THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL HEGEMONISM: NIGERIA AND THE BURDEN OF PEACE-KEEPING IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Regarding Nigeria's past participation in important missions in Africa that include ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the AU/UN Mission in Darfur, and intervention in Mali, this paper therefore explores Nigeria's position as a regional hegemony in African peacekeeping. The main goal is to analyze Nigeria's motivations, challenges, and effects on regional stability within the framework of hegemonic ambitions. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative approach, investigating Nigeria's peacekeeping policies and their ramifications using secondary sources. The results of the research show the need for Nigeria's leadership in peacekeeping operations in addition to major obstacles resulting from political unrest, financial restrictions, and rivalry with other regional powers. The report emphasizes the need for strategic alliances inside ECOWAS and the AU to assist Nigeria's peacekeeping projects and calls for further cooperation and capacity-building to strengthen African regional security systems.

Keywords: Regional Hegemonism, Nigeria, Peace-Keeping, ECOWAS, African Union (AU).

Introduction

Nigeria, which lies within the West African Sub-region, is the most populous nation in Africa with about 200 million people. The country has a great impact on both sub-regional and continental matters thanks to this demographic weight. Its geopolitical relevance is enhanced by its strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea, rich in natural resources like oil and gas. One of the biggest economies in Africa. Often a diplomatic center, Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, hosts several regional meetings and conferences. Major groups, including the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, mirror the greater cultural variety of the African continent, therefore establishing Nigeria as a microcosm of Africa in the country's varied ethnic composition.

Historically, Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy has been marked by a steadfast commitment to African unification and the promotion of regional stability. This dedication is

exemplified by Nigeria's instrumental role in the founding of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975[1], a significant step towards African unity. Nigeria's proactive engagement in continental organizations such as the African Union (AU) underscores its ambition to reshape the political landscape of Africa. The country's commitment to collective security is evident in its participation in regional security projects, including the establishment of the African Standby Force. Nigeria's leadership in the region is further solidified by its contributions to peacekeeping activities and conflict resolution initiatives across Africa. Through its economic and cultural exports, Nigeria's impact goes beyond its boundaries. African popular culture is largely influenced by the nation's entertainment scene, especially Nollywood. The influence of Nigerian music, literature, and fashion throughout the continent is a testament to the strength of its soft power. As a major trading partner of several African nations, Nigeria promotes economic cooperation and interdependence. With Lagos as a major financial center, the nation's financial industry draws investments and supports regional economic growth. Leading regional economic projects, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, show Nigeria's dedication to regional economic integration.

Nigeria's military might add even more to its regional impact. Among the biggest and most sophisticated armed forces in Africa, Nigerian ones are vital for regional security. Nigeria's strong participation in military operations, including the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as in peacekeeping missions under the United Nations, demonstrates its capacity to project force outside of its boundaries[2]. The security alliances the nation forms with other African countries and world powers improve its strategic posture. Nigeria's military training programs and support of regional security systems highlight its function as a security supplier. Despite the significant influence it wields, Nigeria faces numerous internal challenges that impact its regional leadership. These challenges, including political unrest, corruption, and economic inequality, are formidable. Ethnic and religious tensions, as evidenced by the conflict in the Niger Delta and the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, pose a threat to national unity. These domestic issues often constrain Nigeria's ability to fully pursue its regional hegemonic aspirations. However, Nigeria's resilience and ongoing

efforts to address these challenges demonstrate its capacity to maintain and enhance its leadership position in Africa, offering hope for the future.

Definition of Vital Terms.

Regional hegemonism is the domination of one state or a coalition of powers inside a given geographical area, therefore influencing political, economic, and security issues. This idea stems from the more general notion of hegemony in international relations, according to which a hegemon, or leading state, is crucial in preserving and creating order inside a given system[3]. Triple Within the framework of regional hegemonism, the hegemonic state aims to mould the local surroundings to its benefit, usually employing security systems, economic integration projects, and leadership in regional organizations. This supremacy goes beyond mere power-exerting abilities to include public goods like economic stability and security that would help the whole area.

Regional hegemonism employs soft as well as hard power tactics. While soft power is diplomatic endeavors, cultural influence, and ideological leadership, hard power is military interventions and economic leverage. Nigeria's hard power strategy is best shown by its peacekeeping operations and the economic support of surrounding nations. Its diplomatic activities and cultural exports, such as Nollywood films, mirror its soft power approach in the meantime. These techniques, taken together, enable Nigeria to maintain and increase its regional impact. Nigeria wants to establish a suitable atmosphere for its hegemonic rule by juggling diplomatic and cultural outreach with forceful policies.

Overview Of Nigeria's Involvement in Major African Peacekeeping Missions

With major contributions to operations in nations including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Mali, Nigeria has become a major actor in African peacekeeping operations. Among the first and most prominent actions was the 1990s civil war intervention in Liberia. Leading member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria led the creation of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to help Liberia to be at peace[5]. Thousands of Nigerian troops were to be sent, military and logistical support was to be given, and diplomatic

negotiations toward peace were to be facilitated. Nigeria's assistance was crucial in bringing the situation under control and finally producing the peace deal to bring the war to a conclusion.

In Sierra Leone, Nigeria also was rather important in helping to end the terrible civil conflict that broke out in the early 1990s. Widespread crimes and violations of human rights defined the conflict, which drove ECOWAS to send ECOMOG forces—mostly from Nigeria—with supplies and workforce[6]. Securing the capital, Freetown, and helping the government against rebel groups was made possible in great part by the Nigerian military. The Nigerian-led ECOMOG mission was crucial in establishing the conditions for the ultimate deployment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), therefore enabling the consolidation of peace and disarmament of fighters. Through its involvement in the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and the consequent United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)[7], Nigeria has helped bring peace to Sudan.VII By using these missions, Nigeria sought to solve the humanitarian problem and continuous conflict in the Darfur region. The Nigerian military has participated in assisting the peace process, safeguarding citizens, and enabling humanitarian aid. Nigeria's contribution to these missions underlines its commitment to regional stability and its readiness to engage in complicated peacekeeping operations.

Nigeria has also been actively participating in peacekeeping efforts in Mali, particularly in response to the 2012 crisis that witnessed the growth of rebel groups and the instability of the region. Nigeria sent troops to the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which was eventually integrated into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)[8]. Nigerian forces played a critical role in stabilizing key areas, supporting the Malian government, and combating extremist groups. Nigeria's participation in Mali emphasizes its strategic need to guarantee regional stability and oppose terrorism. These peacekeeping deployments underscore Nigeria's long-standing dedication to regional stability and its proactive approach to resolving African disputes. Through its involvement in these activities, Nigeria has demonstrated its ability to lead and organize international initiatives, often providing significant resources and a workforce. The historical context of Nigeria's peacekeeping activity highlights its strategic importance in maintaining

peace and security across the continent and showcases its leadership within ECOWAS and the African Union.

The Reasons Nigeria Joined Peacekeeping Operations

Nigeria's engagement in African peacekeeping operations is driven by a combination of political, financial, and security concerns. Politically, Nigeria aims to assert its leadership authority within West Africa and the larger African continent. Leading in peacekeeping activities helps Nigeria establish its influence within regional organizations like ECOWAS and the African Union, enhancing its diplomatic strength and enabling it to influence regional policies and projects. For instance, Nigeria's significant participation in ECOMOG during the conflicts between Liberia and Sierra Leone confirmed its status as a regional force capable of organizing and supervising international peacekeeping initiatives.

Economically, Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping operations is driven in part by the goal of providing a stable and favorable setting for regional trade and investment. Conflicts between neighboring nations can have spillover impacts, upsetting economic channels, uprooting populations, and posing security issues. Through peacekeeping, Nigeria seeks to lessen these negative consequences and advance regional economic stability. For Liberia and Sierra Leone, for instance, stabilization helped to bring back cross-border commerce and commercial activity, strengthening Nigeria's economy and promoting regional economic integration. Nigerian peacekeeping efforts also heavily rely on security considerations. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa with a sizable economic presence, is especially conscious of the possible security risks and conflicts in surrounding nations. These disputes might cause weaponry to proliferate, migrants to migrate, and extreme ideas to spread—all of which might throw off Nigeria's security scene. For example, Nigeria's intervention in Mali was motivated by the necessity to offset the threat of terrorism and stop the spread of insurgent activity that might compromise the Sahel area or beyond. Through peacekeeping operations, Nigeria aims to solve security concerns at its source and create a more stable regional security scene.

Nigeria's peacekeeping activities are also shaped by its dedication to pan-African solidarity and the principles of collective security. Nigeria sees its role in peacekeeping as part of its broader responsibility to promote stability and peace across the continent. Rooted in Nigeria's foreign policy, which emphasizes African unity and cooperation, this commitment is evident in Nigeria's involvement in UNAMID and AMIS in Sudan, demonstrating its commitment to helping the African Union address issues and manage humanitarian disasters. This sense of duty to promote continental peace underscores Nigeria's vision of a unified and peaceful Africa.

Finally, the wish to improve its international profile and win support from international partners shapes Nigeria's reasons for joining peacekeeping operations as well. By actively participating in peacekeeping activities, Nigeria can show its dedication to world peace and security, thus improving its ties with foreign agencies, including the United Nations. Nigeria's contributions to UN missions—including UNIFIL and UNAMID—showcase its position as a conscientious global citizen. By drawing international support and cooperation on several political, economic, and security concerns, these initiatives help to build Nigeria's diplomatic capital.

Difficulties with Regional Hegemonism.
The challenges of regional hegemonism are examined under two sub-headings, namely, internal challenges, and regional and international challenges.
Internal Challenges: Significant internal challenges, including political unrest, economic restrictions, and military limitations, complicate Nigeria's position as a regional hegemon and peacekeeper. Politically, Nigeria has experienced periods of instability that can undermine its capacity to lead and engage in peacekeeping missions. Periodically upsetting political processes and eroding public confidence in the administration, issues including electoral violence, corruption, and governance shortcomings have. For example, the divisive presidential contests in 2019 and 2023 exposed the difficulties of upholding democratic legitimacy and political stability. Such internal political problems might divert Nigeria's capacity for regional influence and power projection.

Furthermore, Nigeria's efforts at peacekeeping are seriously challenged due to financial limitations. Though Nigeria boasts the biggest economy in Africa, it suffers significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, variable oil prices, and general poverty. Dependency on oil income makes Nigeria susceptible to fluctuations in the world market, which might affect its capacity to support peacekeeping operations. Economic constraints also limit the government's capacity to invest in vital areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, which are essential for long-term stability and progress. Balancing these domestic economic needs with the financial demands of peacekeeping is a perennial dilemma for Nigerian officials. Military limitations further complicate Nigeria's role in regional peacekeeping. While Nigeria possesses one of the largest and most experienced armed forces in Africa, it faces many operational and logistical obstacles. Issues such as low budget, outdated equipment, and logistical bottlenecks might hinder the efficacy of Nigerian peacekeeping operations. For example, during the early stages of the ECOMOG mission in Liberia, Nigerian troops faced significant logistical challenges, including delays in troop deployment and shortages of essential supplies[9]. These limitations underscore the need for continuous investment in military capabilities and infrastructure to support Nigeria's peacekeeping ambitions. The internal security situation in Nigeria also affects its ability to engage in regional peacekeeping. Among several internal security challenges Nigeria faces are militancy in the Niger Delta, communal and ethnic violence in the Middle Belt, and Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. These security issues call for major resources and attention, therefore limiting Nigeria's ability to join outside peacekeeping operations. For example, the continuous struggle with Boko Haram calls for significant military and financial resources that might otherwise be used for regional peacekeeping initiatives.

Regional and International Challenges

Nigeria's role as a regional hegemon and peacekeeper is also challenged by regional and international dynamics, including competition with other regional powers, relations with global powers, and dependency on international support. Regionally, Nigeria faces competition from other influential African states that also seek to assert their leadership in peacekeeping and regional affairs. Countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Ethiopia have significant military

capabilities and political influence, often vying for leadership roles within the African Union and other regional organizations. This competition can sometimes lead to differing approaches and priorities in peacekeeping missions, requiring careful coordination and diplomacy. In particular, the competition between Nigeria and South Africa has been a clear feature of regional dynamics. Both countries are seen as leading powers in their respective regions and have occasionally had differing views on continental issues. For instance, during the African Union's efforts to mediate the Libyan crisis in 2011, Nigeria and South Africa had divergent positions, reflecting their distinct foreign policy approaches[10].

Nigeria's relations with global powers also impact its peacekeeping role. As a significant player in African peacekeeping, Nigeria often collaborates with international partners, including the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union. While these partnerships provide valuable support, they also come with challenges. Dependency on international funding and logistical support can limit Nigeria's autonomy and decision-making in peacekeeping operations. For example, UN peacekeeping missions often rely on funding and equipment from donor countries, which can influence mission priorities and strategies. Also, the dynamics of international politics can affect Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts. Global powers often have their strategic interests in African conflicts, which can influence their support for peacekeeping missions. The intervention in Mali, for instance, involved coordination with France, which has significant historical and strategic interests in the region. Dependency on international support extends beyond financial and logistical aspects to include training and capacity building. While international partnerships have helped enhance Nigeria's peacekeeping capabilities, reliance on external training and support can create vulnerabilities. Ensuring that Nigeria builds its own sustainable training and capacity-building programs is crucial for long-term self-reliance and effectiveness. The Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Centre (NAPKC) is a step in this direction, providing specialized training for Nigerian and other African peacekeepers. Strengthening such domestic measures can lessen dependency and strengthen Nigeria's capabilities to lead and sustain peacekeeping activities.

Case Studies.

i. ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone: Among the most important peacekeeping operations Nigeria undertakes are those involving interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). With Nigeria supplying most of the troops and leadership, ECOWAS sent ECOMOG to Liberia following the start of the civil war there in 1989. The intervention sought to bring order back among the anarchy produced by the warring groups headed by Charles Taylor and Samuel Doe by stopping the bloodshed. Notwithstanding the good intentions, the operation confronted significant difficulties, including a lack of clear mandate and logistical assistance, which resulted in the first failures in controlling the violence. Following a coup overthrowing Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's democratically elected government, Nigeria's participation under ECOMOG started in Sierra Leone in 1997. The intervention aimed to rebuild civilian rule and stop the crimes carried out by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The junta was overthrown, and the government of Kabbah was restored, in great part by Nigerian soldiers. Like the Liberian operation, the intervention was beset by logistical difficulties, inadequate financing, and claims of human rights violations by ECOMOG forces. Notwithstanding these problems, the intervention finally helped Sierra Leone to stabilize and opened the path for later UN peacekeeping missions.

Restoring relative stability in both Liberia and Sierra Leone allowed the ECOMOG deployments to be one of their main achievements since it made humanitarian assistance and reconstruction activities possible. The actions proved Nigeria's capacity and will to spearhead regional peacekeeping initiatives, therefore gaining respect and recognition from the international world. Setting a model for further ECOWAS and African Union (AU) operations, the missions also underlined the value of regional cooperation in resolving issues inside Africa. Still, the ECOMOG actions also exposed major shortcomings and difficulties. The success of the missions was hampered by unclear and unified command structures, poor logistical assistance, and varying foreign support. These problems caused protracted strife and extra hardship for the civilian population. Furthermore, the allegations of human rights abuses by ECOMOG personnel harmed Nigeria's reputation and raised issues about the conduct and discipline of peacekeeping

soldiers. These experiences underlined the necessity for extensive training, enough resources, and robust supervision systems in peacekeeping missions.

ii.   AU/UN Mission in Darfur: Challenges and Contributions of Nigeria: Another major episode in Nigeria's peacekeeping history is its participation in the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Established in 2007, UNAMID was assigned to bring the Darfur area of Sudan under stability following a horrific conflict that had caused extensive crimes and a humanitarian disaster. Nigeria made a major contribution to this effort, sending thousands of troops and police officers. Protecting civilians, enabling humanitarian relief, and bolstering the peace process between the Sudanese government and several rebel groups comprised the objectives of the mission[11]. Nigeria's contributions to UNAMID were significant, including its leadership capacity. Nigerian officials occupied prominent roles in the command structure, including the Force Commander post, thereby enhancing Nigeria's influence and decision-making capacity during the operation. Nigerian forces greatly aided the delivery of security and humanitarian aid to displaced people. Nigerian peacekeepers enabled some regions of Darfur to be stabilized, therefore enabling the resumption of agricultural activity and the return of some internally displaced people (IDPs) to their homes[12].

The UNAMID mission encountered several difficulties notwithstanding their contributions. Achieving long-lasting peace was challenging in Darfur's large and far-off geography, as well as in the continuous conflict between the Sudanese government and rebel groups. Along with their counterparts abroad, Nigerian peacekeepers frequently worked in quite dangerous environments, managing difficult political dynamics and under attack from armed organizations. The mission also battled inadequate finance, poor logistical assistance, and bureaucratic roadblocks that limited its efficacy and capacity to effectively execute its goal. The lack of collaboration from the Sudanese government, which occasionally hampered UNAMID's activities and limited its access to combat areas, was still another major difficulty. This lack of help from the host country made it more difficult for the mission to safeguard people and provide relief. Coordination and communication difficulties also arose from the peacekeeping force's varied composition—that of personnel from many nations with distinct military systems and languages. These problems

highlighted the requirement for efficient command and control systems as well as the difficulty of international peacekeeping activities.

Furthermore, under examination was the UNAMID mission's capacity to stop crimes and properly defend people. As instances of violence and abuses of human rights persisted, doubts regarding the mission's influence and the general strategy for peacekeeping in Darfur grew. As a significant troop-contributing nation, Nigeria was included in this larger assessment that underlined the restrictions and limits of foreign peacekeeping operations in firmly rooted conflicts. These difficulties underlined the need for reasonable goals, strong support systems, and all-encompassing political solutions to go along with military operations.

Notwithstanding challenges, Nigeria's participation in UNAMID strengthened its dedication to humanitarian values and regional stability. The mission provided valuable lessons in handling challenging peacekeeping operations, managing host nation opposition, and navigating international political dynamics. By demonstrating its readiness to assume significant responsibilities in the pursuit of peace and security in Africa, Nigeria's contributions to UNAMID also enhanced its position within the African Union and the larger global community. The lessons learned from UNAMID will undoubtedly shape Nigeria's future peacekeeping strategies and its role in international peacekeeping efforts.

iii.   Mali intervention: Nigeria's role within the larger international coalition: Initiated in 2013, the intervention in Mali represents yet another pivotal turning point in the history of Nigerian peacekeeping. Under the direction of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), later merged into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the goal was to stabilize the nation following a coup and the advent of Islamist militants in the northern areas[13]. Nigeria participated actively in the larger multinational coalition, supplying troops and financial and logistical support. The intervention aimed to save people, and bring back constitutional order. However, the mission faced significant challenges, including the vast and rugged terrain of Mali, the complex political dynamics, and the continuous threat from the rebel groups. These challenges underscored the complexity and difficulty of international peacekeeping operations.

Apart from regional security issues and the need to preserve peace in West Africa, Nigeria's engagement in Mali was motivated by various other factors. Given the current Boko Haram insurgency in Mali's northeastern section, the emergence of Islamist groups there directly threatened Nigeria. The administration of Nigeria realized that the unrest in Mali would have wider consequences for regional security and might help terrorists to spread over West Africa. Nigeria thus actively supported the operation, first by direct military participation and then by political efforts inside ECOWAS and the African Union. Nigeria's military participated in different actions targeted at stabilizing important areas and bolstering Malian forces inside the larger international coalition. Nigerian peacekeepers helped to distribute humanitarian aid, guarded important infrastructure, and engaged in joint patrols. Along with training and supporting Malian security forces to improve their ability to independently control the insurgency threat, deployment is also involved.

Still, the intervention in Mali brought major difficulties as well. Achieving long-lasting peace and stability in the complicated and dynamic security environment marked by asymmetric warfare and the existence of several armed factions proved challenging. Along with other foreign forces, Nigerian soldiers suffered deaths and operational losses from regular attacks and ambushes by rebels. The mission also battled logistical difficulties, including the difficult terrain and insufficient infrastructure, which hampered the troop and supply transportation. Notwithstanding the difficulties, Nigeria's participation in the Mali intervention strengthened its dedication to regional security and its major contribution to African peacekeeping. The mission gave insightful teachings on handling difficult insurgencies, organizing international operations, and juggling military and political initiatives. Nigeria's contributions to the intervention improved its profile in the world and showed its capacity for guiding and backing regional peacekeeping projects.

Impact Assessment of These Missions on Regional Stability and Nigeria's International Standing

The great influence of Nigeria on peacekeeping operations spread over West Africa and other areas has affected regional stability greatly. The interventions in Sierra Leone and Liberia were crucial in stopping general bloodshed and bringing peace back into these nations devastated by civil strife. ECOMOG's 1990 mission in Liberia, mostly under Nigeria, helped to establish cease-fires and safe areas that allowed humanitarian aid to reach impacted civilians. Though the peace was fleeting, this intervention not only stopped the conflict from becoming more out of hand but also set the stage for the 1997 elections that resulted in Charles Taylor's administration. Under Nigerian leadership in ECOMOG, Sierra Leone's military regime was toppled, and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's democratically chosen government was reinstated in 1998. The successful running of later elections and the end of the civil war in 2002 highlighted the long-term stability these actions brought about. By proving Nigeria's ability to lead and oversee difficult peacekeeping operations, these missions greatly helped to stabilize her West African neighbors.

Further demonstrating Nigeria's dedication to regional security outside of West Africa is the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), where Nigeria was instrumental. Nigeria made a major contribution to UNAMID's initiatives to safeguard civilians and enable humanitarian relief in Darfur, which was affected by conflict. Notwithstanding major operational difficulties, including hostile terrain and political opposition from the Sudanese government, Nigerian peacekeepers were crucial in reducing violence and giving internally displaced people (IDPs) security. Though not successful in ending the conflict, the efforts of the mission helped to lower major crimes and provide better access for humanitarian organizations. This intervention improved Nigeria's standing as a stabilizing agent in Africa by underlining its eagerness to participate in peacekeeping activities in varied and difficult surroundings.

Nigeria's involvement in the Mali intervention, particularly under AFISMA and then MINUSMA, further solidified its position in regional security. With the emergence of Islamist militants in northern Mali, Nigeria's contributions were instrumental in helping the Malian government forces stabilize key areas. Nigerian troops facilitated the delivery of humanitarian

aid, provided security for vital infrastructure, and engaged in joint operations. Despite logistical challenges and asymmetric threats, Nigerian forces effectively contained the insurgent threat and supported the objectives of the broader international coalition. This intervention underscored Nigeria's strategic significance in maintaining stability in the Sahel region and combating terrorism. The Mali mission also highlighted Nigeria's ability to operate within international systems, coordinating with other African and foreign forces.

These peacekeeping operations have significantly enhanced Nigeria's global reputation. Nigeria's unwavering commitment to world peace and security is evident in its consistent deployment of troops and supplies to various operations. The leadership roles held by Nigerian officers in several missions, such as commanding ECOMOG forces and holding key positions in UNAMID, have further elevated Nigeria's profile on the international stage. These contributions have earned Nigeria respect and recognition from international organizations like the United Nations and the African Union, cementing its reputation as a leading contributor to peacekeeping efforts in Africa. Nigeria's active participation in peacekeeping has also strengthened its diplomatic ties with other African governments and key world powers, bolstering its influence in regional and international affairs. The impact of these peacekeeping missions on Nigeria's domestic situation is also noteworthy. Nigerian troops who have participated in international peacekeeping have gained invaluable experience in handling difficult problems, working in different surroundings, and liaising with other countries. These encounters have sharpened the operational capacity and professionalism of the Nigerian military, so helping to address internal security issues, including the Boko Haram insurgency. However, the financial and logistical weight of these missions has also taxed Nigeria's resources, occasionally redirecting funds from urgent home problems. Balancing international peacekeeping commitments with domestic security needs remains a critical challenge for Nigeria. Nonetheless, the overall impact of Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts has been positive, contributing to regional stability and enhancing Nigeria's standing as a pivotal player in African and global security.

The Role of Regional Organizations in Supporting or Hindering Nigeria's Hegemonic Ambitions

Supporting and opposing Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations in Africa are regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In particular, ECOWAS has been very helpful in giving Nigeria a stage on which to exercise its leadership via regional security projects and peacekeeping deployments. Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS-led interventions—such as those in Liberia and Sierra Leone under the ECOMOG structure—showcased its ability to organize and guide regional forces successfully. These expeditions confirmed Nigeria's hegemonic position within West Africa as well as its reputation as a regional stabilizer. For example, Nigeria's major financial and military support to ECOMOG operations was crucial in managing and finally resolving problems in these nations, therefore underscoring its vital role in regional peacekeeping. Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS is not without its challenges. While ECOWAS provides a stage for Nigeria to demonstrate its influence, it also presents a complex landscape of regional politics and the interests of other member nations. Some members of ECOWAS may view Nigeria's hegemony with mistrust or anxiety, fearing it could compromise their own sovereignty or regional influence. This was evident during the ECOMOG deployments when conflicts over command and control concerns, resource distribution, and strategic priorities periodically arose between Nigeria and other member nations[14]. These conflicts can hinder Nigeria's effective leadership and require a delicate balance between promoting regionalism and claiming leadership.

Furthermore, the African Union (AU) greatly influences Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations. The larger AU mission for continental peace and security gives Nigeria chances to influence beyond West Africa. Nigeria's contributions to AU missions, like the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), highlight its commitment to continental stability and aspirations for a leadership post inside the AU structure. Nigeria's active involvement in these missions has improved its reputation inside the AU and strengthened its credentials as a major actor in African security events. For instance, Nigeria's participation in UNAMID underlined its ability to assist more general continental security projects and its capacity to participate in difficult peacekeeping missions. Still, Nigeria's

aspirations inside the AU are also vulnerable to competitive dynamics with other powerful African governments, such as Egypt and South Africa. These nations regularly fight for leadership roles within the AU and other international forums; they have their own regional and continental ambitions. Particularly, Nigeria and South Africa have been quite competitive, trying to control AU policies and projects and establish their influence. Sometimes, this competitiveness causes conflict and complicates initiatives to offer a unified African approach to peace and security. For example, different points of view between Nigeria and South Africa on how to approach the issue in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010-2011 exposed the difficulties of attaining unanimity inside the AU[15].

Apart from rivalry among other regional powers, the emphasis of the AU on shared responsibility and collective leadership shapes Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations. Together with the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Standby Force (ASF), the AU's peace and security architecture advances a cooperative method of crisis management and peacekeeping. This framework demands Nigeria to collaborate closely with other member nations and share decision-making power even while it supports its leadership by offering organized means for intervention. Sometimes, this limits Nigeria's capacity to unilaterally influence results and calls for a more inclusive and consultative style of regional leadership. Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations may be significantly affected by the financial and logistical limitations that ECOWAS and the AU face. While Nigeria often bears a large portion of the responsibility for regional peacekeeping initiatives, the limited resources of these agencies could jeopardize Nigeria's ability to sustain ongoing operations. The dependence on foreign financing and assistance for AU and ECOWAS operations further complicates Nigeria's leadership role, as outside donors could influence operational choices and strategic priorities. This reliance underscores the urgent need for Nigeria to advocate for improved financial and logistical support systems within these regional organizations to enhance their sustainability and performance.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study has sought to investigate Nigeria's motivations, challenges, and effects on regional stability and international relations, thereby critically evaluating its position as a

regional hegemon in efforts at African peacekeeping. Several important conclusions have surfaced from a thorough investigation of Nigeria's past participation in significant peacekeeping operations, including the AU/UN Mission in Darfur, ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and intervention in Mali. First of all, Nigeria's leadership in peacekeeping has been crucial in resolving regional disputes and advancing stability, therefore highlighting its dominance as a major regional force. Second, although Nigeria has shown dedication and capacity for peacekeeping, major obstacles, including political unrest, financial restrictions, and rivalry with other regional powers, have presented themselves.

Moreover, the report underscores the necessity of strategic alliances within regional organizations like ECOWAS and the AU to bolster Nigeria's peacekeeping initiatives while addressing issues of hegemony. By fostering improved cooperation, financial support, and capacity-building projects, Nigeria can overcome these obstacles and promote a more collaborative approach to peace and security in Africa. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of Nigeria navigating its position as a regional hegemon with diplomacy, inclusion, and a commitment to collective security, thereby fostering regional stability and integration in Africa.

Endnotes

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