

Review – Power Politics in Africa

Written by Adeleke Olumide Ogunnoiki

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Power Politics in Africa: Nigeria and South Africa in Comparative Perspective
Edited by Olusola Ogunnubi and Samuel Oyewole
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020

Power Politics in Africa is an edited volume that examines Nigeria and South Africa's bilateral relations, military and economic capabilities, soft power, and indeed, their hegemonic rivalry in Africa. Comprising twelve chapters in total, the book meets four cardinal objectives. First, it inserts the African perspective on regional hegemony into International Relations (IR). Second, it juxtaposes the hard power of Nigeria and South Africa. Third, it includes the element of soft power in regional hegemony studies in Africa. Finally, it offers a comparative perspective on the leadership role of the aforementioned countries at the sub-regional level, and in Africa at large.

Over the years, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular has been marginalised in the generation of knowledge in IR. Interestingly, the editors of the book bring this long-standing issue of the “intellectual marginalisation” (p.3) of Africa to the forefront in chapter one. Chapter two takes a step further by employing Afrocentricity to expound the multifaceted relations of South Africa and Nigeria. Starting from 1999, the chapter gives instances of cooperation, competition, and disagreement between the two African countries.

Before any state can be accorded the title of regional hegemon, it must possess and exert relatively unmatched hard power within the region in which it is geographically located. In Africa, as chapter four points out, Nigeria and South Africa have the biggest defence budget in the West African and Southern African sub-regions respectively. However, the military personnel of both countries vary in size. Setting apart post-apartheid South Africa from Nigeria is the sophisticated military equipment of the former. Though Nigeria has produced a small amount of reconnaissance drones, armoured tanks, patrol boats etc., it does, along with several countries in and outside Africa, import new military equipment from South Africa from time to time. Considering the military capabilities of these regional powers, Nigeria and South Africa can responsibly project military power within West Africa and Southern Africa respectively. The two countries cannot, however, afford “reckless power projections” (p.80) in SSA or elsewhere at the moment.

This brings us to the other component of hard power — economic capability, which chapter seven touches on in its discourse of Nigeria-South Africa economic relations. In 2014, mineral and oil-rich Nigeria became the largest economy in Africa following the rebasing of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This immediately made mineral-endowed South Africa, that prided itself as the biggest economy in Africa, the second-largest economy in the region. However, Nigeria cannot celebrate this economic accomplishment as it would love to, seeing as South Africa's GDP per capita dwarfs that of Nigeria. As a matter of urgency, the national governments of the two economic heavyweights need to take deliberate and concrete steps to set both economies on the pathway of sustainable economic growth.

Besides wielding military might and economic strength, Nigeria and South Africa both have enviable soft power which can be utilised for image-building abroad, and to achieve articulated foreign policy objectives. Chapter ten unpacks the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood), faith-based organisations (international mega-churches), and contributions to African scholarship (literature) as the primary sources of Nigeria's soft power. Sadly, as chapter

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eleven points out, the corruption and criminality, bad governance and insecurity in Nigeria, coupled with the bad leadership, corruption and occasional xenophobic violence in South Africa, have not only given the regional heavyweights a bad image in the comity of nations, but also undermine their soft power, acceptance and influence in Africa.

Nevertheless, Nigeria and South Africa have assumed prominent leadership roles in Africa, which chapter five and eight cover. In the peace and security architecture of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria, the acclaimed 'Giant of Africa', provided immense funding and contributed troops for peacekeeping missions in the erstwhile war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone. Similarly, South Africa's mediation efforts and deployment of troops to Lesotho remain notable examples of her leadership role in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

There are four salient takeaways from this edited volume. First, the book is an eye-opener to the fact that, unlike the Realists' argument that states are the main units of analysis and actors in the international system, several non-state actors in Africa are jockeying with sovereign states to be prominent actors in the continent. This demonstrates the need to incorporate the emerging African perspective in IR, especially to throw light on the political realities in the African continent. Second, is that Nigeria is trailing behind South Africa in military Research and Development (R&D). This is a wake-up call for the 'Giant of Africa' to prioritise and invest more in the modernisation of its military industry, not only to address the myriad of security challenges bedeviling the country, but also to allow it to play significant roles in Africa as a potential regional hegemon in the coming years. The third takeaway is the worrisome economic status of the Nigerian State. Unlike South Africa, which is an industrialised and diversified economy, Nigeria is, to a great extent, a mono-product economy from where a chunk of South African oil imports originate. Furthermore, South Africa has well over fifty businesses in Nigeria that are taking advantage of the country's big consumer market. The same cannot be said of Nigeria, which has only a few registered companies operating in the formal sector of the rainbow nation. These economic issues need to be looked into by the incumbent federal government of Nigeria. More importantly, South African expertise needs to be employed more than it has in several sectors of the Nigerian economy. Lastly, Nigeria and South Africa's images have been dented time and again on the global stage, owing to protracted domestic issues, such as the corruption that is common to both countries. Tackling these issues will certainly go a long way in repairing their image in the comity of nations, and, of course, in attaining their hegemonic aspirations in Africa.

Largely a comparison of Nigerian and South African power politics from political, economic, military, and diplomatic angles, this volume has successfully joined a few books and articles in filling the lacuna in IR literature with regards to the African perspective. For centuries, European, or rather, Western, viewpoints have dominated IR theories, despite not being completely applicable in regions such as Africa. While the book does not in any way dismiss Western perspectives in examining African international relations, it complements them with the African perspective, thus making the discourse and analysis of IR subject matter, in particular 'power politics', more universal than it has been. Brilliantly, the book encourages further studies on the hegemonic contenders and soft power in Africa. Another area that is likely to be explored by seasoned and promising scholars is the understudied 'smart power' of regional powers in Africa i.e., the combination of Joseph Nye's concepts of 'hard power' and 'soft power'.

As much as the edited book is striking, it is not without flaws. The chequered bilateral relations of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa can be summarised using the 3Cs – cooperation, competition, and conflict. In the edited volume, instances of the 3Cs such as the two regional heavyweights' cooperation at the continental level to create the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), competition for the permanent seat(s) for Africa in a potentially reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and conflict on intermittent xenophobia, yellow fever inoculation cards, the Côte d'Ivoire/Libyan crises, and the African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson election, were somewhat over flogged.

For a book of this nature, a chapter exclusively for the discourse of Nigeria and South Africa's leadership role in the AU was missing. Though the role played by the two regional powers to transmute the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the AU, and establish the NEPAD and APRM institutions, were touched upon, a chapter dedicated to examining at length these instances, and others of their nature, would have been appreciated. Moreover, while the

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focus on Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, and the African Renaissance foreign policy of South Africa, were mentioned in the book, a chapter that solely compares the Afrocentric foreign policies of Nigeria and South Africa would have further complemented the edited volume.

Overall, the 276-page book is a well-researched piece. Being a timely work of literature, it is recommended for Nigerian and South African policymakers, Political Science, IR, and scholars and students in other related fields of study, especially those yearning for the African perspective in the themes of power politics, regional hegemony, and soft power. Additionally, I would encourage universities and think tanks alike, where IR is a discipline or at the heart of research being conducted, to have this book on their library shelves. No doubt, having this informative piece will not only enrich their collection of IR literature, but will help permeate Afrocentricity around the world, if not spur the inclusion of other regional perspectives in IR.

About the author:

Adeleke Olumide Ogunnoiki is an Independent Researcher and Commissioning Editor in E-International Relations (E-IR). He obtained both his Master of International Law and Diplomacy (MILD), and M.Sc Political Science (International Relations) from the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Nigeria. His article, Xenophobic Violence in South Africa and the Reactions in Nigeria, was published in the Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs.