

Exploring regional security complex and role theories in Nigeria's
multilateral diplomacy

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Abstract

The article explores the theoretical underpinnings in the multilateral policy of Nigeria as a state. Multilateral policy occupies a pivotal role in the formulation of Nigeria's external policy and such policy orientation will continue to dominate the foreign policy terrain of Nigeria. This historical exploration of Nigeria's global role has revealed the central place of multilateralism and such policy consistency needs to be understood in terms of theoretical orientation. Thus, the preoccupation of the current research endeavor is to explore the pragmatic employment of multilateralism in Nigeria's foreign policy and situate such within the lens of Regional Security Complex and Role theories. In doing this, both theories are critical in understanding the rationale behind the utility of multilateralism in Nigeria's foreign policy. In conducting this research, qualitative content analysis and process tracing are used as methodological approach.

Keywords: Foreign policy; multilateralism; role; regional security complex; Nigeria

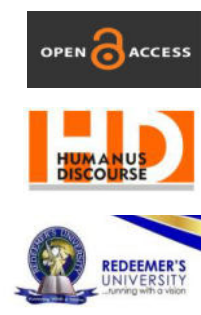
Introduction

The independent states within the international system started to evolve mechanisms to solve global conflict by the beginning of 20th century. In this way, the League of Nations was formed which subsequently replaced by the United Nations (UN). The formation of these two global multilateral institutions was the product of global hegemons who saw it as their responsibility to maintain global order in the areas of peace, security, and commerce (Ruggie, 1992:568).² Since the formation of the UN in 1945, states have been cooperating together to solve some transnational security issues like terrorism, child trafficking, drug trafficking, environmental issues and illegal arms trafficking (Abbott & Snidal, 1998:4).³ It needs to be stressed that the decolonization process of the 1950s and 1960s greatly multiplied the number of independent states in the international system; the result of which was the proliferation of regional and sub-regional multilateral institutions. Some of these regional and sub-regional multilateral institutions were sponsored by

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²Ruggie, J. G.. Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution. *International organization* 1992,46(03): 561-598.

³Abbott, K. W., &Snidal, D. Why states act through formal international organizations.*Journal of conflict resolution* 1998, 42(1): 3-32.



regional hegemons and powers to cater for the specific needs within the regional sub-system (Yansane, 1977).⁴

However, the influence of regional hegemons in multilateral institutions has attracted little attention among the scholars, especially in relations to Nigeria (Meierding, 2010:6; Pry, 2010:22; Nolte, 2009:894; Hurrell, 2005)).⁵ Their global structural position and foreign policy preferences made them to be analytically distinct from traditional "Middle Powers"-a term formerly reserved for countries like Australia, Sweden, and Canada (Meierding, 2010:6).⁶ Some of these regional powers have become prominent international actors in economic and political issues; and understanding their multilateral preferences and behaviours is vital (Tetenyi, 2014:4; Nolte, 2010:889).⁷ Countries like Brazil, China India and South Africa have begun to attract the attention of scholars, Nigeria, in contrast, is under-researched in relation to multilateralism and leadership aspiration in Africa (Meierding, 2010:6; Nolte, 2010: 883).⁸ Thus, the central issue to be investigated here therefore is how Nigeria has been displaying its hegemonic role in Africa and most importantly in West Africa through the strategy of multilateralism. This research intends to fill this research gap by examining Nigeria's strategy of multilateralism in relation to its employment of multilateral diplomacy in Africa since independence. Those factors that render multilateralism inevitable are also crucial to this study. Doing research on this, it is believed, will serve as a compendium to the study of Nigeria's role in international institutions and hence its regional hegemonic posture in Africa. In doing this, the research focuses on theoretical lens of role theory and regional security complex theory in understanding the Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

The RSCT is a form of subaltern security discussion in the global security architecture. During the Cold War global system, the global structure was the predominant approach adopted in security studies (Ayoob, 1991:259).⁹ As a subsystem, region has become a useful mechanism in defining the contemporary international security which is seen as a step towards achieving global peace and security. The importance of regions as the basic unit of

⁴Yansane, A. State of Economic Integration in North West Africa South of the Sahara: The Emergence of ECOWAS. *African Studies Review*, 1977, 20 (2): 35-52.

⁵Meierding, E. IR Theory as Politics, International Politics as Theory: A Nigerian Case Study. *Africa Nebula* 2010, Issue 2: 6.; Prys, M. The variability of regional powers. In *Paper presented at the SGIR 7th Pan-European Conference on IR* 2010 (9):11; Nolte, D.. How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics. *Review of international studies*, 2009, 36: 881-901

⁶Meierding, E. IR Theory as Politics, International Politics as Theory: A Nigerian Case Study. *Africa Nebula* 2010, Issue 2: 6-15.

⁷Tetenyi, A. South Africa vs. Nigeria: competing countries for leadership position in Sub-Saharan Africa, paper presented at the ISA/FLACSO conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina on the 24th of July, 2014.

⁸Meierding, E. IR Theory as Politics, International Politics as Theory: A Nigerian Case Study. *Africa Nebula* 2010, Issue 2:6; Nolte, D. How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics. *Review of international studies* 2009, 36: 881-901

⁹Ayoob, M. The security problematic of the Third World. *World Politics* 1991, 43(02):257-283.

security analysis appeared in the 1970s when some states were coerced into the Cold War rivalries between the two superpowers. The only unified mechanism adopted then was nonaligned movement which most developing countries adopted in resisting the Cold War influence (Ayoob, 1995).¹⁰ Thus, some regional organizations were formed in the heydays of Cold War which tried to curb the incidence of local rivalries within a certain region. ASEAN, OAU, ECOWAS and Organization of American States (OAS) were formed during this period. The main focus of RSCT is that states who share the same borders are normally locked in a security dilemma. In terms of definition, RSCT is regarded as a situation whereby "local sets of states exist whose major security perceptions and concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security perceptions cannot realistically be considered apart from one another" (Buzan, 1986: 8).¹¹ The theory posits that the security of states within a region or sub-region is defined by the geographical contiguity. It maintains that the security and safety of each state within a region cannot be isolated from the happenings in the neighbouring states. The main focus of the theory therefore rests on the basic assumption of the need to ensure that the regional security is collectively pursued by states that make a regional security complex. There are basic features defining the RSCT. These are anarchy, geographical proximity, interdependence and rivalry, and independence (Oladimeji, 2022).¹² These are elaborated more below.

The RSCT is defined in terms of anarchy which pervades the sub-regional political structure of the region (Oladimeji, 2022).¹³ The states that make up the regional system are locked up into regional security which they cannot extricate from. In this process of anarchy, it may be possible to contrive a regional mechanism to address such security complex which may be "standard or centred" (Buzan, 1986).¹⁴ Regional security complex is standard when the region is bipolar or multi-polar in nature while the centred regional security is a uni-polar system. The conception of RSCT is that regions are anarchical in nature, characterized by rivalries among contiguous states. RSCT also relies on the geographical proximity of states within a certain region (Buzan, 1986).¹⁵ It posits that states within a certain geographical setting with shared boundaries are inextricably locked together in terms of security. The position is that for the theory to hold, two or more states must share geographical proximity which may makes it difficult for each other to escape from the security threat of the adjacent states. RSC is also characterized by interdependence and rivalry among the constituted states. The regional arrangement render the need for interdependence in some areas inevitable while in some cases states may engage in rivalries in terms of dominating the

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Buzan, B. A framework for regional security analysis. *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers* 1986, 7.

¹²Oladimeji, T. Security, Economy, and Regional Organizations in Nigeria's External Relations. *Impact: Journal of Transformation* 2022, 5(1): 84-93.

¹³Oladimeji, T. Security, Economy, and Regional Organizations in Nigeria's External Relations. *Impact: Journal of Transformation* 2022, 5(1):84-93.

¹⁴¹⁴Buzan, B. A framework for regional security analysis. *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers* 1986, 7

¹⁵Ibid.

regional complex. According to Prys(2010)¹⁶“the nature of security interdependence, national threat perceptions, and quest for autonomy are some of the crucial factors affecting the prospect for collaboration within regional security complexes”.

The last characteristic of RSCT is the perceived independence from global structure (Lake and Morgan, 2010).¹⁷ RSCT evolves as a durable approach in achieving global security. This is because region perceives itself as capable of maintaining its security and it is regarded as such. According to the theory, region tries to maintain its independence by evolving a regional mechanism to prevent external penetration into the region (Ayoob, 1991:267).¹⁸ This is particularly so during the heyday of colonialism where region evolve mechanism to promote decolonization. The formation of pan-Africanism and subsequently OAU can be regarded as a prime example of this scenario. At present, eleven regional security complexes are identified as constituting the basic security approach in the international system (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll, 2010:10).¹⁹It needs to be stressed here that regional security complex has three principal sources of threat. They are: intra-regional rivalry, intra-state threat, and extra-territorial threat.

Intra-regional rivalry is one of the major sources of threat to regional security complex. This is the rivalry that normally brews among the competing states within a region (Ayoob, 1999:249).²⁰Such rivalries can constitute a threat to the regional stability and peace. The rivalry may occur between two most important actors in a region as obtains in the East Asia between Japan and China. In the South Asian sub-continent, Pakistan and India also define the regional security complex. The second source of threat, intra-state threat, occurs where there is a threat within the state itself which constitute an important element in the regional security complex. The internal political imbroglio in a state may have a spillover effect which may threaten the security of a region. This is especially true if the ethnic group in a state has language and cultural affiliations with another in contiguous border. In this way, the existence of problem in a state may warrant the group in another state to lend support or rise against their own state. Such is the case in the Liberia and Sierra Leone. The last source of the threat is the extra-territorial threat (Ojo, 1980).²¹This is one of the most visible threats to regional security complex in the developing world and this maybe a result of colonialism. The former colonial masters and the global powers do have influence and greater structural advantage over the

¹⁶Prys, M. The variability of regional powers. In *Paper presented at the SGIR 7th Pan-European Conference on IR* 2010, (9):11

¹⁷Lake, D. A., & Morgan, P. M. *Regional orders: Building security in a new world*. Penn State Press, 2010.

¹⁸Ayoob, M. The security problematic of the Third World. *World Politics* 1991,43(02): 257-283

¹⁹Frazier, D., & Stewart-Ingersoll, R. Regional powers and security: A framework for understanding order within regional security complexes. *European Journal of International Relations* 2010, 16(4): 731-753.

²⁰Ayoob, M. The security problematic of the Third World. *World Politics* 1991,43(02): 257-283

²¹Ojo, O. J. Nigeria and the Formation of ECOWAS. *International Organization* 1980, 34(4): 571-604.

regional security complex which give them the opportunity to infiltrate the regions in the developing world. This source was very potent during the Cold War era where the two superpowers courted for allies in the developing world. The US's influence in Angola, Liberia and South Africa in Africa is a case in point.

Such extra-territorial threat also defines the West African sub-region where France presence has been noted since the colonial times. It needs to be said that threats to the regional security complex are contained in many ways and one of this is the formation of regional organization to avert or curb incessant security issues (Zartman, 1967:551).²² The establishment and formation of such regional organization is tailored towards regime maintenance, intra-regional conflict control, collective defence and extra-regional intervention and self reliance. It needs to be stressed here that where region security complex is unipolar the overbearing state may promote, sponsor and establish a regional organizations that will cater for the threats enumerated above (Prys, 2010:12).²³ In certain case, therefore, "Regional autonomy could reflect the geopolitical design of the regional hegemonic leader seeking to reduce outside influences in order to enhance its own" (Lynn, 1973: 58).²⁴

RSCT and Nigeria's Multilateral Diplomacy

The data collected has shown that the RSCT can aptly provide explanation for multilateral dimension in the hegemonic posture of Nigeria. Also, the collective security is not unconnected to Nigeria's multilateral policy as most of Nigeria's behaviours in the global politics tend towards the concept of collectivism to address security threats in West African security complex. This is achieved by evolving regional security architecture (Ali, 2012:13).²⁵ Yorom (2010) posits that,

Nigerian leaders believe that the country's security is tied to that of other African states because of cultural and historical experiences, and because of transnational security issues which are defined by the way in which the security of a state is affected by what happens in contiguous countries around its neighbourhood (p. 277).²⁶

The country does not project unilateralism because of the fragility of continental politics. The nature of the regional security complex in the West Africa sub-region has occupied attention of policy makers in Nigeria since independence. While collective security might have been natural to Nigeria ever since independence in 1960; its membership of the ECOWAS as a regional

²²Zartman, I. W. (1967). Africa as a subordinate state system in international relations. *International Organization*, 21(03), 545-564.

²³Prys, M. .The variability of regional powers. In *Paper presented at the SGIR 7th Pan-European Conference on IR 2010*, (9) :11)

²⁴Lynn, M. "The Prospect for Order through Regional Security", in Richard A. Falk and Saul H. Mendlovitz, *Regional Politics and World Order*, San Fransisco, W.H. Freeman, 1973.

²⁵Alli, W. O. *The role of Nigeria in regional security policy*. Nigeria, Abuja: Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 2012.

²⁶Yorom, G, Nigeria and the challenges of transnational security in west africa. In Bassey, C. O., & Oshita, O. O. (Eds.). *Governance and border security in Africa*. (pp.273-294) Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010.

forum has been seeing as window of opportunity to exert considerable influence outside the sub-regional security complex (Ali, 2012:13).²⁷ By Nigerian definitions, security is holistic in its multilateral undertakings. It is in such circumstance that Nigeria sponsored some sub-regional multilateral organizations in 1964 and 1975 (Ojo, 1980: 572).²⁸ Because of the peculiar nature of African states at the time of independence, the burden of providing collective security instrument rest solely on Nigeria. Although countries like Ethiopia, Liberia and Egypt had been championing the course of collective security before Nigeria got independence, the political and social foundation of their intervention was very weak (Chibundi, 2003:5).²⁹ Nigeria by its preponderance power in Africa was in the best position at the time of independence to defend the African interests through multilateral institutions and to seek independence for Africa as a region. Thus, Nigerian military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, stated in 1971 that,

Is fortunate in having the resources potential in men, material and money to lay a solid foundation for a socio-economic revolution in black Africa. The uncompromising objective of a rising economic prosperity in Nigeria is the economic independence of the nation and the defeat of neocolonialist forces in Africa.³⁰

The idea of collective security was later given another dimension when Nigeria unilaterally sponsored the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975. Also, a Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, with the idea of collective security to African problems, sponsored the idea of African Standby Force alongside South Africa (Alo, 2013:296).³¹ The formation of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), AU, and ECOMOG are all byproduct of Nigeria's philosophical underpinning emanating from the nature of regional security complex in Africa. Thus, the foregoing analysis of RSCT indicates that the theory is suitable in studying the Nigeria's multilateral policy.

Role theory

Role theory has been variously applied by sociologist and psychologist in the study of society from the early 1960s. The application of the theory to the field of international relations was a brainchild of K.J.Holsti (1970).³² The theory developed narratives concerning the position of each state in the global political

²⁷27Alli, W. O. *The role of Nigeria in regional security policy*. Nigeria, Abuja: Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 2012.

²⁸Ojo, O. J. Nigeria and the Formation of ECOWAS. *International Organization* 1980, 34(4): 571-604

²⁹Chibundu, V. N). *Foreign Policy: With Particular Reference to Nigeria (1961-2002)*. Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2003.

³⁰Gowon, Y. Head of the Federal Military Government, Commander in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, speech delivered at the opening ceremony of the Eight OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the 21 June, 1971 at Addis Ababa.

³¹Alo, E. N. Obasanjo's leadership role as chairman of NEPAD's HSGIC. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 2013, 7(7): 295-303

³²Holsti, K.J. National role conception in the study of foreign policy. *International studies quarterly* 1970, 14(3): 233-309

space. Holsti stressed that each state defines roles for itself in the international politics which to some extent provides clue in determining the foreign policy direction of states. In this way the theory developed two major concepts: role perception and conception in understanding the foreign policy of regional hegemons (Prys, 2010:12-14).³³ Role perception refers to the roles expected a state to play in the global political arena while role conception is the role state defines for itself in the globe (Harnisch, 2011:8).³⁴ Role conception is a systematic appreciation of roles, as designed and formulated by policymakers in a state, state defines for itself in the global arena. It needs to be stated that to understand the foreign policy of a state, one can engage in discourse analysis of speeches of leaders, diplomats, military, and policymakers of a certain state to appropriately establish the role conception of such state. States conceived a role for itself based on the identity and norms which define the existence of states within the international system. The role definition and conception of a state is a product of internal variables of the state as state cannot devise a role beyond its internal capability (Harnisch, 2011:10). Such internal capabilities are economy, military, demography and geography (Holsti, 1970:235).³⁵ There are some futures that are discerned from role theory which define the role regional hegemony can play in the global politics. Some of these features are discussed below

Self-perception: Concept of self-perception in role theory underscores the hegemonic role of a certain state in the global politics. It emphasizes the role a state perceived for itself within a regional subsystem or at structural level. The role perception establishes the fact that state may be pushed or willingly decides to perform certain role in the global politics and this arises from the material capability of the state. State cannot assume any role that is beyond its own means and capability and this tends to support the notion that role theory is a family member of hegemonic theories. In this manner, state look inward before projecting role for itself either at regional level or global arena.

Role conception: Role conception stipulates that some states conceive certain roles and responsibilities for themselves in the global politics. This approach posits that preponderant state in a region or globe naturally assumes leadership position for itself to perform certain responsibilities which some small states may not capable of doing (Wish, 1980:539).³⁶ Again, this approach is a reminiscence of hegemonic theory which relies predominantly on the material capacity of state. Some states willingly perform some roles by regional recognition accorded to it by regional member states. In this case, a preponderant state may be invited by other state to assume a position of leadership in conflict situation. This, thus, pushes the boundary of role theory to include regional acceptance of hegemony. This element does not easy to track

³³Prys, M. The variability of regional powers. In *Paper presented at the SGIR 7th Pan-European Conference on IR 2010*, (9):11.

³⁴Harnisch, S. Role theory: operationalisation of key concepts. In H. Sebastian, F. Cornelia & M.W. Hanns (Eds), *role theory in international relations, approaches and analyses* (pp.7-15). USA: Routledge, 2011.

³⁵Holsti, K.J. National role conception in the study of foreign policy. *International studies quarterly* 1970, 14(3): 233-309.

³⁶Wish, N. B. Foreign policy makers and their national role conceptions. *International Studies Quarterly* 1980, 24(4): 532-554.

as most regional members occasionally resist the overwhelming power of a regional hegemony and this is natural as power breeds envy. In this way, role perception is a result of identity formation of a state in relation to the role of others (Wish, 1980:536).³⁷ State in a regional subsystem may deem it necessary to perceive certain role for itself because of its material position within the system or subsystem. Some of these roles are liberator, regional protector, regional leader, anti-imperialist agent, mediator, regional protector and bridge building. The roles listed here are normally believed to be performed by hegemon in a regional subsystem or at global level. For state, therefore, to perform some of these roles and responsibilities, its material capabilities must dictate as such.

Nigeria's Multilateral Policy and Role Theory

Role theory is one of the best-suited approaches in the study of Nigeria's multilateral policy. Prior to the date of independence in 1960, many Nigerian leaders began to perceive the country as the automatic leader of Africa. In order to perform the role conceived for the newly-created state, the multilateral policy became an important instrument to perform such role (Adeniji, 2005:1).³⁸ Through the content analysis of speeches, parliamentary debates, official documents and press conferences, it showed that Nigerian policy makers, leaders, public and military are aware of the certain roles perceived for the country. The data collected so far confirmed the suitability of the theory in studying Nigeria's regional hegemonic status and multilateral policy. Through triangulation of data sources, the research has identified some of the roles performed by Nigeria through multilateral organisations. These roles are: regional protector, liberator, bridge builder, developer, regional subsystem collaborator, mediator, regional leader, and integrator.

Conclusion

Nigeria's multilateral policy is a product of foreign policy orientation and direction. The utilization of multilateral organizations by Nigeria's government started in 1960s when Nigeria started pursuing the establishment of regional organization by then Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Thus, the exploration of such endeavor showed that the Nigerian government perceived for itself some critical roles to be played within the Africa's political system. In this case, role theory can explain the involvement of Nigeria in several issues within the continents. Role theory explains the utilization of ECOWAS in resolving some conflicts within the sub-regional system. Again, Regional Security Complex Theory also lends credence to the Nigeria's response to sub-regional and regional security through the multilateral platforms of ECOWAS, African Union, and ECOMOG. The intertwine nature of regional security in West Africa has endeared Nigeria towards the sponsoring of multilateral institutions to achieve regional stability. Multinational Joint Task established by countries

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Adeniji, A. Power and Representation at the United Nations: A Critique of Nigeria's Bid for Permanent Seat in the Security Council. *India Quarterly* 2005, 61(2): 116.

like Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria is a case in point. The Joint task effort is to combat insurgency and terrorism within the West Africa Sub-regional system. Thus, to fully understand the Nigeria's employment of multilateral diplomacy, Regional Security Complex Theory and Role theory are potent theoretical lens that provide insight.

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