

Russia–Ukraine Conundrum: Reform of the UN Security Council and Nigeria’s Quest for Veto Power

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Abstract

Of all conflicts that have plagued the world in the post cold war era, the Russia-Ukraine war has been by far the most potentially disruptive conflict which has captured the imagination of scholars, politicians and observers of international affairs worldwide. The Russia–Ukraine war has not only brought to the fore the grave flaws in the existing international order, it has also underlined the inadequacy of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining world peace and security. This is because Russia, which holds a seat as a permanent member of the UN security council, a body set up principally to help guarantee world peace has, to all intents and purposes, violated the territorial integrity of its neighbour. This paper also assesses Nigeria’s aspiration for a permanent seat in the UNSC and underlines that while Russia should be censured for its actions, Nigeria’s aspiration can at best be said to be based on a shaky foundation.

Keywords: UN Security Council, Russia-Ukraine war, veto power

Introduction: History, Identity and the Outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War

More than any other conflict in the post cold war era, the Russia-Ukraine war that started in 2022 has been, by far, the most potentially disruptive imbroglio which has captured the imagination of scholars, politicians and observers of international relations especially in Europe since the beginning of the 21st century. True, the crisis in the Balkans in the dying years

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of the last century was brutal and occasioned considerable destruction; nevertheless, there was no time during this conflict that it threatened the rules-based international order that had existed since the end of World War II. In addition there was never a time when the combatants threatened to deploy nuclear warheads. In the case of the current crisis however, not only has Russia threatened the use of its nuclear arsenal, this threat has been met by disquiet not only in Washington, but also in Beijing, Delhi, Berlin and numerous European capitals.

We may also add that this conflict, on account of its disruptive effect on the international political economy, has been a source of concern not only to members of the UN Security Council but also to the broader member states of the UN General Assembly. The immediate cause of the outbreak of the war can be located in the suspicion of Russia about the intention of the West for its seeming encouragement of Ukraine to join the European Union and by extension NATO (Reach et al., 2023). Russia viewed this move as an existential threat to its existence. A deeper understanding of the conflict can only be unravelled if the dynamics of history and identity between the two countries is unpacked.

Ukrainian identity has always been a contested issue. What is clear however is that for many Ukrainians, Russia has often served as the out-group by which many Ukrainians differentiate themselves (Urban, 1992). Long before the creation of the Russian empire in 1721, Russian and Ukrainian history have been entwined. The two nations are in agreement that the medieval era Kyivan Rus state is their established place of origin. Over the centuries however, the suspicion in the late 19th century by Russia that Ukrainians sought to establish a distinct identity and pursue ultimate political independence led to repressive measures aimed at eroding a separate Ukrainian identity. In 1863, for example, the Tsarist government promulgated the Valuev Decree which forbade the use of the Ukrainian language). The repressive law was further consolidated by another decree in 1876 – the EMS Decree (Snyder, 2004), which criminalised the production or importation of Ukrainian language books. The unintended consequences of the Russian attempt to extinguish Ukrainian identity

was the forging of a narrative of Ukrainian persecution by the Russians – a narrative that has evolved into the core pillar of Ukraine’s desire for national identity. While the Soviets at the incipient stage relaxed the stranglehold on its component states and allowed for some limited degree of cultural self-realisation, all these soon evaporated with the ascension of Joseph Stalin who not only vitiated the existing policies but introduced new restrictions that put paid to the idea of a Ukrainian identity. The massive purge of intelligentsia in the 1930s, coupled with *holodomor* – a man-made famine from 1932 to 1933 that led to the death of millions of Ukrainians, only served to fortify the search for a Ukrainian national identity (Reach et al., 2023).

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the contrasting beliefs and objectives of the two countries came to the fore. Russia’s inflexible belief appears to be that Ukraine could not really be a country; it was always in one shape or another going to be either part or an extension of Russia. The separation of Ukraine meant the loss of Kiev which is equivalent to Russians losing a significant part of their cultural and historical identity. The need to exert total control over Ukraine therefore became a key objective of Russia’s foreign policy. As Paul D’Anieri bluntly put it, “Russia’s notion of its national security was incompatible with Ukraine’s democracy and independence” (2019).

To underline its cogent belief in the above mantra, Russia, since 1991, has sought to integrate Ukraine into its orbit and exert Russia’s goals at the expense of Ukraine’s sovereignty. While space may not allow for an exhaustive documentation of these Russian attempts, we might do well to highlight some of them. In the first decade of Ukraine’s independence, Russia deployed a range of tactics to keep Ukraine dependent on her. In exchange for political and economic concessions, Russia provided subsidy to the tune of between 5 and 10 billion USD annually from 1991 (Krickovic & Bratersky, 2016). In addition, though Ukraine was not averse to economic co-operation with Russia, it nevertheless rejected the idea of a Russian led customs union. Fear of Russian domination, it must be stressed, remained the main consideration for this rejection. Also, through a combination

of threats and intimidation, Russia sought to utilise Ukraine's energy vulnerability to take ownership of the Black Sea fleet (D'Anieri, 2019). When this proved unsuccessful, Russian authorities resorted to harassment of Ukrainian servicemen, indiscriminate issuance of Russian passports to Ukrainians working at Black Sea facility and haranguing Ukrainian patrol ships (Mezentsev, 2011). The Russian Duma even passed a resolution questioning the legality of the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 (Yeltsin Assails Parliament Vote Claiming Crimea Port for Russia, 1993). Despite these provocations, Ukraine did not attempt any fundamental break from Russia due to cultural and historical considerations. Of course, Ukraine also recognised its energy vulnerabilities and was content with its determined attempt to resist Russian control. These back and forth continued up until 2004 when matters took a dramatic turn.

The 2004 Election and the Orange Revolution

Russia's preferred candidate in the 2004 Ukrainian election was Victor Yanukovych. Making no secret of its support for Yanukovych, Russia was estimated to have funded up to half of his election expenses (Samual et. al, 2018). Added to this is the overwhelming deployment of Russian media support which ran negative adverts against Victor Yushchenko, Yanukovych's opponent. Russian media harped on the importance of continued co-operation between Russia and Ukraine while framing Yushchenko as a puppet of the West. After lots of political intrigues, Victor Yushchenko emerged president, a development that was met with great discomfiture in Russia, indicating the dramatic decline of Russia's influence over Ukraine and the country's attempt to look towards the West for its future. In order to abort this trajectory and prevent further attempt to integrate with the West, Russia resorted to fomenting separatism in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Notwithstanding this development, President Yushchenko continued its integration efforts with the West as exemplified in NATO's 2008 Bucharest Meeting Memorandum and signing on to the 2009 EU Eastern Partnership program (Reach et al., 2023). Putin's angry reaction to these moves undoubtedly betrays his

mindset. According to him, Ukraine was not really a country but “an artificial creation of capricious Soviet leaders” (Charap & Colton, 2017). As if to foreshadow the imminent take-over of Crimea and other eastern parts of Ukraine, the Russian Duma in August 2009 passed a legislation which permitted Russian forces to intervene abroad in defence of Russian citizens (Larrabee, 2010).

To prevent it from making further progress in its attempt to integrate with the EU, Russia resorted to direct threats against Ukraine’s independence. To this end, prominent Putin Adviser, Sergei Glazyer declared, in no uncertain terms, that if Ukraine proceeded with its quest for EU Association Agreement, Russia would no longer guarantee Ukraine’s statehood and might intervene if pro-Russian regions (within Ukraine) sought help from Russia (D’Anieri, 2019) Directly resulting from this threat and other pressures, Yanukovych capitulated and officially jettisoned the EU Association deal. Russia further encouraged Yanukovych to put down the resulting protests by force or risk direct Russian intervention. Thus, Russia’s frustration at its inability to influence Ukraine’s decision making culminated in the invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Three days before the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, President Putin had restated his often held belief that “Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our history, culture and spiritual space” (On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians, 2021). For Putin, the rift between Russia and Ukraine was created by the West and neo-Nazis in Kyiv. Despite the much vaunted “brotherly” relations between Russians and Ukrainians, as declared by Putin, Russian soldiers were traumatised to witness the stiff resistance that greeted them during the war of annexation. Described variously as “enemies”, “occupiers” and “fascists” it was clear that expectation of being welcome as “liberators” was misplaced (Ukraine Women Offer Seeds to Russian Soldiers., 2022). Indeed, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the invasion of the country in 2022 only served to intensify disdain, if not

hatred, for Russia by many Ukrainians, but also helped to forge a stronger Ukrainian national identity ultimately.

The above discussion would appear to suggest the following: first that Russia and Ukraine undoubtedly have strong cultural and historical connection which spans centuries. Second is the fact that in spite of attempts to conflate the two identities, Ukrainian identity has remained steadfast and distinct over time. Third is the reality that in the post Soviet era, Russia had attempted to influence political development in Ukraine, hoping to keep the country either as an adjunct or part of its sphere of influence. A large section of the Russian elite indeed believe that the existence of Ukraine is a mirage. The attempt by Ukraine to flirt with the idea of ascension to the EU and by extension NATO is deemed an existential threat to Russia. The annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine is therefore seen as part of an overall effort to ensure national security by Russia. Ukraine, on its part, sees its move towards the West as a definite attempt to define its political and economic trajectory, unhindered by a neighbouring bully with scant regard for its sovereignty.

Having constructed a board overview of the reason for the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the remaining segment of this paper would examine the attempt to reform the UN Security Council and the significance of Russia's membership vis-à-vis the current war with its neighbour. Next would be a consideration of Nigeria's aspiration for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. This will be concluded with a short debate about whether Russia should still continue to hold on to its permanent seat and whether Nigeria deserves to be vested with veto power.

UN Security Council Reforms: Matters Arising

At its incipient stage in 1951, the United Nations had a total number of 51 members with five countries, the UK, France, US, Soviet Union and Republic of China being permanent members of the Security Council. The little tweak that has occurred over the years is the ascension of Russia to the Soviet Union's seat after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and

the substitution of the representative of China by the delegates from mainland China (Bourantotis, 2005). The number of non-permanent representatives of the Security Council was increased to 10 in 1963. Even when the membership of the United Nations increased to 192, the number of seats in the Security Council has remained unchanged. While it would appear that there is general consensus that there is need for a further enlargement of the membership of the Security Council, there is no unanimity of views regarding the modalities to achieve the goal.

One visible and prominent group that has pushed vigorously for a reorganisation of the Security Council is the Group of 4 (G4). Comprising Brazil, Germany, India and Japan, the group members in their 2005 official proposal put themselves forth as the main candidates for the expanded UN Security Council while advocating for the inclusion of an undisclosed African nation (Baily, 2011). The position of the G4 must be understood against the backdrop of the historical antecedents of these countries. It should be noted that Brazil had, at the initial stage of creation of the UN been offered a seat in the Security Council (Gonsalves, 2006). Considering itself unable to shoulder such huge responsibility at the time, she demurred. For all practical purposes Brazil, obviously now believes that it was ripe enough to take its rightful place. As for Germany and Japan, it should be remembered that these two countries were the *raison d'être* for the creation of the body in the first place. Curbing the aggression of the Axis powers was a major reason for the establishment of the UN. Now that these two countries have proved to be reliable partners in the search for international peace and security, it was deemed only natural for them to be considered for inclusion in the august body. The case for Indian membership of the UNSC appears unassailable. Among other things, it was a founding member of the body; it has been an active participant in all UN initiatives; it is the world's largest liberal democracy; it is the world's fifth largest economy and above all possesses confirmed nuclear capability (Alene et. al., n.d). Indeed, as India has argued, the fundamental issue at stake is that the Security Council must reflect contemporary

realities, especially the one concerning the under-representation of the global south.

The African agenda for the reform of the UN Security Council is no less significant. Its demands include an expansion of not just the permanent seats, but also the non-permanent ones. In the view of the African Union (AU) the above solution is the only one capable of overcoming the current spectre of under-representation of developing countries among the majority of states in the UN General Assembly as well as the lack of representation of Africa and Latin America in the Security Council. The African Union's position contrasts with that of the G4 in that it requests for the reservation of two permanent seats to the African continent. Also, African countries do not want to forgo the right of veto power for their additional seats (Mbamara, 2021). The African position was clearly spelt out in the *Ezulwini Consensus* which was adopted by the Foreign Ministers of African countries. On the UN reform, the AU agreed that "Africa's goal is to be fully represented in all the decision-making organs of the UN, particularly in the Security Council, which is the principal decision making organ in matters relating to international peace and security (Pirozzi et. al., n.d.). Worthy of mention here is the fact that concrete criteria have been laid down by the UN report of the *High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* the aspiring members of the UN Security Council must have met. This includes considerable financial, military and diplomatic contributions which these countries must have committed to the UN over time. Put differently, potential new members for this exalted position must have contributed immensely to the UN assessed budgets, and must have participated in numerous UN mandated peace operations.

The Uniting for Consensus is another group that has vigorously pushed for a reform of the UN Security Council made up of approximately 40 countries, notable among which are Italy, South Korea, Pakistan and Columbia. Fiercely critical of their perceived diminished international standing, these groups proposed to counter the G4 proposal by advocating for a proposal which will see an increase in number of non-permanent members of the Security Council from ten to twenty (Pirozzi et. al., n.d.). The

novel provision in this suggestion consists in the advocacy for the General Assembly to elect non-permanent members of the Security Council for a period of two years in the first instance but they will be eligible for re-election subject to the approval of their respective regional groups. The proposal was further modified in 2009 when Columbia and Italy, acting on behalf of the group, submitted a proposal through which elected non-permanent members would enjoy a tenure of between 3-5 years without the need for an immediate re-election (Martini, n.d.). Consensus around this position has however been difficult to achieve. First, the suggestion that regional groups should have a say on who occupies the seat runs counter to the United Nations statutes which recognises only states as members. A more subtle explanation for the lack of enthusiasm for this position is the determination of France and Britain to protect their “super power status” at all cost, a status that may be diminished by the accession of countries like Italy, Turkey, Canada, etc.

The UN Security Council, as currently constituted, is a product of the power realities of 1945. The grating of the veto power to the five permanent members was designed to reinforce the ability of the organisation to maintain world peace and help assure international stability. Power realities on the international stage have since undergone dramatic changes with new centres of power having emerged. Countries like India, Pakistan and Israel (allegedly) now possess nuclear capabilities. Some of the victorious powers of the Second World War have lost their great power standing; hence the need for a reform of the Council is a no-brainer. But there is obviously an elephant in the room. Reform of the Security Council is a two-tier process. To start with, a minimum of 128 member states of the General Assembly must cast a “yes” vote to kickstart the process (Its Time for Nigeria to join the UN Security Council..., 2024). Worth noting here is that those absent or abstaining are not counted as part of the 128.

In addition, upon the approval of the plan by the General Assembly, it must be ratified by two-thirds of the legislature of member countries, including all the veto power wielding countries (Mbamara, 2019). The clear implications of the above is that reforming the Security Council

would require an uncommon diplomatic creativity, the like of which is yet to be seen in the UN arena. The call for the reform of the Security Council is even more crucial now in view of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The assault on a sovereign neighbouring state brings to the fore the question: Does Russia deserve to retain the membership as a permanent member of the UN Security Council?

Nigeria and the Quest for a Permanent Seat in the UN Security Council

As referenced earlier, conversation around the reform of the UN Security Council has been an ongoing but nonetheless contested issue. There is no doubt however across the isles about the need both for tweaking its functions and more especially the necessity for the expansion of the Security Council to allow for new members. Speaking on a television programme in October 2023, Nigeria's newly sworn in Foreign Minister, Dr. Tuggar asserted that Nigeria was interested in having a permanent seat in the Security Council because the existing arrangement with five members is anachronistic. Questioned further to justify Nigeria's aspiration, the Minister declared:

We are the largest country in Africa, and 50 percent of Africans are Nigerians. We are projected to become the third largest country in the world by 2050 (Mbamara, 2019).

Long before the declaration above, Nigeria had in October 2000, under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, put in place a high powered committee to drum up support for Nigeria's aspiration among members of the United Nations (Mbamara, 2019). In similar vein, Nigeria's Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, had in 2015 predicated Nigeria's ambition for a permanent UNSC seat on the premise of the country's profile in international peacekeeping, size of the country's economy and the country's population (Adeniji, 2005). In the conduct of Nigeria's diplomacy, the United Nations occupies a pivotal position. This is exemplified by the fact that the UN was the first organisation which Nigeria joined

soon after her independence. Nigeria's post independence leadership believed that the surest way to preserve her newly won independence and sovereignty is through the pursuance of multilateralism as reliable tool for her external relations (Akindele & Akinterinwa, 1995). Since there is no bigger multilateral organisation than the UN, we might do well to turn our attention to Nigeria's activities at the UN since the inception of its membership.

It should be stated from the outset that dedication to the eradication of colonialism, especially on the African continent, remained the backbone of Nigeria's diplomatic activities at the UN, especially in the years between 1960 and 1980. Leveraging on the realisation that the UN was perhaps the most strategic and high profile body to prosecute the anti-colonial campaign, Nigeria, in concert with others, adroitly deployed the body for expediting the movement towards political independence in a broad swath of the African continent. In the UN, Nigeria strenuously promoted the view that self determination went beyond being a human (and political) right but is indeed a legal right for all people under colonial rule (Gambari, 1997). The logical extension of this reasoning therefore was that the use of all measures, force included, to rid a territory of foreign domination was legitimate. Nigeria's endorsement of the use of armed confrontation to secure independence by liberation movement, coupled with its determined mobilisation of international support for the liquidation of colonial rule in all parts of the African continent, is a testimony to her unflinching determination to eradicate colonialism on the continent.

As it was with colonial rule, white minority rule and apartheid is another struggle to which Nigeria dedicated considerable attention and resources. Especially through the instrumentality of the United Nations, Nigeria mobilised, not just resources, but also international support to achieve the cause of black majority rule in both Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa. Such was the dedication of Nigeria to the cause of eradication of colonial rule and white minority rule on the African continent that for more than two decades, the UN Committee Against Apartheid was chaired

by successive permanent representatives of Nigeria at the United Nations (Nigeria has contributed to 41 peacekeeping operations worldwide..., n.d.) Added to this is the fact that though Nigeria is not geographically located in the southern African region, it nevertheless was regarded a frontline state in the struggle for black liberation.

It is useful to highlight at this juncture Nigeria's contribution to UN peacekeeping. According to Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, Genera Lucky Irabor, Nigeria has contributed to 41 peacekeeping operations worldwide since her ascension to UN membership. Also, over 200,000 Nigerian troops have served in UN peacekeeping missions worldwide. Senior Nigerian military officers have had the privilege of commanding some of these missions. Also, in the West African sub-region, Nigeria has been involved in peacekeeping operations on field missions in Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Darfur, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In the process it has invested markedly by way of provision of civilian experts, logistics, finance, etc., thus making her easily the foremost contributor in terms of troops and civilian police on the African continent. In Liberia alone, Nigeria committed over \$8 billion in the effort to return the country to the part of peace. The above depicts, in bold relief, the burden of responsibility Nigeria was always prepared to shoulder as a credible member of the Organisation (Nanda, 2023). It is useful to add here that Nigeria has regularly met her budget obligation to the UN and has not been found wanting.

The Debate: Does Russia deserve to retain its seat in the UN Security Council?

The United Nations Security Council, under the UN Charter is saddled with the primary responsibility of maintaining peace and security in the world. It is the only UN body conferred with the obligation of imposing international sanctions and to initiate military action. In spite of the awesome powers conferred on the Security Council to enable it maintain international peace and security, numerous crises remain unaddressed by the august body. Attention can be drawn here to the Rwandan Genocide,

the atrocities in the Balkans, the wanton destruction that occurred in the Darfur region of Sudan, Russia's annexation of Ukraine and most recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine, among many others.

Indeed, one of the most odious irony of the Russia-Ukraine war is that even in the face of Russia's blatant aggression and flagrant violation of the UN founding principles, Russia's UN Ambassador emerged as the Security Council's president in February 2022 (Nanda, 2023). This absurdity prompted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to warn that: The world is dealing with a state that turns the right of veto in the UN Security Council into a right to kill thereby undermining the whole architecture of global security. He further rhetorically asked: "Where is the security that the Security Council must guarantee?" (Shaw, 2024).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, presented the United Nations with a unique dilemma: a veto power wielding member of the body had unconscionably violated the sovereignty and territorial space of another member state. Russia's atrocities in Ukraine rival, if not exceed, any in Europe since 1945. However, it is not so much the aggression as the intent of the action that is concerning. The post 1945 legal order has rested on the proposition that boundaries, once settled between states, do not change except by agreement between states (Mankroff, n.d.). The employment of force to settle a dispute over borders is a clear violation of international law and a recipe for the unravelling of the relatively stable international order which the world has enjoyed since 1945. The Russian war against Ukraine does not pretend to have rested on any legal basis, it would appear to have been borne out of a deeply ingrained belief among the Russian ruling elite that Ukraine could not exist as an independent neighbour; indeed, that Ukraine is nothing but an extension of Russia (Budjeryn, n.d.). The grievous implications of Russia's aggression should not go undocumented. Each time Russian leaders toy with the idea of recreating the Tsarist empire, they send apprehensions to the states once ruled by Russia. The action also underscores, though not very vividly, the notion that the *Budapest Memorandum* under which Ukraine agreed to cede its nuclear arsenal to Russia in order to prevent nuclear

proliferation, has become ineffectual (Nanda, 2023). Recall that under the agreement, Russia had pledged to assure Ukraine's security. The purported annexations of Ukrainian territories by Russia also calls into question the inviolability of the 1991 mutually agreed settlement of post-Soviet borders among the former Soviet republics. Especially in the global South, the risk of outbreak of border disputes would spell doom for the existing world order. Allowing Russia to get away with its questionable behaviour may unwittingly serve as encouragement for latent border disputes like the one between India and Pakistan – two nuclear capable powers, and China and Taiwan, to be re-awakened.

As it is in Ukraine, so is the case in Syria where as at July 2022, Russia has deployed its veto 17 times (Nanda, 2023). Frustrated by the numerous Russian vetoes, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Agnes Calamard called upon the UN General Assembly to ensure that a humanitarian assistance continues to reach ordinary Syrians who are nothing but victims of war. In her words, "The Syrian government and the Russian veto power must not stand in the way of providing humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians (sic) in disparate north west Syria, as this amounts to violating their rights to life, to an adequate standard of living, including housing, water and sanitation, and to health (Nanda, 2023). It is gratifying to record that in spite of continuing Russian support, the UN General Assembly has, in several resolutions condemned the Syrian regime for egregious human rights abuse and violence against innocent civilians. What remains to be added here is that as far as its activities in Ukraine is concerned, Russia has not covered itself in glory.

That the ill-advised invasion of Ukraine does not enjoy international support is attested to by the fact that on March 2, 2022 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution reaffirming "That no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognised as legal" (Bourantotis, 2005). The Assembly deplored in the strongest terms "Russia's aggression" insisting that Russia "immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine..." and that "Russia completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine..." Nor was

that the end of the public opprobrium (Cantori, 2022). On April 7, 2022, the General Assembly suspended Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council.

In addition to the international embarrassment to which Russia had been subjected over its unprovoked assault on Ukraine, Russia's conduct has also brought to the fore a revisit of the controversy surrounding her membership of the Security Council. In December 1991, following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Security Council had welcomed Russia to assume the permanent member seat reserved for a representative of the USSR. Belarus, Russia and Ukraine accepted at the time that the USSR had "as a subject of international law, ceased to exist" (Adeniji, 2005). The propriety of this action by the UN at the time is now being called to question. In other words, Russia may not have deserved the honour of UN Security Council membership after all.

How credible is Nigeria's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat?

Nigeria's activities at the United Nations since the beginning of its membership have earlier been referenced. As alluded, Nigeria played a frontline role in peacekeeping operations at the behest of the UN. She led the international struggle for the eradication of colonialism and apartheid, especially in the Southern African region. Her role as a credible member of the organisation is certainly not in dispute. Since there appears to have been a consensus that in the expected reorganisation of the UN, at least one permanent seat would be reserved for Africa in the expanded UN Security Council, two countries have consistently been touted as deserving of the seat, beside Nigeria. Egypt and South Africa are thought to be possible contenders for this esteemed position. Egypt is said to be eminently qualified on account of its geopolitical standing, population, culture and relative political stability. It is an important African and Arab state. She can be described as a key hegemonic state in the international relations of the Middle East. It is also a militarily powerful state with some 300,000 strong armed forces (Ikhariale, 2002).

South Africa's credentials are no less impressive. It is the regional hegemonic power of the Southern African region; it has a formidable economy relative to other sub-Saharan African countries; this is not to mention her sophisticated armed forces (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo Kwaako, 2007), which is derived from the legacy of her apartheid past. Despite the impressive records of these two nations, promoters of the Nigeria's bid are quick to submit that the Nigerian aspiration is unassailable. They aver that with an unadulterated black population of over 200 million people, the country qualifies to be regarded as the real representative of the black race. They contend further that though Egypt is geographically located on the African continent, it is more racially and ideologically oriented to the Arab world than the African continent. As for South Africa, it is argued that the country is not racially pure since it is composed of blacks, Indians and whites (Economy is collapsing..., 2022).

Nigeria, added to the above considerations, is deemed to be far ahead of the two other contending nations because it has been fully tested with regards to successful discharge of its international obligations over time whether in terms of peacekeeping or peace enforcement – two critical requirements of Security Council membership. We can add to the above the strategic location of Nigeria in the middle of Africa. Egypt is located far in the north while South Africa inhabits the southern fringes. These locations are said to be disadvantageous for these two countries to respond to core African crises. It is worthy of mention here that generally, for a country to aspire for membership of the UN Security Council, it must possess a reasonably resilient economy, a strong military base (possibly with nuclear capabilities), a reasonably large population, and a respectable international profile. While Nigeria may parade a respectable military, functional enough to ensure regional stability, plus a high population relative to other African nations, it cannot be said, by any means, to possess the economic might necessary to shoulder the responsibility of a veto wielding UN Security Council membership. This is because the illusion of wealth which Nigeria projected in the 1970s has since unravelled. The 'buoyant' economy of the 1970s had been fed by an

unexpected oil boom which had helped to bank-roll an activist foreign policy which led to her legendary continental pre-eminence.

Following several years of military rule, which not only constrained creativity, but was accompanied by poor economic management, Nigeria experienced a prolonged period of economic stagnation, rising poverty indices and stifling of its public institutions. Pervasive corruption undermined the effectiveness of public expenditure programmes with little to show for the huge investments in education and health. Added to this is the lack of adequate investment in infrastructural facilities like rail, road and telecommunications. These infrastructural bottlenecks in turn militated against private sector activities which in turn vitiated the scope of Foreign Direct Investment. The poor condition of the country's power sector exemplifies the state of infrastructural deficit with per capita power consumption in Nigeria estimated at 82 kilowatts (KW) compared with an average 456KW in other sub-Saharan African countries. In more recent years the economic woes have been compounded by the spate of insecurity, massive youth unemployment and terrorism which have plagued the country. It is surely a Herculean task to entrust a country with the above profile the privilege of a UN security membership seat.

Conclusion

The Russian-Ukraine war is one conflict that has demonstrated in bold relief that, in contemporary world of globalisation, one single event can have unintended consequences on the socio-economic and political stability of the world. While the world was reeling from the effects of covid 19 pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has exacerbated the effects of the pandemic. Thus the recovery which was envisaged has been stalemated by the negative effects of the conflict. The prices of goods, especially food items, have shot up since the Russian-Ukrainian corridor is a major supplier of wheat for the world market. Oil prices have gone up thereby leading to inflation in many countries.

In the face of this crisis, the United Nations Organisation, which was created to guarantee world peace and stability has been rendered impotent

mostly because Russia, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, instead of helping to guarantee peace has become the harbinger of instability. While there is no clear cut provision in the UN Charter regarding how a permanent member of the organisation can be deprived of its position, it is heartening to see that the contempt and disdain with which Russia has been treated in the UN General Assembly signposts world's opinion about its despicable action. Russia's behaviour therefore brings to the fore once again the urgent need for a reform of the UN Security Council. When the reform eventually takes place, there must be a provision to sanction an irresponsible use of the veto power such as Russia has done, especially in its veto of the various attempt to censure it for its contemptible behaviour. No country saddled with the responsibility of maintaining world peace should be an enabler of world instability.

As for Nigeria, its claim to UN Security permanent membership can only convincingly advanced when her domestic condition improves. A quick comparison here will suffice. Belgium with a population of 11.7 million (2024) has an economy of \$624 billion (2023) while Nigeria with a population 223 million(2023) has an economy currently estimated at 252 billion (2024). Surely Nigeria would do well to devote her attention to improving its economic lot instead of playing the proverbial giant with clay feet.

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