

The United Nations Reforms and Nigeria's Quest for a Permanent Seat

A. S. Akpotor and P. E. Agbebaaku*

Political Science Department, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

**E-mail: agbephil@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Member Nations. Western Powers. African States. Veto Power. Global Governance. National Interest

ABSTRACT At the end of World War II, the United Nations was born with the Big Five negotiating them into the Security Council which is the most powerful organ of the U.N.O. But since 1955 there had been clamour for changes and reforms of the UN especially the Security Council which is regarded by many as a prestigious exclusive club. The calls for reforms increased with the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s. This made the United States too powerful and many times going against the decisions of the Security Council especially in the area of collective security as in Iraq. The UN Panel emplaced to propose some reforms came up with two models which we highlighted. These proposals were to make the UN more democratic and more representative of the diverse peoples and continents of the world. In the light of the proposals which seek to give Africa two permanent seats, Nigeria indicated her interest in securing either of the seats. We strongly supported Nigeria's bid.

INTRODUCTION

The UNO came into being in 1945, that is, at the end of World War II. The negotiations which saw the birth of the body took into considerations the role played by the major victorious allies in the war. As part of the booties of victory, they negotiated themselves into the Security Council which is the United Nations' most powerful organ of the UN because of the veto power wielded by its members. It is charged with maintaining peace and security between nations. Chapter 7 of the Charter empowers it to enforce the decisions of the body. It has the power to make compelling decisions on member governments. It has 15 members made up of five permanent members with the veto and double veto; Peoples Republic of China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United states of America; and 10 other elected non – permanent members that run for two years.

It was this world body that Nigeria at independence on October 1, 1960 gladly waited to be admitted into because she saw it as an organisation for multilateral diplomacy and for service. So when eventually she was admitted into the United Nations on October 7, 1960, the then Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, in his address to the General Assembly captured the country's feeling when he stated that:

"We in Nigeria honestly believe in the principles of the United Nations... we feel an immense responsibility to the world, we see nation wrangling with nation and we wonder how we can help" (Balewa 1960).

Therefore, when the time became ripe, in line with national interest and the desire to serve at the highest level, Nigeria's quest for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council is not misplaced. With global politics becoming more dynamic and complex, there follow in its wake the clamour for democratisation and better regional representation. And Nigeria in conjunction with a host of other countries feels strongly in the 21st century that the UN is very ripe for some reforms especially the Security Council which should be enlarged to accommodate the different regions of the world; and that she (Nigeria) is the best qualified to represent the region of Africa judging from some of the criteria outlined later in the paper. (Adeniji 2005; Gambari 1997; Akinterinwa 2005 etc.) also hold this view.

There has been clamour for reforms at the UN, particularly for an increase in the number of permanent members of the UNSC to make it more democratic and representative of the diverse peoples of the world. This clamour for reform is not new; infect these calls for changes date back to 1955 that is barely 10 years after the UN came into force. As it is, or as it should be, initiating reforms for an organization normally evolved from observed problems. This exactly fits into the UN structure and operations since its inception in

1945. Some of the problems border on the overbearing influence of the US with the use of the veto and her growing military and diplomatic power. This octopus hand of the US has empirically been displayed from the 1990s with the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and her almost sole effort in the gulf war against the UN's wish.

The reform as envisaged could also be attributed to the frustration of a third world Secretary - General whose peaceful approach to issues has always been hijacked by military solution of the western powers coordinated and sponsored by the US.

SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM: MODELS A AND B

Model A provides for six new permanent seats, with no veto being created, and three new two – year term non-permanent seats, divided among the major regional areas as follows:

Africa	53	0	2	4	6
Asia and Pacific	56	1	2	3	6
Europe	47	3	1	2	6
Americas	35	1	1	4	6
Totals model A	191	5	6	13	24

Model B provides for no new permanent seats but creates a new category eight four-year renewable-term seats and one new two-year non-permanent (non-renewable) seat, divided among the major regional areas as follows;

Africa	53	0	2	4	6
Asia and Pacific	56	1	2	3	6
Europe	47	3	1	2	6
Americas	35	1	1	4	6
Totals model A	191	5	6	13	24

Source: UN Document, online.

The Proposed Reforms Schedule: The proposed reforms aside of funding and budgetary procedure is the two-security council enlargement proposal submitted by a UN panel of eggheads. Proposal A recommends six additional permanent seats in the Security Council in addition to the current permanent five. It was assigned as follows; two to Africa, two to Asia, (Japan and India prescriptely), one to Europe/ Germany prescribed) and one to Latin America (Brazil, prescribe). These new six were to also possess the veto power.

Proposal B recommends creating eight rotating two-years term seat (non- permanent) with the four regions above having 2 seats each.

THE CRITERIA

The criteria contained in the high level panel on “Threats, Challenges and Change” (A/59/565) (U.N Doc. 2005) concerning the reform of the Security Council are:

- They should, in honouring article 23 of the charter, increase the involvement in decision-making of those who contribute most to the United Nations financially, military and diplomatically, specifically in terms of contributions of United Nations assessed budgets, participation in mandated peace operations, contributions to voluntary activities in support of the United Nations objectives and mandates. Among developed countries, achieving or making substantial progress towards the international agreed level of 0.7 percent of GNP of ODA should be considered an important criteria of contribution .
- They should bring into the decision – making process countries more representative of the broader membership, especially of the developing world.
- They should not impair the effectiveness of the Security Council.
- They should increase the democratic and accountable nature of the body.

On the initiative of the then AU, Chairman, Olusegun Obasanjo, African leaders at the AU summit had settled for the first option, worked towards two-consensus candidates (the Ezulwin consensus in Swaziland, February 2005) to avoid rancour and give Nigeria a smooth ride. This was done consequent upon the US interest for Egypt and South Africa.

This consensus building became threatened at the July 2005 AU Sirte summit where the countries jostling for the seats rose from four, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa to eight, with Gambia, Kenya, Senegal and Libya joining the race.

Eventually, Nigeria evolved serious consultation, lobbying, and compromises which informed Heads of State and Government to formally request the UN General Assembly to accept the expansion of the Security Council and the Africa's demand for at least two permanent seats. On July 25, 2005, Nigeria's then Foreign Minister, Olu Adeniji alongside the foreign ministers of South Africa, Libya and Egypt with other interest groups in new York met in London with members of G4, Brazil, Germany, Japan and India and this meeting

led to a slight change on the part of Nigeria. This was like favouring option B which G4 seems to have been orchestrating. Egypt accused Nigeria of a sell-out of a mutually agreed position. Thus, Africa went to the UN summit in September 2005 unprepared. We need to state however, that Nigeria's shift in tactics is based on greater wisdom, realism and vision. Acquiring the veto power alongside entrance into UNSC is a matter of state prestige. Indeed, the fear of the permanent five (P5) became the beginning of wisdom to the Nigerian led group of African countries – Ghana, South Africa, Botswana etc. The reality of having two permanent seats without a veto and four non-permanent (as against the initial five demanded) is a wiser option than allowing their resolution realized at Libya to be vetoed by the powerful permanent five. This option looks better because it would appear that only Africa was struggling for the veto clause which the G4 was not interested in.

In addition, a deluge of complaints had evolved from the permanent members over the likely unwieldy nature of the proposed new Security Council. That the initial 24 recommended by the Secretary General was too large and the USA has said that it should not be more than 21. In the new deal, all proposed two African nations plus India, Germany, Brazil and Japan will be permanent members without the veto.

Some Nigerian scholars had argued that if the veto is not secured, there is no basis of being in the Security Council. But others argued that the veto power is almost stale. Veto powers are of diminishing importance in the current precarious global settings of terrorism and environmental disasters which can wipe a whole state within hours.

We now need more effective global governance than the UN is providing. The question can be asked, how often has the veto power been used and what were African losses? That the issues of colonialism, the Middle East, Apartheid and the Cold War that make the veto relevant are gone. That we secure the ordinary membership of the Security Council first, understand the dynamics of the council and the occupier of the seats and gradually talk to them, and gradually we can secure the permanent seat. Others have argued that being a member of the UNSC will not give Africans the lost this golden opportunity, is anchored on competing personalities ego and the interest of rival nations.

Assessing Nigeria vis-à-vis other African countries from the above, Nigeria is matchless. In the first place, Nigeria is more representative of the black continent. It is the most populous country in Africa, and the most populous black nation on earth. For every four Africans, there is one Nigeria, and one of every five blacks on earth is a Nigerian. With regards to religious balance, Nigeria is preferable by its secular nature. Nigeria has Africa's largest concentration of either Muslims or Christians, but Egypt is a predominant Muslim country, with some elements of fundamentalists, terrorist gangs, and less democratic. The 2004 western survey which ranked Nigeria as the happiest people in the world qualifies Nigeria, psycho-socially.

Nigeria's geo-strategic location is a blessing, for it is located around the centre of Africa and so easily and speedily accessible to every African country, and she has a listening ear. Nigeria sees herself first as an African nation and seeks to promote the interests of the whole continent and that of the black people all over the world. This is well reflected in her foreign policy where Africa is her centrepiece (Aladekomo 2005: 33).

Flowing from the above, Nigeria's historic, heroic and commendable role in the international community is in tandem with Article 1(i) of the UN charter, 1945.

"The purposes of the UN are to maintain international peace and security and... take effective collective measures for... the prevention and removal of threats to world peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression" (U.N. Charter).

In other words, Nigeria since independence in 1960, has been visibly committed to the promotion of peace, security and liberation in Africa, Middle East and Europe. In the area of UN "assessment on troops contribution, Nigeria is ranked 7th, South Africa is 10th, Senegal 12th, Kenya 13th, Egypt 49th, Algeria 81st, and Angola not ranked among the 106 countries. This suggests that Nigeria leads other African aspirants in this regard. For this, the US and other big powers ought to campaign for Nigeria's success in this bid. We note, however, that the western nations do not want a strong voice for Africa which Nigeria represents so that they can manipulate the UN as they wish. For the African continent, African states ought to declare a consensus on Nigeria's choice for one of the seats. This should be so because successive

Nigerian administration was indisputably the champion of the eradication of colonialism in Africa, an injustice, which the UN itself was opposed to in those days. This Nigeria did for Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Namibia. Nigeria, even though not in the southern-African region, made herself a member of the frontline states in the battle against apartheid South Africa and colonialism.

Attendantly, Nigeria has been at the apex vis-à-vis other African states of building capacity for the resolution of conflict/restoring or installing democracy, peace and stability in several brother African countries where warlords or power hungry military boys had seized power. This Nigeria has done with world acclaim in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote'd Ivoire, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Togo, Sao Tome and Principe and Guinea Bissau. Nigeria single-handedly initiated the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) deployed for peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1989 to 2002. The burden of those peace operations was borne largely by Nigeria. Nigeria in 1981 wrote off \$80 million which the OAU could not pay for as expenditure on the OAU peacekeeping operation in Chad (Akpotor and Nwolise 2005).

Nigeria also has been at the apex of humanitarian interventions in Africa and the resolution of the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan and has hosted many rounds of peace talks. It was Nigerian troops that led the AU contingent in that country. Nigeria's humanitarian intervention to the famine stricken people of Niger Republic is well known. Relief materials were delivered through a presidential committee led by her speaker of the House of Representatives. Nigeria has continuously given financial handouts to all African states in need, for example, to Cameroon when lake Nyos Volcanic eruption occurred. Nigeria in the past sold her oil at concessionary rate to some African states. In fact, she is Africa, number one financial and aid provider for fellow African states, through OAU/AU, ECOWAS, ADB and the lake Chad Basin Commission etc. By this, Nigeria is commended for fulfilling Article (2) and (3) of the UN charter, which states. "The purpose of the UN are to develop friendly relations among nations and to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character".

With regards to regionalism as a basis for the

strength of the UN, Nigeria has played her role functionally. She was a founding member of OAU in 1963, and was functional in the transformation of the OAU into African Union (AU) in 2002. Attendantly, she is one of the initiators of the new partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and its peer review mechanism. On the sub-regional plain, Nigeria and Togo were the founding fathers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975.

Nigeria's economic and social indicators put her on a high pedestal; she is one of the biggest economies in Africa. It is Africa's biggest market and it is responding to functional economies reforms, like the anti-graft war. This has been acknowledged by the Paris club, which cancelled \$18 billion of our foreign debt in 2005. Nigeria has also consistently paid its UN dues and as at December 2004, she had paid her full dues to the UN regular budget.

Although in politics, self-preservation is the first law, which means South Africa and Egypt are free to contest for the UNSC seat, it is, however, against universal morality and African culture for someone to be biting the hand that had fed him. Nigeria and South Africa, the two greatest powers in Africa should be companions rather than competitors; be like a snail and its shell, as the US and UK have been on international issues like in Iraq. South Africa should remember the financial and material contributions Nigeria sacrificed for her in the days of apartheid. For Egypt, she should not forget history so soon. Nigeria championed the African campaign for severance of relations with Israel in 1973 for its war with Egypt. And that Nigeria only restored diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992 (Akpotor and Nwolise 2005), many odd years after Egypt itself has restored diplomatic ties with it.

The above glaring indisputable facts inform some African states to declare an unalloyed support for Nigeria's bid for one of the UNSC permanent seats. The comment by Mr. Howard Jetter, US Ambassador to Nigeria (2005) captures it all, that:

Nigeria is not just a country in Africa, it is the essential nation and the test case for the entire continent. Nigeria subsumes all the problems potentials, and promise of Africa as the continent moves into the new millennium (Aladekomo 2005).

CONCLUSION

Affecting any major reforms in the Security

Council of the United Nations will not be an easy task. As we stated earlier, the clamour for reforms in the UN dated many years back and yet not much result has been realised. The Security Council in all intents and purposes is a prestigious as well as a powerful club and the present permanent members will like it to remain the exclusive club that it is and prevent new entrants as much as possible. But the world has undergone a lot of changes since 1945 and it will be like swimming against the tide if the permanent members of the Security Council believe that the status quo will remain *ad infinitum*.

In the current trend of democratisation and good governance, the UNSC should be enlarged without further delay. In the light of this, therefore, we say that Nigeria's quest for a permanent seat at the Security Council is borne out of her desire to contribute more meaningfully towards world peace and security. Nigeria possesses the required credentials for admission into this club, though she might not be preferred by the "Big Powers" that are at the UNSC. These proposed reforms may be slow in coming but they will one day. We, therefore, urge Nigeria and other African states to intensify efforts in their diplomacy to convince the international community of their capability and readiness. Also, Nigeria and other African states must improve on their efforts in the areas of democratisation and good governance to be able to win the full confidence of the "Big Powers" in the Security Council and the international community at large. For instance, Akindele and Akinterinwa (1995) have even argued that there should be a distinct seat for Africa and another distinct seat for Nigeria based on merit. This means that Nigeria is qualified for a permanent seat on her own merit which should not be subjected to much debate while on the other hand, Africa as a region be allotted a seat. We will conclude and say with Akinterinwa (2005: 70) that

"Nigeria's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC is legitimate. It is the most credible and that can be truly representative of African and Black interests in the World. The African and world environmental conditionings are favourable to Nigeria's permanent membership of the UNSC. More importantly, Nigeria's decision to be a permanent member of the council is deliberate and has taken into account all the challenges especially military, human resources and financial wise. In the event of an expanded UNSC, Nigeria is currently the most eligible African candidate for a UNSC permanent seat for many reasons".

REFERENCES

- Adeniji O 2005. *Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy, Governance and International Security*. Ibadan: Dokun Publishers.
- Akindele RA, Akinterinwa BA 1995. Improving the Effectiveness and Legitimacy Profile of the United Nations Security Council: The Case for the Enlargement of its Permanent Membership. *Paper Presented at Seminar on Africa and the UN System*, Lagos.
- Akinterinwa Bola 2005. Nigeria and Permanent Membership of the United Nations Security Council: Dynamics and Definienda. In: Bola A Akinterinwa (Ed.): *Nigeria and the United Nations Security Council*. Ibadan: Vantage Publishers, P. 12.
- Akpotor AS, Nwolise OBC 2005. *Revolving Issues in Nigeria's Foreign Policy*. Lagos: Ilupeju Press, pp. 133 – 134.
- Aladekomo Tony S 2005. Nigeria's Quest for UN Seat, in the *Vanguard* (Lagos) September 21, 2005, P. 33.
- Balewa AT 1960. Maiden Address to the UN General Assembly, October 7, 1960, N.Y.: UN
- Gambari Ibrahim A 1997. Reforms of the UN and Nigeria's Quest for a Permanent Seat in the Security Council. Lagos: NIIA *Founder's Day Lecture*, 1997.
- Udeh Chinedu 2005. Nigeria and the UN Security Council Permanent Seat, in the *Vanguard* (Lagos) September 5, 2005, P.3.
- UN Charter 1945. Article 1. New York: UN.
- UN Document, On-line. Secretary General message to the General Assembly, 2005, New York: UN.