all 47 counties and running a Campaign for Women in Leadership to encourage voters to vote for women. In Zimbabwe, a new constitution that is strong on women's rights was signed into law, which resulted in women gaining 35 percent of the seats in the 2013 July elections, compared to a previous 17 percent in 2008. Behind the breakthrough was the Group of 20, a constitutional gender equality lobbying group, comprising activists, politicians, and scholars supported by UN Women. According to the UNDP report, in July 2015, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development concluded with a clear recognition of gender equality as a critical element in achieving sustainable development, with States adopting the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. UN Women intensely engaged in the negotiations, advocating for a commitment to transformative financing for gender equality. UN Women now work with a group of Member States to implement an Action Plan on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, to ensure that the gender commitments that were included in the agreed text will be turned into actions. The UN system now stands ready to support governments in the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda, which builds on the successful outcome in Addis Ababa.

### **Women: Towards A New Political Culture in Africa**

South Africa's cabinet is now 50% women for the first time. The appointment of more women along with several younger politicians reflects a good balance of youth, gender, geographical spread, and experience (Fleming 2019). South Africa joins a list of ten other countries that have achieved gender parity- or female majority in the cabinets. Other African countries are Ethiopia and Rwanda. Stronger equity in government is essential for any thriving democracy, gender diversity in public institutions is particularly crucial, given that these decision making bodies create the rules that affect people's rights, behaviour and life choices. Also, two African women are among seven candidates to be the next director-general of the World

Trade Organization (WTO). They were nominated alongside candidates from Egypt, South Korea, Mexico, Moldova, and Britain. There is broad support to pick a candidate from Africa and a woman. No African has been WTO director-general since its founding in 1995, nor headed its predecessor organisation, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which started in 1948 (World Economic Forum).

Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women show that while the number of women in government is increasing, it is at a slow pace. According to the United Nations Women (UN Women), women entering politics is progressing slowly. “The snail’s pace of progress on gender equality and women’s participation in public and political life will need to be tackled head-on for the overall success of the new goals”. Only 22 percent of all national parliamentarians were female as of August 2015, a slow increase from 11.3 percent in 1995. As of August 2015, 11 women served as Heads of State and 13 served as Heads of Government. Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women, there have won 63.8 percent of seats in the lower house. Globally, there are 37 states in which women account for less than 10 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of August 2015, including 6 chambers with no women (Miambo, Kapinguru &Meissner 2019).

### **Women Political Representation across Regions**

Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region, across all chambers (single, lower and upper houses). As of August 2015, these were: Nordic countries, 41.1 percent; Americas, 25.5 percent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 24.4 percent; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.0 percent; Asia, 18.4 percent; the Middle East and North Africa, 17.1 percent; and the Pacific, 15.7 percent (Miambo, Kapinguru &Meissner 2019)

### **Women Representation in Other Domains of Government**

As of January 2015, only 17 percent of government ministers were women, with the majority overseeing social sectors, such as education and the family. Women’s representation in local governments has made a difference. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62 percent higher than in those with male-led councils. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found. (Miambo, Kapinguru &Meissner 2019).

### **Expanding Participation: What is Needed**

Thirty percentage is widely considered an important benchmark for women’s representation. As of January 2015, 41 single or lower houses were composed of

more than 30 percent of women, including 11 in Africa and 9 in Latin America. Out of the 41 countries, 34 had applied some form of quotas opening space for women's political participation. Specifically, 17 use legislative candidate quotas; six use reserve seats; and in a further 11, parties have adopted voluntary quotas. In countries with proportional electoral systems, women hold 25.2 percent of the seats. This compares with 19.6 percent using the plurality-majority electoral system, and 22.7 percent using a mixed system. More women in politics do not necessarily correlate with lower levels of corruption, as is often assumed. Rather, democratic and transparent politics is correlated with low levels of corruption, and the two create an enabling environment for more women to participate.

Many of the conflicts today are as much between States as between State and non-State actors. Increasingly, these non-State actors are claiming the territoriality and legitimacy of governments. This makes it all the more urgent that the international community support women's role and agency and leadership to rein in the forces of terror and violence, in protecting themselves and the community. A possibility of bringing their sons and daughters to the peace table, and being there to hold them to the purpose of peace, to rebuild peaceful and sustainable societies and economies. Through education, children are either taught not to hate or to love, raise leaders who act with wisdom and compassion, and establish a true, lasting culture of peace and with women's disposition. Mothers, grandmothers, and other family members often being the first teachers of children, they can play a vital role in educating young people to value peace and not war. And who can be better at this than women who are natural nurturers, who are better disposed to find solutions through dialogue, are sensitive to human needs and rights and inter-generational perspectives?

The role of women in achieving a culture of peace has also been affirmed in various normative instruments of the United Nations. Perhaps, most importantly is the landmark of the Security Council resolution 1325 on peace and security. The Security Council adopted resolution 2122, which reaffirmed the role of women in peace and security, mentioning gender equality as necessary to ensure sustainable peace (UNW, 2015). As the global leader on gender equality and the empowerment of women, UN Women strives to promote women's ability to strengthen peace and dialogue within their communities. At all levels, they work to amplify the voices of women in peace activities and facilitate their access to peace and security decision-making. They support women's peace coalitions in South Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Colombia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Nepal, among other places (UNW, 2015). In Liberia, women devised the peace hut mechanism in which local women leaders mediate and resolve local and domestic conflicts before they escalate into violence. In the peace huts in rural Liberia, women leaders are also referring survivors to services, liaising with local police through a mobile phone hotline, and engaging in local peacebuilding efforts (UNW, 2015).



In South Sudan, UN Women has supported in select communities women's empowerment centre where sexual and gender-based violence-prevention activities and referrals take place (UNW, 2015). In Liberia, Timor-Leste, Uganda, and Haiti, UN Women is supporting local organisations to build referral services and networks for survivors, such as reproductive health care, access to justice, livelihood support, and psychosocial counselling (UNW, 2015). On the 5th of October 2013, elections doubled women representation in the Cameroon National Assembly. This unprecedented increase brings the proportion of women in the National Assembly to 31 percent, a result of synergy between actors, adoption of an Electoral Code, and involvement of a gender expert (UNW, 2015). Despite the progress seen in promoting the rights of women and their roles in peace processes, challenges remain in terms of gender equality and equity.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

This paper examined the African political culture to understand the challenges women face. The paper noted the contributions of UN Women in African political culture. It showed that women empowerment is crucial to advancing the culture of peace in all its sectors, be it education, sustainable economic and social development, human rights and equality, democratic participation. It is now acceptable that African societies would achieve sustainability by involving women in politics and by remoulding the African political culture. African women constitute a vital number of the population of the continent and, thus, should play a vital role in society. Women have been stakeholders in bringing together knowledge and expertise by adding new dimensions in policy agendas. Women's issues are now being raised more easily and more often than before, and there has been strong advocacy on international feminism (Devlin & Elgie 2008). Women have been powerful in creating momentum for the results and progress all over the world, and the playing field needs to be levelled by African governments to open opportunities for men and women.

As a result of the low number of women in politics and the violence associated with politics, this paper makes the following recommendations. First, that African leaders should redefine the criteria for their own political culture by changing unconventional voting behavior. Political participation should be a manifestation of the change in political culture and provide effective governance with sound reform policy, conflict prevention, and economic diversification, that is, democratic governance in the context of African reality. Second, women should strive towards being relevant in their constituencies, be active in fighting corruption and bribery in elections. Third, politics involves the use of money worldwide. Therefore, women should start saving years before even contemplating venturing into politics. Women's participation in governance must be encouraged by every government as this can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the causes, proffer alternative solutions to bad governance and bolster actions addressing varying needs and sustaining peace over time.

Fourth, NEPAD needs to shift its policy position to truly address the problem of women's oppression, and embark on greater advocacy to ensure better participation and inclusiveness. In this regard, the policy formulation and implementation process should be in a way that is responsive to gender imperative. NEPAD policy must be a product of the people and must shift from the top-down approach to a bottom-up approach to be truly inclusive and facilitative of social transformation. Finally, a holistic approach should be adopted in resolving conflicts in Africa, with African women as stakeholders. For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU) could set up an arm of ECOWAS or African Union Women, i.e. AU Women, ECOWAS Women as we have UN Women because Africa's peaceful coexistence can truly be met by Africans.

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## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE MIDDLE-EAST: IMPACTS AND TRAJECTORIES

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### Abstract

When the novel coronavirus broke out in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, it appeared unheard of. Then it quickly spread to many countries, not sparing the Middle East region that has been in throes of conflict and war for many years. The paper explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this conflict-ridden region, to find out the extent it has mitigated the conflict and war there. Several conspiracy theories have been advanced as to the origin of the virus, but this paper critically examines the natural perspective of the pandemic. The fear and infection of the virus forced some Middle East warring parties to cooperate, for instance, the Israelis and Palestinians, albeit for a brief time. However, it did not significantly attenuate the wars in Syria and Yemen. But it had some sobering effects, for example, making Iran, the hardest hit in the region by the pandemic, to ask the International Monetary Fund for a \$5bn stimulus package. This was despite the tensions between Iran and the United States (with veto power in the Fund) to curtail the former's hegemonic drive in the region. From every indication, the COVID-19 has left some long-lasting impact not only on the Middle East region but the world as a whole, as it has affected virtually every country, great and small, without regard for borders and creeds. It has affected the global health and global economy in very profound ways. While the COVID-19 pandemic will come to an end, though not certain when the world will need to prepare for another yet unknown pandemic.

**Keywords:** Middle East, COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and war, global economy, global health

### Introduction

The Middle East region is that part of the world where conflict and war had been a sad trajectory for millennia, with the novel coronavirus spreading to compound the many troubles of the region. The first COVID-19 case in the Middle East was reported in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 29 January 2020, in a family of four who arrived from Wuhan, China. But the vast majority of the 16,659

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infections reported in the region as of Monday, March 16, 2020, were in Iran, one of the world's worst-hit countries, after China, South Korea, Italy and Spain, and the United States. This is a region of the world acclaimed as the cradle of civilization and the root of the three Abrahamic faiths and as a crossroads of trade and travel, striding three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe. Every evidence suggests, arguably, that the novel coronavirus originated in China, in Asia and spread with rapidity to all continents. Specifically, the paper takes a close look at the impact of the spread in the Middle East, particularly the extent it has affected relations among the nations in conflict and war. How have the countries confronted the invisible but invincible enemy? Of course, a deadly virus comes with its negative impact, but could it have imposed some positive effect, forcing cooperation of some sort? What are other lessons for the region and the world in the face of pathogenic mutations and infections? How else can the world be prepared for a future plague outbreak, suggesting this might not be the last, for the region and the world?

It is curious to note that author Dean Koontz in his book, *The Eyes of Darkness* (1981), wrote with apt precision that: “In around 2020 a severe pneumonia-like illness will spread throughout the globe, attacking the lungs and the bronchial tubes and resisting all known treatments. . . .” (Koontz, 1981). Top medical and biological institutes are in a race to culture a vaccine. As will be revealed later in the paper, what lies ahead dwarfs what the world is currently battling with. Given the current nature of responses, can nations cooperate, or each will face challenges? Section one of the paper is composed of the abstract and this introductory part. In section two, the background and theoretical perspectives are examined. The impact of the neo-coronavirus on the Middle East countries is assessed in section three. Lessons that could be learned in the trajectories cannot be wished away, more so as the current experience needs to be a foreboding preparedness. We examine this scenario in the last part and how it probably would impact human attitude in the face of deadly circumstances.

## **Background and Perspectives on the Virus Origin**

On December 31, 2019, China notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of several cases of unusual pneumonia in Wuhan, a port city of 11 million people in the central Hubei province. On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the WHO officially codenamed the disease as COVID-19 (2019-nCoV)<sup>18</sup> a pandemic (also known as SARS-CoV-2), after a careful assessment (World Health Organization, 2020). In 2012-2014, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) emerged as a camel-vector virus that infected many people in the region. In 2019-2020, the coronavirus infectious disease (COVID-19) originated in China and spread across the world to the Middle East. Because of the usual tendency by state officials to

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<sup>18</sup> Deciphered as coronavirus infectious disease 2019 (COVID-19), or 2019 new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) or severe acute respiratory syndrome second variant (SARS-CoV-2), suggesting 2002 – 2004 SARS was the first.

conceal information, for whatever reasons, the WHO urged Middle Eastern states to “give them more information on their number of infections” amid accusations that some were not reporting all their cases. Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said “the approach in the Middle East to fight the coronavirus had . . . been ‘uneven’ and that much more should be done” (The National, 2020). Even the Chinese government did try to conceal the disease outbreak at the early stage before notifying the WHO. As a result, the disease must have moved outside China before the world knew about it. On the perspectives of the virus’ origin, there have been several speculative conspiracy theories as to where it originated and for what purpose. According to Global Research’s Philip Giraldi:

The most commonly reported mainstream media account of the creation of the coronavirus suggests that it was derived from an animal-borne microorganism found in a wild bat that was consumed by ethnic Chinese residents of Wuhan. But there appears to be some evidence to dispute that in that adjacent provinces in China, where wild bats are more numerous, have not experienced major outbreaks of the disease. Because of that and other factors, there has also been considerable speculation that the Coronavirus did not occur naturally through mutation but rather was produced in a laboratory, possibly as a biological warfare agent (Giraldi, 2020).

Admittedly, countries have engaged in the production of all kinds of weapons, physical, chemical, and biological weapons, of mass destruction, because of power rivalries. This may be understandable from the realist orthodoxy perspective, of an anarchical international political system, in which nations seek not only maximum means of survival for themselves but also attempts to dominate others. But is the new coronavirus manmade or a natural occurrence? Within the Middle East, Iran accused Israel of orchestrating and unleashing the coronavirus. Hossein Salami, commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Command (IRGC), suggested that the coronavirus might have been an “American biological invasion,” leading some of the regime’s defenders to call for a retaliatory response. As Kasra Aarabi writes, in *Foreign Policy*, indeed, ‘a deeper look at IRGC-linked communications networks reveals a systematic propaganda campaign to seize the pandemic as an opportunity to vilify not only the United States but also the regime’s other traditional ideological enemy, Israel, as well.’

It is claimed that the virus is a “Zionist biological terrorist attack,” in line with previous allegations that the so-called Zionist regime has conducted “12 bioterrorist attacks against the people of Iran” (Aarabi, 2020). China had earlier, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Zhao Lijian, alleged that the coronavirus “. . . is an American disease that might have been introduced by members of the United States Army who visited Wuhan in October 2019” (Myers, 2020). But on Friday, March 13, another spokesman of the MFA, Geng Shuang, downplayed the politicization of coronavirus outbreak. He stated: “We

are firmly opposed to this (politicization). The international community, including the United States, have different views on the source of the virus. What I have been saying in recent days is that the Chinese side always believed that this is a scientific issue and requires scientific and professional opinions” (Myers, 2020). Understandably, China and the United States have been having fierce trade disputes since the Trump administration came into office in 2017. Similarly, the United States and Israel have both opposed to Iran’s nuclear programme, in particular, the United States’ withdrawal from the 2015 six-nation Nuclear Deal with Iran. Amidst the diplomatic crises plaguing these countries, the coronavirus emerged and, thus, compounding already soured relations among them. Therefore, at best, these claims may be deemed purely political and for hegemonic rivalries, and a deliberate misinformation ‘being weaponized as part of a broader foreign policy agenda that seeks to secure national advantage from the COVID-19 pandemic’, which is off the purview of this paper. Even though the controversy may linger long as to whether the 2020 coronavirus outbreak was a natural occurrence or manmade, it will be more beneficial to examine it from a natural and scientific perspective. As Joseph Micallef writes on the Military.com website:

The available evidence suggests that the origin of COVID-19 is consistent with the origin of other coronaviruses, including those that led to the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2004 and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2012-2014, and which every year lead to the development of several new strains of influenza. There is no evidence that the coronavirus is a man-made bio-weapon that somehow escaped from a research lab.” (Micallef, 2020).

According to zoologists, coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and humans. While the animal source of the new coronavirus is not yet clear, scientists suspect bats maybe its vector, and that the virus passed to humans via another animal species, such as the pangolin (Chughtai & Stepansky, 2020). Pangolin (from the Malay dialect pengguling) is identified as belonging to a family of Asian and African toothless mammals, and most obvious is the bat family. The New York Times’ Steven Myers, citing a senior official of China’s National Health Commission, Liang Wannian, corroborates the view that the likely carrier of the virus was ‘a pangolin, an endangered species that is trafficked almost exclusively to China for its meat and for its scales, which are prized for use in traditional medicine’. He asserts that “The first cluster of patients was reported at the ‘Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market,’ and studies have since suggested that the virus could have been introduced there by someone already infected”. This is suggesting that “there is no scientific reason to believe the virus began elsewhere” other than Wuhan and the surrounding province of Hubei (Myers, 2020).

Further analysis of the evidence by a study team, showed that the novel coronavirus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” From this, the researchers seem to conclude that, “we do not believe that any type of laboratory-

based scenario is plausible.” Dr. Robert Garry, a professor at the Tulane University School of Medicine and one of the authors of the study, told American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC News), “. . . we felt it was important to get a team together to examine evidence of this new coronavirus to determine what we could about the origin.” Dr. Francis Collins, the director of the National Institutes of Health, in the U.S., supported the study’s findings: “This study leaves little room to refute a natural origin for COVID-19” (Holland, 2020). The researchers said ‘COVID-19 is 96% identical to a coronavirus found in bats . . . but with a certain variation that could explain what has made it so infectious’. Garry affirms. “We know from the study of other coronaviruses that they’re able to acquire this [variation] and they can then become more pathogenic...” This is a good explanation as to why this virus is so transmittable and has caused this pandemic” (Holland, 2020).

Specifically for the Middle East, the coronavirus that caused the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) infected humans from camels. Chughtai and Stepansky write that ‘the new type of coronavirus has had a greater proliferation in a shorter period than its predecessors SARS and MERS’ (Chughtai & Stepansky, 2020). Indeed, MERS had no global widespread impact in the manner the COVID-19 has ravaged the world, and enveloping the entire Middle East itself. With the COVID-19 pandemic spread to the Middle East in February 2020, it reported the first casualty in Iran. By early March it has spread to many countries in the region, and like most of the world, the region suffered from thousands of new cases a day. Responses to the pandemic ranged from “lockdowns” of the sort seen in other parts of Asia and Europe to more “laissez-faire” approaches in some places. In the Middle East, responses were hampered by civil wars, insurgencies, and weakened states, where non-state actors are dominant or active, and states do not always control their whole country.

Conceptually, coronaviruses are named for their appearance: “Under the microscope, the viruses look like they are covered with pointed structures that surround them like a corona, or crown” (Sauer, 2020). A virus is ‘a microscopic piece of genetic material surrounded by a coat made of proteins’. Because it is parasitic, when ‘it enters healthy cells and hijacks them,’ especially if the immune system is too weak to fight, ‘creating copies of itself’. Joel Shannon explains that “when viruses begin replicating inside a living organism, they can cause infectious disease.” Thus, in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the virus is SARS-CoV-2, and the illness it caused is called COVID-19 (Shannon, 2020). What this tells us is that a virus is not a self-sustaining organism but a harmful microbiological substance existing as a parasite. The Middle East, by some definitions, refers to ‘the lands around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, extending from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula and Iran’ and sometimes beyond. By some conceptions, the entire area at a period was called The Orient and divided into three regions: Near East, applied to the region nearest Europe, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf; the Middle East, from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia; and the Far East, those regions facing the Pacific Ocean.



By the mid-1900s, a common definition of the Middle East encompassed the states or territories of Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates. Subsequently, probably by racial consideration, lands included in the definition are those of the three North African countries of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). The COVID-19 has impacted virtually every country in the region, more importantly, its impact on the economy and conflict.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on the Middle East**

The impact of COVID-19 in the Middle East has been felt in many areas in the region, especially in the economic sector, conflict, and war. The Middle East holds about two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Large portions of the oil deposits are found in the Persian Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In terms of oil reserves, Saudi Arabia ranks first internationally, with about one-fifth of the world's known reserves. As the COVID-19 hit the world, the oil price plunged in the Middle East and the Caucasus and Central Asia, and it has had a substantial impact on the economy not only in the region but the rest of the world. Like much of the rest of the world, people in these countries were taken utterly by surprise with this development, and we<sup>19</sup> would like to express our solidarity with them as they cope with the unprecedented health crisis and economic losses. Because this challenge is especially daunting for the region's fragile and conflict-torn states—such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Israel, and the Palestine Authority—where the difficulty of preparing weak health systems for the outbreak was compounded by reduced imports due to disruptions in global trade. This has given rise to shortages of medical supplies and other goods and resulting in substantial price increases (Azour, 2020).

### **Economic Impact**

The economic impact is most severe in the oil and aviation industries. On 22 March 2020, the Middle East's Dubai-based Emirates Airlines announced the shutdown of its flight operations from 25 March due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Its planes were grounded and the company's 103,000 employees were placed on reduced pay, with many going down to half pay. According to the Emirates Group chairman and CEO, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al-Maktoum, the airline could not "viably operate passenger services until countries re-open their borders, and travel confidence returns". He says, "The world has gone into quarantine due to the COVID-19 outbreak." He states, "We want to avoid cutting jobs. When demand picks up again, we also want to be able to quickly ramp up and resume services for

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<sup>19</sup> By 'we', it refers to the author and other like-minded scholars of Middle East Geopolitics and Near East Studies and the International Financial Institutions. These are benignant about the conflict and war ravaging the region, now compounded with the onslaught of COVID-19, and its place in World Politics.

our customers” (MEED, 2020). Airline companies are particularly hit because the fast spread of coronavirus was through air travels, especially those with air links with the epicentre of the outbreak in China.

As many more airlines shut down, it raised fears of widespread social instability and bankruptcy ‘triggered by mass unemployment, and also the spectre of a new global financial crisis caused by a rise in loan defaults’. Omar al-Ubaidly, director of research at Derasat, a Bahrain-based think-tank, states that “The biggest economic risk is that many companies become insolvent and more face bankruptcy at a scale and frequency that is unprecedented in modern history,” resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. He affirms “This will hit other sectors such as banking and increase unemployment and social risk” (MEED, 2020). On 14 March 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Central Bank launched “AED100bn (\$27bn) of credit and capital, along with a series of other financial measures to provide a temporary exemption from principal payments and interest on existing loans to all private sector companies and individuals” affected by the coronavirus outbreak in the country. Similarly, on March 20, the Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Economy and Planning, Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Jadaan, “announced financial support and stimulus measures totalling SR70bn (\$19bn) to help the economy deal with the disruption caused by the pandemic” (MEED, 2020).

The kingdom also reviewed its 2020 budget and funding reallocated to sectors that needed the most support, such as healthcare. The announcement added to ‘the SR50bn of support’ previously announced by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority. On 22 March, again, the UAE approved the sum of ‘AED16bn (\$4.4bn) economic stimulus package that includes measures to accelerate major infrastructure projects across the federation’. The measures include a ‘renewable six-month suspension of work permit fees and reduction of labour and other charges.’ Globally, arguably, it has been the biggest financial intervention in history (plus over \$2trillion by the U.S. Congress, for the U.S.). In effect, the entire global economy was put on unemployment benefits. Because of the social restrictions that were necessarily implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19, shutting down the global economy for an indefinite period.

According to IMF, “The cumulative loss to global GDP over 2020 and 2021 from the pandemic crisis could be around \$9 trillion, greater than the economies of Japan and Germany, combined” (UN News, 2020). As it has been suggested elsewhere, on how to rescue the economy after the coronavirus onslaught ends, governments should move quickly to ‘support businesses hurt by plummeting household demand. That will include restaurants and bars, sports teams, airlines, and many other businesses whose collapsed revenue streams have left them unable to pay workers, suppliers, and landlords.’ Matthew Slaughter and Matt Rees, in their article “How to Avoid a Coronavirus Depression”, in the Foreign Affairs, stressed that, “Without a mechanism to share the collective economic costs

of flattening the curve, the burden of social distancing will be borne by these businesses alone” (Foreign Affairs, 2020). Slaughter and Rees’ main contention is that “It will take wartime spirit- and spending-to keep the Global Economy Afloat”, during and after the virus disappears. This would require governments to inject huge stimulus packages into their economies.

## **COVID-19 Pandemic and Conflict in the Middle East**

### *Syria, Yemen, and Iran*

On April 11, 2020, five U.N. Middle East envoys issued a joint appeal urging warring parties in the region to ‘work towards an immediate end to hostilities,’ in line with the Secretary-General’s call ‘for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic’. The envoys are Geir O. Pedersen (Syria); Jan Kubis (Lebanon); Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert (Iraq); Martin Griffiths (Yemen), and Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. They stated that “Too many in the Middle East have endured conflict and deprivation for far too long. Their suffering is now compounded by the COVID-19 crisis and its likely long-lasting social, economic, and political impacts” (UN.org, 2020). They emphasized that efforts will succeed if the guns of war and conflict are silenced.

On the global scale in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the Middle East is unique because of its conflicts and wars and insurgent activities of non-state actors. The wars in Syria and Yemen since 2011 and 2015 respectively, and in Libya have continued, albeit with minimal low. Also, Iran and U.S. spats are unsettling. In Syria, some cities were locked down by the local authorities without water supply. Seth Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, observed that “With millions of displaced people and refugee camps,” it was “unclear how Syria could manage a pandemic” (Frantzman, 2020). Frankly, the situation in Syria was quite “unclear” where the government lacked “testing” instruments, and cases were not divulged. On March 23, 2020, however, marked the ninth year of the Syrian conflict, with the pandemic’s minimal impact. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ‘the month of March saw the lowest civilian death toll since the conflict started in 2011, with 103 deaths’ (rfi.fr, 2020). The ‘low’ was due largely to the COVID-19 impact on the war-ravaged country.

The Yemeni war has entered its fifth year of blood-letting between it and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and backed by the United States. The Yemeni government and the Huthi rebels initially responded positively to the UN appeal for a ceasefire, as did neighbouring Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of the Yemeni government. By the first week of April 2020, that glimmer of hope in the conflict was short-lived, however, when Saudi air defences intercepted ballistic missiles over Riyadh and a border city fired by the Iran-backed Yemeni’s Huthi rebels. The Saudi-led coalition retaliated by striking Huthi targets in the rebel-

held capital Sanaa, on Monday, April 6, 2020 (Bangkok Post, 2020). Talks have repeatedly faltered but the UN envoy Martin Griffiths held daily consultations in a bid to clinch a nationwide ceasefire. But as the Bangkok Post reported, more flare-ups in Yemen compounded a humanitarian crisis in the country “often described as the worst in the world and invite a coronavirus outbreak of catastrophic proportions” (Bangkok Post, 2020). Since the war erupted in 2015, the UN had warned that Yemen’s 24 million people require humanitarian assistance, “where the health infrastructure has collapsed, where water is a rare commodity and the population fears being wiped out if a ceasefire doesn’t allow for adequate aid” (Bangkok Post, 2020), coupled with the COVID-19 scourge. On April 16, 2020, there was a relief as Yemen was granted “SDR14.14million” emergency financial assistance by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2020), to cushion the COVID-19 impact.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was the first Middle East country to report a death due to COVID-19, however, it was unclear when the first coronavirus case in Iran was detected. For a while, the government concealed the epidemic occurrence “until it became clear to the world that the local situation in Iran worsened with more than 30 members of the Parliament (MPs) and government officials contracted the contagious disease” (Duddu, 2020). On 20 February 2020, the first death in the country was officially announced in Qom city. As the country battled to control the surging infections, its tension with the United States came to fore as to whether it would ease the economic sanction. In a rare move, the ravaging pandemic forced Iran to seek financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for the first time in 60 years. According to the state news agency, IRNA, the central bank governor, Abdolnasser Hemmati, claimed to have formally requested access to Rapid Financial Instrument (RFI) in a letter dated March 6, 2020. Hemmati wrote on his Instagram account: “Given the widespread prevalence of coronavirus in our country and the need to continue to take strong measures to prevent and cure (the disease), and to address its economic impact,” Iran asked for “about \$5 billion” in assistance (The Siasat Daily, 2020). This was after Iran had internally approved new funds for loans worth \$5 billion to help pandemic-hit businesses (Press TV, 2020).

According to a tweet by Iran’s Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the IMF Chief Kristina Georgieva had “stated that countries affected by #COVID19 will be supported via Rapid Financial Instrument (RFI)”. Accordingly, the foreign minister affirmed: “Our central bank requested access to this facility immediately”. As Minister Javad Zarif said, the IMF and its board “should adhere to fund’s mandate, stand on the right side of history and act responsibly” (The Siasat Daily, 2020). However, it was reported that the U.S. administration was set to blocking the loan on two main grounds. First, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, among other state officials, ‘tried to exploit the pandemic as part of a broader campaign to get U.S. sanctions lifted’. Second, they argued ‘that Khamenei has at

least \$300 billion he's refusing to tap to fight the virus'. Moreover, U.S. officials further maintained that 'U.S. sanctions have carve-outs for humanitarian sales to Iran'. They made clear that 'the U.S. has been forced to hold off from a total sanctions clampdown on Iran'. This would explain why, according to a U.S. senior administration official, 'the administration extended a series of sanctions waivers that allow Russia and China to conduct limited nuclear work with Iran, in part because sanctioning those two countries' nuclear industries would deny the U.S. materials it needs to fight coronavirus' (Wadhams, 2020), and that of Iran, too.

The various loans that can be granted by the IMF must be approved by the institution's executive board, where the United States practically has a veto on decisions. However, because of the dire humanitarian situation that now exists, it would have been honourable if the U.S had strongly considered shelving its veto power, more so as Iran is a member state of the Fund. The right of every member state deserves recognition which must be assessed based on need. As of May 15, 2020, according to Iran's Health Ministry spokesman, Kianoush Jahanpour, confirmed cases across the country were put at 116,635, with an overall death toll of 6,902, from COVID-19 to date. As the Anadolu Agency reported, citing state-run Iranian television, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani affirmed that the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions imposed to contain it could remain until the end of the Iranian calendar year. President Rouhani stated that "No one knows when the coronavirus pandemic will end. It might continue in the next three months, and it might remain until the end of the year [20 March 2021, according to the Iranian calendar]" (Middle East Monitor, 2020). According to the president, the Iranian government's actions were two-fold: first, "the fight against the coronavirus," and second, "fighting poverty," especially since many Iranians have lost their sources of income due to the measures taken against the pandemic.

### ***Israel-Palestine***

For some reason, the COVID-19 crisis has not proven to be fertile ground for strengthening ties between Israel and her Arab neighbours, but for a measure of cooperation with the Palestinians. On March 5, 2020, the first cases of the infection were confirmed in the West Bank (Judean) city of Bethlehem. In quick response, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority (PA) appointed Premier Mohammed Shtayyeh to take charge of the pandemic. Yahoo News reports that the premier formed an emergency committee superseding all ministries, "locked down Bethlehem and announced a state of emergency in the West Bank (Judea) with schools closed and all but essential movement banned" [Emphasis added]. As Gerald Rockenschaub, head of the World Health Organization's Palestinian office affirmed that "They took action very rapidly and took the crisis management function to the highest level" (Dyke, 2020). The measures have helped limit the spread of the virus and its impact on the Palestinians' weak health infrastructure.

Equally important, there was some level of cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But the PA spokesperson said he “did not want to elaborate in order not to endanger the partnership, which is not appreciated by all Palestinians”. The spokesman, Ibrahim Milhem said, “We and the Israelis are now in a joint operations room to deal with the contagion and to prevent its spread. We and they are in danger,” he affirmed at a press conference in Ramallah. Ibrahim further stated, “Moreover, we are coordinating with them on a high level. There are areas where we control or do not control. We are coordinating at a high level with the Israelis to keep the contagion away from us, them, and the entire world” (Ahren, 2020). On this rare cooperation, occasioned by the pandemic, if leveraged upon, the Israelis and Palestinians could push for more direct talks for peace between them. It is a possibility if both sides are willing and build confidence in each other for mutual right of existence. In Israel, the first coronavirus case was confirmed on 21 February 2020, after a female citizen tested positive for COVID-19 at the Sheba Medical Center, on “return from quarantine on the Diamond Princess ship from Japan” (The Times of Israel, 2020). By March 29, according to the Health Ministry, ‘the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Israel soared beyond the 4,000 marks to 4,247, recording an increase of 628 in 24 hours’ (The Times of Israel, 2020).

It is curious to note that Israel has not been shielded off the COVID-19 plague as they were more than four millennia ago in Goshen, Egypt. This may not be too surprising, for several reasons. First, as at then, providence smiled on them as a people under servitude, needing a protective shield. Second, the racial mix of today was not what it was back then. By occupation the Jews were shepherds. Goshen was chosen because “shepherds were despised and hated” in some other parts of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Pharaoh enthusiastically embraced them. Third, Israel today is amoral, glamourising “gay pride” unapologetically, like every other nation under the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Frankly, COVID-19 respects no faith, race, nor status, rich and poor, strong and weak, holy and profane, everyone received a dose. However, the Israelis are very enterprising people. Thus, Israeli entrepreneurs put their ingenuity into play in the quest for both a vaccine and preventive solutions. As healthcare systems collapsed under the weight, there was a dire need to test and treat people outside of the hospitals and to better identify and quarantine people with the disease. As Forbe’s Wendy Singer writes,

Israeli entrepreneurs typically do not take no for an answer, which is why Israeli research and health technology startups are taking up the charge against coronavirus. More than 80 Israeli companies are actively working on wide-ranging solutions; their expertise range from remote monitoring, diagnostics and decision support, to protection and prevention, and addressing social and mental health aspects of the virus (Singer, 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 46:31-34 (Living Bible, Paraphrased, 1971).

Two of these companies--Migal Galilee Research Institute and the Israel Institute for Biological Research--have made significant progress in vaccine development. In early March, the research team leader clarified that '90-day time frame' would be required to the point at which 'the product would be ready for human-testing, not production' (Reuters Fact Check, 2020). What this means is that the vaccine will not be ready until late June 2020, for test-run before mass production. Others believe that, "If things go well . . . we will have enough evidence of safety and efficacy so that we can... have a vaccine around the end of October," 2020. Virtually every country is in the quest to find a vaccine to treat and prevent the COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2. The efforts by the Israeli scientists and other countries must yield positive results for now and the future prevention of virus attacks.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic: Trajectories and Lessons for the Middle East**

The Lancet describes the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) as 'a lethal zoonotic pathogen' that was first identified in humans in Saudi Arabia and Jordan in 2012. Intermittently outbreaks of MERS-CoV continue to occur. According to The Lancet "Between April 2012 and December 2019, 2499 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV infection, including 858 deaths (34.3% mortality)" from 27 countries, with the majority of in Saudi Arabia (2106 cases, 780 deaths). Also, large outbreaks of human-to-human transmission have occurred, "the largest in Riyadh and Jeddah in 2014 and South Korea in 2015". MERS-CoV remains a high-threat pathogen identified by WHO as a priority pathogen because it causes a severe disease that has a high mortality rate, epidemic potential, and no medical countermeasures (The Lancet, 2020). It is clear that the impact of MARS-CoV dwarfs COVID-19, and the infection of the former was still much being felt in 2019 when the latter struck.

In the last 500 years, author Spinney documents 15 plague outbreaks that claimed millions of lives. Most viruses that cause diseases in humans transmute from lower animals. Most recent virus studies—about the SARS and MERS—suggest that every year leads to the development of several new strains of influenza. Meaning that when COVID-19 is over, another one is probably lurking around to breakout, with or without much warning. In a way, we are living on borrowed time. Whether it is global warming or pandemics, we simply must prepare better but how to do that is rather tricky. Some have argued that, leaving aside the tragic and incalculable human cost, "if we had spent \$200 billion preparing for an epidemic like this, we might not be spending \$2 trillion on a stimulus package". Not only in the United States but many countries, including those in the Middle East, that governments, corporations, and studded individuals coughed out thousands and millions of financial packages to support and palliate the losses to COVID-19.

Aside from the conspiracy theories the coronavirus outbreak generated, there were also apocalyptic resultants of the epidemic. Some believed that the prevalence of bestiality, homosexuality, barbarity, the criminality of all sorts, injustices, and all

facets of corruption, and the growing Satanic worship in many places, even in the United States, were all part of ‘why God’s anger has befallen the world with COVID-19’. If this were to be the case, would the occurrence change human unwholesome behaviour? Have past plagues changed human misdemeanors? Hardly. SARS-nCoV that has caused COVID-19 will not be the last to plague humanity. There are hosts of animate and inanimate elements capable of causing plagues. Global warming, for instance, that is causing Climate Change, is haunting the world and the Great Powers, in particular the United States and China. What necessary and concerted actions are they taking on the issue? Political gameplay at best. They do not seem ready to eliminate carbon combustion and to limit temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius.

The future does not look bright. Already, global warming has caused deadly heatwaves in some countries, for example, in Japan, in 2018. But because this had no widespread impact like coronavirus, it was taken as inconsequential. However, a more terrible plague than COVID-19 will come upon the world, as God’s terrible wrath, if the coronavirus outbreak was part of it at all, as advanced by some. At that time, one of several plagues will descend from the sun, causing it to scorch all humanity with blasting heat. Everyone would be “burned by the blast of heat,” and they would curse the name of God who sent the plagues. They would not change their mind and attitude to give Him glory. Despite “their pains and sores” they would refuse to change their mind from “all their evil deeds”.<sup>21</sup> While the aftermath of COVID-19 will be significantly felt in many aspects of state relations, but the extent to which it would change people’s ethical behaviour may be hard to measure. Because COVID-19 infection has no direct bearing on whether someone was morally sound or not, and neither were plagues in the last five hundred years, to say the least. It infected both the good and the bad alike; but it was a foretaste of future occurrences, whether we care to prepare for them or not.

A correlation between the coronavirus, unchecked global warming, and possible sun blast can be made. On August 12, 2018, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) launched the Parker Solar Probe, a mission to “touch” the sun. The Parker Solar Probe was designed to ‘One other important lesson that must not be glossed over is the high possibility of biological warfare, for nations that have experimented with biological weaponry. While this paper has not conceded to any peddled conspiracy theory in the current case of COVID-19, however, it is a “dry run” for a biological weapon impact, which the nations that have the capability must desist from. The current situation has made it abundantly clear that any nation that would embark on biological warfare cannot escape its effect as well. Indeed, there seems to be no country fit into superpower claim in biological warfare because the biological agent, be it virus or bacteria, released will affect all and sundry.

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<sup>21</sup> Revelations 16:9.



## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic started from Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and quickly spread to all parts of the world, including the Middle East. COVID-19 has been an extremely dangerous disease because it has a decimating aggressive nature, mutating from person to person, spreading very quickly and easily. The disease appeared to be about ten times as deadly as past pandemics, but brought under control through several strategies, including lockdowns, face masking, and social distancing. As of June 21, 2020, 8,969,263 cases of COVID-19 (from 213 countries and territories) were reported, in which 4,771,809 recovered, and 467,668 deaths, from worldometers report. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had double trouble for the Middle East, a region that has been in throes of conflict and war as part of its existence for millennia. The spread of COVID-19 to the region only compounded the MERS that has plagued the region since 2014. The novel coronavirus has affected virtually all the countries in the region, with profound impacts on the health infrastructure, the economy, and conflicts plaguing the region. It minimally mitigated the conflict and war, however, with sobering low in violence. The pandemic foisted some cooperation between the Israelis and Palestinians because they realised the disease made no distinction between them and their separation barriers. It is hoped that the experience of this pandemic would evolve new thinking about man's humanity and the need for peaceful cooperation and shun needless conflicts and wars.

Like past lethal pandemics, COVID-19 cases will drop abruptly after peaking in most places it has been most severe. One explanation of how it will decline in lethality is that medical science has combined some remedies and precautions that have become more effective in the prevention and treatment of pneumonia. The evidence of this has been that the death rate has not been directly proportional to the infections by the virus, and there have been more recoveries than deaths. There is a theory which holds that the 1918-20 virus 'mutated extremely rapidly to a less lethal strain. . . a tendency for pathogenic viruses to become less lethal with time, as the hosts of more dangerous strains tend to die out' (Barry, 2004). COVID-19 pandemic will die out; but the world must not fail to brace-up for another in the future, probably more lethal as a corona-heat blast. And whether COVID-19 was natural or man-made must be thoroughly investigated to understand exactly how it originated. This will provide critical information and useful knowledge to prevent similar occurrences in the future, and be prepared on how to confront such plague head-on.

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