gsin

GLOBAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE NOTE

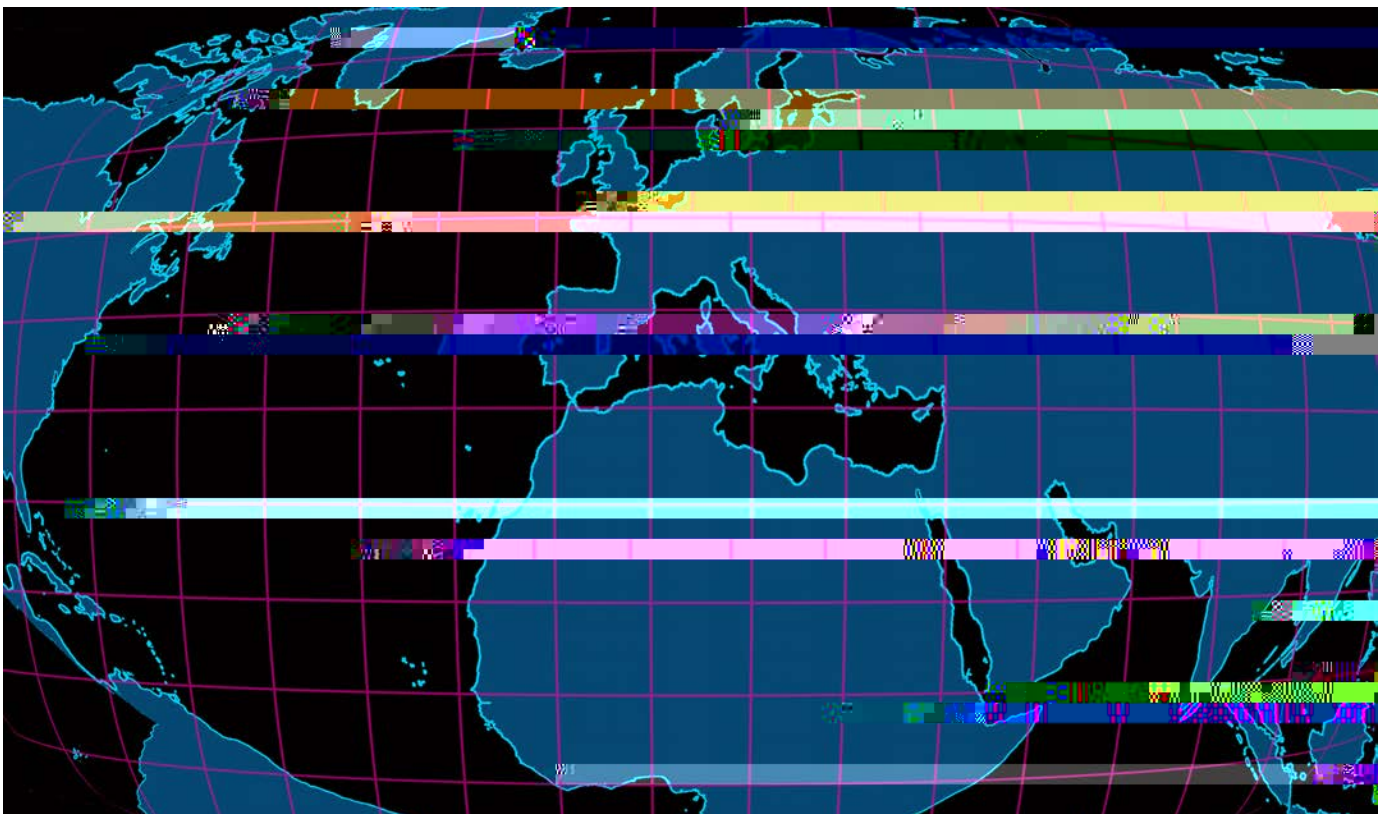*Fidel ABOWEI*

The Military and Soft Power: Assessing the case of Nigeria's Security Engagement in West Africa from the Perception of Ghanaian and Liberian Political and Academic Elites

The Military and Soft Power:

Assessing the case of Nigeria's Security Engagement in West Africa from the Perception of Ghanaian and Liberian Political and Academic Elites

Fidel Abowei

When military power is evoked, what come to mind are soldiers, tanks, bombers and ships – resources that underlie the hard power behavior of coercion. Because military resources are mostly applied to limit the choices of others, their utility is usually associated with imposed behavior. Building on a rich literature on conceptualizations of soft power, this paper argues that military resources and their associated policies do have attractive potentials. It investigates the views of Liberian and Ghanaian political and academic elites towards Nigeria's security engagement in West Africa to illuminate the relationship between certain expressions of military power and attraction. The analysis reveals that Nigeria's repeated contributions to peace support operations within the region and its engagement in high-level military diplomacy that involve personnel exchanges and joint military exercises, are all different expressions of its military power that are viewed positively amongst Liberian and Ghanaian elites. It also remarks that Nigeria's inability to curtail the threat of Boko Haram is a drag on its reputation for military invincibility. To the extent that the nature of Nigerian security engagement in the region is designed to enhance its leadership status and deepen sub-regional integration, the analysis stresses the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy approach.

Although recently, cogige,8

West African, are not so different in this regard since, nowadays, the absolute rarity of brazenly coercive posturing, in the form of interstate military confrontation, has limited the utility of military resources to intrastate conflicts and the quest to eliminate trans-border organized criminal groups such as Boko-Haram, Ansaru and Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) operating regionally. This regional context has allowed Nigeria, in its drive for continental leadership, to engage significantly in the security dynamics of the region, despite confronting internal security challenges — the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, the rise of banditry in north-west and the Niger Delta crises.

Since the 1990s, Nigeria – the most populous and largest economy in Africa[2] – has engaged militarily in civil wars in Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Liberia under UN, African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peace operations. It also participates in joint military exercises and personnel exchanges with neighboring states to maximize inter-operability and cultural familiarity. More recently, Nigeria mobilized a coalition of West African states under the ECOWAS Mission in Gambia (ECOMIG) to oust Gambian dictator Yahaya Jammeh from power, in the aftermath of the disputed presidential elections, which took place in 2016. This paper assumes that the nature of Nigeria's military engagement with its regional neighbors is likely to suscitate favorable perceptions for the country that may constitute a source of influence. It is suggestive of what Joseph Nye dubs the power of attraction, that is, the ability of a state to obtain the outcomes it desires in inter-state relations because other states "admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of openness – want to follow it".

The analysis conducted herein is situated within the framework of Nye's conceptualization of soft power since military resources are a vital component of a state's power arsenal; and, as Nye suggests, the demarcation between what is hard and what is soft about power is less in the tangibility of power resources a state possesses than in the nature of the behavior of such state towards others.[8] In other words, how a state's military resources are applied to pursue strategic objectives is more indicative of its soft power capability than the nature of its resources. This u42.6637 T-4 ( )-89e-2 (a)-4 (t)3 (i)3 (v)-2 (e)-210 (o25T-4 210 (o25T4 (nal)6 (;)]T.l(a)5 ()Tj 0.0804 m1)-89

behavior.[15] In what instances then do military resources generate attraction? Nye proposes three sources of attraction for a state: its culture, political values (when consistent at home and abroad), and foreign policy (when it is perceived to be legitimate and having moral authority).[16] To the extent that military resources are instrumentalised within the context of a state's foreign policy, their use in a non-coercive, benign and legitimate form is likely to generate attraction and tangible foreign policy benefits.

Accordingly, the strength of a state's military, relative to others, as well as the nature of security ties and military alliances it has with other states, is likely to generate attraction especially when it is perceived as competent and providing security for others.[17] As an important output of military alliances, providing protection for other states against threats may also generate attraction if perceived to be trustworthy and credible.

Nigeria's use of military power in West Africa

With the largest economy in Africa,[19] a defence budget of USD 1.9 billion (2019 est.) and a 120,000 active military force, Nigeria's superior military capability in West Africa is well documented.[20] Among the leading military powers in the continent, Nigeria ranks after Egypt, Algeria and South Africa. In West Africa, the Nigerian defence budget is nearly the combined defence budget of all other fourteen states in the sub-region. After Nigeria, the biggest military spenders in the sub-region are Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire – $0.7 billion and $0.5 billion respectively.[21] Both countries, also, come after Nigeria in terms of manpower as they boast 25,000 and 15,000 military personnel. This dominance also extends to the realm of military infrastructure and equipment whether in terms of quality and quantity.[22]

Despite superior Nigerian material strength, its operational capability does not extend beyond the defence of its sovereignty and, to a large extent, the West African sub-region, and, thus, can best be described as a regional power. This regional power status has shaped what can be described as a largely liberalist and normative foreign policy posture – imbued in Nigerian leadership aspirations and the need to deepen sub-regional integration – that emphasizes international peace and security and, by implication, regional security and cooperation, humanitarian assistance and, finally, upholding human rights and global humanitarian norms.[23] They are analogous to the means by which the country seeks to attain the national interest, which the Nigerian National Defence Policy (NNDP) of 2006 and its latest iteration of 2017 categorize as vital, strategic and peripheral.[24] Whereas the vital interest is securitarian in nature as it emphasizes the "survival" of the nation through the protection of citizens and the guarantee of sovereignty, its

---

[19] African Development Bank, "Nigeria Economic Outlook 2020".

[20] Nan Tian *et al.,* "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019", SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2020, https://www. sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2019. For Nigeria's military strength see Global Fire Power, "Nigeria Military Strength 2020", https://www.globalfirepower. com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=nigeria.

[21] Tian, "Trends in World Military Expenditure", 6.

[22] Whereas Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have 64, 34 and 33 aircrafts respectively, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has an inventory of 200 to 250 aircrafts, including F-7NI (Chengdu J-7) light fighters, FT-7NI trainers, 20 Alpha light fighter jets, L-39ZA Albatross jet trainers, three C-130 Hercules, 20 Mi-35Ps and Mi-35Ms, 10 Mi-24Vs, etc.

[23] Daniel C. Bach,

strategic and peripheral interest contemplate the means by which the vital interest may be achieved.[25]

The Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) have been instrumental in pursuing these objectives whether at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. Apart from the overbearing influence of the idiosyncrasies of successive Nigerian leaders, the persistent threat to Nigeria's stability from the recurrence of intra-state conflicts, not only in states contiguous to the country's national boundaries but all over Africa, shaped a defence policy that emphasizes multilateral and bilateral cooperation in areas of peacekeeping, joint military training and exercises, exchange of personnel and expertise, and intelligence gathering, as a means of ensuring not only regional peace and security, but, ultimately, sub-regional integration.[26] The NNDP, which de-emphasizes the use of force except in instances where Nigeria's maritime and trade routes are under threat, mandates the AFN to participate "in complex political emergencies including humanitarian assistance" under international alliances, including the UN, AU and ECOWAS.[27]

According to Wasa Festus, a deputy director in the Nigerian Ministry of Defence, the country pursues "a peaceful foreign policy" and the AFN is authorized to support this objective.[28] Consequently, the AFN has engaged actively in, over, 20 peacekeeping operations since it first participated in the UN Operations in the Congo (ONUC) in 1960. Under the auspices of the AU, 1,500 Nigerian troops, including military personnel and observers, participated in the peace mission in Sudan (AMIS).[29] In West Africa, Nigeria led the transformation of ECOWAS from a distinctively economic union to an institution that also caters for

(UNAMSIL) respectively. In both missions it contributed over 80 percent of troops and 90 percent of funds, estimated to be in the region of $8-10 billion.[30]

Under Nigeria's leadership, ECOMOG, which benefitted from troop contributions from all Anglophone states in the region as well as Guinea, was successful in bringing the warring factions in the Liberian civil war – the government of Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) – to a peace 3j 0.-6s 3j is   y   i   (L

pool resources together to combat the rising menace of Jihadist groups in the Lack Chad Basin.[32] More importantly, it is indicative of Nigerian disposition to a multilateral approach in tackling security challenges not just within West Africa but also across the continent.

Beyond peace support operations, the AFN engages also in joint military exercises and personnel exchange programmes with counterparts from West African states to enhance cultural familiarity and interoperability in times of joint missions, as a means of enhancing w23 (t)7 eaan ofw2o4c249

Liberian military cadets have also received training at the NDA while mid-level officers attend the AFCSC.

further notes that

As the descriptive statistics indicate (Figure 1), 63.5% of coded units referenced Nigerian military engagement in West Africa positively. This coding applied where interviewees expressed favorable views of Nigerian role in peace support operations and its commitment to the peace and stability of the sub-region. In Liberia, a feeling of gratitude towards Nigeria for its role in the peace process, buttressed by Nigeria's role in rebuilding the A 3 (rC)2 (i)2 (i)2 rCi,gessn (s)-37( )-t4 (t)75 (3)7

with beneficiaries of assistance.[46] These views are indicative of the extent to which negative practices by peacekeeping forces can rob off negatively on the image of the sending countries.

The prevalent issue of Boko Haram, which the Nigerian government is still unable to deal with, may also explain some of these negative percetions, as quite a few references alluded to the inability of a seemingly powerful military like Nigeria's to deal with the homegrown terrorist group. These negative sentiments were further compounded by reports of Boko Haram infiltrating the Nigerian army. Reactions of this nature should not come as a surprise since only 11% coded units

corporative relationship. Thus, bearing in mind that other elements of Nigeria's behavior may also influence their subjectivity, the next section questions if favorable perceptions of Nigeria have engendered support for its foreign policy objectives. In other words, has the attraction Ghanaian and Liberian elites

clearly defined strategic interests in Nigeria's involvement in regional conflicts, as exemplified in Liberia and Sierra Leone, is one of the reasons why Nigerian scholars and foreign policy analysts believe that the country's foreign policy is anything but strategic.

Regardless of Nigeria's intent, perceptions amongst Liberians and Ghanaians elites appear to suggest that Nigerian military engagement in West Africa is mostly positive. To the extent that this behavior is attractive, I argue that enhanced security cooperation and acceptance of Nigerian leadership status within Liberia and Ghana are commensurate with Nigeria's foreign objectives and are indicators to the effectiveness of its approach.

West Africa's security context has changed considerably from the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War years when Nigeria was required to play a leading role in conflict interventions. Today, civil wars have given way to new forms of threats such as the rise of armed religious extremism, maritime piracy, narco-trafficking and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Nigeria itself is dealing with a homegrown insurgency that continues to undermine the security and stability of the northeastern part of the country as well as neighboring states, while countries like Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau and, recently, Mali are contending with political instabilities.

Nevertheless, the sub-region remains home of the most stable states in Africa led by Ghana, Senegal and Cape Verde. Furthermore, the role of Nigeria in Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia successfully transitioned these states from war to peace. West Africa has suffered less conflict and fatalities than any other sub-region in the continent.[51] From a regional security stand point, ECOWAS is the only organization with a stand-by force ready to intervene in conflicts, should the need arise, thanks to Nigerian leadership. These are gains that undoubtedly illustrate an enhanced regional security context.

That Nigeria has a hand in the reassuring security profile of the sub-region is not in question, but other states in the region as well as extra-continental actors – former colonial masters and the UN – equally played some role. The fear of Nigerian dominance or hegemonic aspirations from Francophone West African states, that almost curtailed the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975, has gradually dissipated, not only because of Nigeria's multilateral security engagement in the sub-region but also of its diplomatic initiatives in the economic and cultural realm.[52] In a sign of enhanced cooperation within ECOWAS on questions of security, Operation

---

[51] Marc Alexandre *et al., The Challenge of Stability and Security in West Africa* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2015) 1-9.

[52] For more on the relational dynamics of West African states see Clement A. Adibe, "Foreign Policy Decisionmaking in Anglophone West Africa", in Gilbert M. Khadiagala and Terrence Lyons (eds), *African Foreign Policies: Power and Process*

The *Global Security and Intelligence Note* (GSIN) series, published by BUCSIS, aims at encouraging critical analysis of contemporary security and intelligence affairs and at contributing to the wider dialogue, among scholars, government officials, experts and other professionals, with a view towards advancing cutting edge policy recommendations to the most ambiguous global security and intelligence challenges. It envisages the publication of original, unpublished, papers, by established scholars as well as emerging researchers, on a variety of contemporary questions, such as collective security, hybrid threats, terrorism, cyber security, intelligence studies, unconventional warfare, human security, public surveillance, and other questions pertaining to international security and intelligence.