CONCEPT PAPER

For a
Policy Advisory Group Seminar on

THE EAGLE AND THE SPRINGBOK:
STRENGTHENING THE NIGERIA/SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONSHIP

Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR)
Cape Town, South Africa

Lagos, Nigeria

9-10 June 2012
Introduction

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), in Cape Town, South Africa, is planning to hold a two-day policy advisory group seminar on 9 – 10 June 2012 at the Sofitel Hotel in Lagos, Nigeria, on “Strengthening the Nigeria/South Africa Relationship”. The objective of this small, discreet group is to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries, in a conducive, off-the-record setting, in order to craft concrete recommendations on how Nigeria and South Africa can work more closely together to promote African interests bilaterally; multilaterally; at the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN); and to consider how they can work together more effectively to promote conflict resolution and economic cooperation in Africa.

Nigeria and South Africa are the two leading powers in sub-Saharan Africa. They have sought to act as engines of economic integration and development both in their respective sub-regions and on the continent as a whole. The bilateral relationship is potentially the most important on the continent, and is vital to efforts to pursue conflict resolution and regional integration in Africa. While South Africa remains the wealthiest and most industrialised country on the continent, accounting for about a third of Africa’s economic strength, Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country (140 million people), with the second largest economy on the continent. Nigeria and South Africa are the dominant players in their respective sub-regions, each accounting for about 75 percent of the economies of their regional economic communities (RECs): the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2011, both countries were non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, with seats on the 15-member AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC). Yet, tensions have recently been reported in bilateral relations between the two countries. In March 2012, 125 Nigerian travellers were turned back at O.R. Tambo airport in Johannesburg for allegedly carrying fake yellow fever vaccination cards.¹ The Nigerian government deplored the incident and demanded an explanation from the South African government, while 78 South African travellers to Nigeria were turned away in retaliation. Nigerian officials accused South Africa of xenophobia, and members of the public in both countries fired off heated responses on the issue.² South Africa subsequently apologised for the incident, while denying the charges of xenophobia.

The explicit aim of this policy advisory group is to seek concrete ways of strengthening Africa’s potentially most strategic bilateral relationship. For this purpose, and to suggest how the relationship may develop in the future, it is necessary to know something of how relations between the two countries have evolved. The Lagos seminar of June 2012 will therefore assess the historical background and diplomatic dynamics of bilateral and multilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa; examine the state of economic and trade relations; investigate the role of civil society actors in potentially strengthening relations; and assess the future of bilateral relations, based on concrete recommendations for their improvement.

The policy advisory group seminar on Nigeria and South Africa builds on two influential edited volumes published by CCR in recent years: Adekeye Adebajo and Abdul Raufu Mustapha (eds.), Gulliver’s Troubles: Nigeria’s Foreign Policy After the Cold War (2008); and Adekeye Adebajo, Adebayo Adedeji, and Chris Landsberg (eds.), South Africa in Africa:

² See, for example, the many comments on “Nigeria lashes out at SA xenophobia”, News24, 3 March 2012; “South Africa-Nigeria: Nigeria Deports 56 More South Africans”, Afrique en Ligne, 7 March 2012.
the Post-Apartheid Era (2007). CCR has previously held policy seminars on such related topics as South Africa’s role in Africa; South Africa’s role in SADC; and Nigeria’s leadership role in ECOWAS’s evolving security architecture. The policy seminar thus builds on the Centre’s solid policy research expertise in this area developed over the last decade.

The History of Nigeria/South Africa Bilateral Relations

In 1960, the year of Nigeria’s independence, the Sharpeville massacre perpetrated by the apartheid regime set South Africa on the road to international isolation and increasingly brutal and repressive rule. Soon after Nigeria became independent, South Africa was, in March 1961, in effect forced out of the Commonwealth. In the 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria took a leading role in fighting for the liberation of South Africa, working closely with the Frontline States of Southern Africa (FLS) (Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Angola and Zambia). For decades, Nigeria chaired the United Nations (UN) Special Committee against Apartheid, and after the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa, Nigerian students and civil servants contributed financially towards the education of black South Africans, while the Nigerian High Commission in Botswana issued hundreds of Nigerian passports to South Africans who had fled the country. Nigeria was seen by some as “the new global hub of the anti-apartheid movement”, with one of the few popular anti-apartheid solidarity movements in Africa. A founding member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Nigeria was invited to meetings of the Frontline States and played an important role in securing the independence of Namibia by 1990, supporting the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) financially in its efforts to rid the country of apartheid South African rule, and then sending the largest police contingent to the UN Transitional Assistance Group in 1989. By the time apartheid had come to an end, Nigeria had spent an estimated $61 billion on its anti-apartheid efforts. It was therefore appropriate that it was the country that sponsored the UN Security Council resolution in 1994 welcoming South Africa back into the international community after the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa’s first democratically-elected president in the same year. Nigeria’s Permanent Representative at the UN, Ibrahim Gambari, was the last Chair of the world body’s Special Committee against Apartheid. With the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Africa and Nigeria in 1994, High Commissions were established in Lagos and Pretoria (now Tshwane). It was anticipated that the new South African government would be conscious of a debt of gratitude to Nigeria, and that this would lay the basis for the development of a close relationship between the two countries.

This did not happen, however. South Africa, having achieved a negotiated settlement hailed around the world, quickly emerged as a leading player on both the African and the international stage. Nelson Mandela’s South Africa was a moral icon compared to Nigeria, where in the 1990s, successive ruling military juntas under Generals Ibrahim Babangida and

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5 Mark Gevisser, Thabo Mbeki The Dream Deferred, pp. 371 (quotation) and 375, citing in particular the South Africa Relief Fund set up by the Nigerian government and the major UN conference against apartheid held in Lagos in 1977.
Sani Abacha became increasingly repressive at home, while undertaking noteworthy peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Successive Nigerian governments resented the way in which the new South Africa saw itself as an African and global leader, usurping a role Nigeria had historically wished to play. Relations hit a new low in 1995/1996 when Mandela sought to punish Nigerian autocrat, General Sani Abacha, for hanging the environmental and human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight other activists. Having gone out of his way to try to prevent the executions, Mandela felt deeply betrayed. He called publicly for sanctions to be imposed on the Abacha regime and for its expulsion from the Commonwealth. But he failed to win support among other African countries for his suggestions, and South Africa was seen by some as acting as a proxy for Western interests. In 1996, Abacha’s Information Minister, Walter Ofonagoro, was reported to have notoriously described South Africa as a “white country with a black head of state”.

This acrimonious situation changed in part because Mandela’s successor as president in 1999, Thabo Mbeki, had a deep understanding of Nigeria, having lived there as the African National Congress (ANC) head of mission between 1977 and 1978, when he befriended then head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo. As South Africa’s President between 1999 and 2008, Mbeki worked to promote a transition to democracy in Nigeria, changing policy from Mandela’s pro-human rights approach to a more pragmatic one. Relations between the two countries began to improve before Obasanjo became Nigeria’s civilian president in 1999: the same year that Mbeki became president of South Africa. Obasanjo had, as co-leader of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa, visited Mandela in jail in 1986. Mbeki made the first ever state visit to Nigeria by a South African head of state, and attended Nigeria’s fortieth independence anniversary celebrations in 2000. Obasanjo also visited South Africa as President. The coincidence of Obasanjo and Mbeki coming into office at the same time provided an opportunity for a strategic partnership between the two African powers. Mbeki lent his country’s weight and resources to AU peace efforts in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Côte d’Ivoire, while Obasanjo continued Nigeria’s peacemaking efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and extended it to Sudan’s volatile Darfur region. Obasanjo spoke of the two countries having “the burden of turning around the fortunes of our continent”, and for a time, it seemed that he and Mbeki were working together to end conflicts on the continent and to reconstruct Africa’s institutional architecture, with a view to promoting economic development and democratic governance. The two leaders elaborated a new socio-economic blueprint for the continent by 2001, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). They together led the way in transforming the OAU into the African Union (AU), rejecting Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi’s more radical vision of a “United States of Africa” for a more gradualist and realistic approach to regional integration. They also championed the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) by 2003 as an instrument to advance socio-economic development and democratic governance in Africa. The five years between 1999 and 2004 can, in retrospect, be seen as the “golden age” of bilateral relations between the two countries, at a time when Nigeria and South Africa closely co-ordinated their efforts before key AU and UN summits.

In 1999, a Bi-National Commission (BNC) was established between the two countries, headed by their respective deputy presidents. By February 2003, about 20 agreements had

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10 Adebayo, Curse of Berlin, ch.7.
11 Quoted ibid, p.143.
been negotiated and signed between both countries.\textsuperscript{12} Eight meetings of the BNC were held between 1999 and 2009, and a Nigeria-South Africa business summit was held on the sidelines of the fourth BNC meeting in March 2002.\textsuperscript{13} Among the ideas promoted in the BNC was that of a South Africa–Nigeria free trade area, which was supported by the South Africa/Nigeria Chamber of Commerce, as well as a free trade area between Nigeria and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) including South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Namibia.\textsuperscript{14} In June 2008, Mbeki spoke of the partnership between the two countries as being “part of a historically important process of leading the entire continent in terms of reconstruction and renewal”.\textsuperscript{15} The BNC meeting in Abuja in February 2009, on the tenth anniversary of the creation of the commission, discussed the state of bilateral relations and sought ways to strengthen BNC structures, as well as mutual collaboration on African and global issues. The next BNC meeting is planned for May 2012, and the Lagos seminar hopes to build on its key recommendations.

\textbf{Nigeria/South Africa Economic and Trade Relations}

In the last decade, trade between Nigeria and South Africa has increased dramatically. South Africans had, from the beginning of the transition from apartheid, sought business opportunities in Nigeria as the largest market in Africa. In 1999, there were only four major South African companies engaged in business in Nigeria. Within a decade, this number had increased to over 100, and South African firms like Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN) and Standard Bank prospered in Nigeria, contributing towards employment, revenue generation, and improved quality of goods and services. By 2006, Nigeria had become South Africa’s largest trading partner on the continent. The value of bilateral trade, only $16.5 million in 1999, increased to $1.5 billion in 2007 and to almost $3 billion by 2008.\textsuperscript{16} This figure had reached over $3.6 billion by 2011.\textsuperscript{17} The South Africa-Nigeria Chamber of Commerce, which emerged out of the BNC, identified investment opportunities for South African companies and provided them with relevant information, while South Africa’s Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) launched a South African-Nigeria Business Investment Forum to assist South African companies wishing to invest in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{18}

Other South African ‘blue chip’ companies that followed MTN included Stanbic, Rand Merchant Bank (involved in equity funding deals), and more recently, retirement fund administrator Alexander Forbes. Within a year of operations, Stanbic’s Nigerian affiliate was contributing 13 percent of its Africa-wide revenues (1.26 billion rand). In 2008, Alexander Forbes bought a 40 percent stake in Nigeria’s pension sector, comprising 8 million potential state employees. Sasol, the world’s largest producer of petrol from coal, made a $1.2 billion investment in Nigeria to export natural gas. South Africa’s government-funded Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) invested in Nigerian oil, gas, infrastructure, tourism, and telecommunications. South Africa’s Spoornet worked with the Nigerian Railway Corporation

\textsuperscript{12} Overview of Nigeria-South Africa Relations, Nigeriafirst.org, 18 February 2003.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} See also www.sa-ncc.co.za.
to revive Nigeria’s railways. Protea had four hotels in Lagos in 2008, with another eight under construction. Fast-food chains Chicken Licken and Debonairs Pizzas established franchises in Nigeria.  

Johncom opened Exclusive Books and Nu-Metro cinemas in Abuja and Lagos, as well as DVD and CD manufacturing plants. Shoprite Checkers opened an outlet in Lagos in 2006 that became profitable within a year. A Nigeria–South Africa chamber of commerce was also established in 2001, while a joint business investment forum met in South Africa three times between 2004 and 2008. By 2003, Nigeria had already become South Africa’s third largest continental trading partner, after Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and its largest continental importer. Three years later, Nigeria became South Africa’s largest trading partner on the continent. Businesspeople from South Africa and Nigeria now frequently cross each other’s borders, with over a hundred South African firms working in Nigeria by September 2007, up from fifty-five in 2003.

Of Nigeria’s exports to South Africa in 2003, 98.3 percent consisted of oil, though Nigeria’s Union Bank and First Bank also had representative offices in South Africa. In 2005, Nigerian oil company Oando set up shop in Johannesburg. Three years later, the Dangote Group, Nigeria’s largest industrial conglomerate, bought 45 percent of South Africa’s Sephaka Cement, at a cost of 3 billion rand, in preparation for an expected construction boom for the 2010 football World Cup. These latest investments could go some way to convincing Nigerians—who have often accused South Africans of predatory, mercantilist behavior - that the South African market may be opening up to their own firms in reciprocation. Many Nigerian professionals also work in South Africa, in fields like academia, medicine, accounting, human resources, and property. In turn, South Africa sells Nigeria a more diverse range of goods, including machinery, electrical equipment, wood, paper, foodstuff, beverages, spirits, tobacco, sugar, plastics, and rubber.

When Obasanjo’s successor as president of Nigeria, Umaru Yar’ Adua, visited South Africa in June 2008, he and Mbeki again enthused about the further potential for business cooperation between the two countries. Yar’Adua told a meeting of the South Africa-Nigeria Business Forum that Nigeria hoped soon to reach double-digit growth and needed investment in power, railways, roads, oil and gas. While many South African companies had been granted licences to operate in Nigeria and had prospered there, few Nigerian companies operated in South Africa, and some that had tried to do so had failed (such as the newspaper This Day). At a meeting of the BNC in Tshwane in November 2009, South Africa’s deputy president, Kgalema Motlanthe, noted that his country wished to see more Nigerian businesses investing in South Africa. As the Thabo Mbeki presidency was succeeded by the Jacob Zuma one, South Africa looked elsewhere on the continent for new business opportunities and for oil, not least to Angola, a member of SADC much closer to Tshwane. South Africa’s perceived tilt towards adopting Angola as its strategic partner in Africa in 2009 was one aspect of the new tensions that have developed between the two countries in the past three years.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
New Tensions in the Nigeria/South Africa Relationship

While the previous history of tensions between Nigeria and South Africa was never entirely negated by the new relationship under Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo, new tensions began to emerge from 2005, when both countries sought a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. As Obasanjo and Mbeki increasingly faced problems at home, it began to be realised that the new relationship rested heavily on the personalities involved. Though Obasanjo had, as AU chair, asked Mbeki to mediate in the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria eventually made clear it did not support Mbeki’s intervention, and he was accused of being biased towards President Laurent Gbagbo and of failing to report promptly to Obasanjo on the mediation. As ECOWAS pushed for his replacement, Mbeki resigned as mediator in 2005. In 2006, Mbeki opposed Obasanjo continuing for a third term as AU Chair, and the following year, South Africa made clear it did not approve of him standing for a third term as president of Nigeria. Then in May 2008, xenophobic violence erupted in South Africa’s townships, and a number of Nigerian immigrants were targeted. The Nigerian press was very critical of South Africa for not acting more decisively against this violence.25 In another important but unrelated development, Mbeki, who had been ousted by Jacob Zuma as ANC president in 2007, was subsequently removed from office as president of the country in 2008.

The Bi-National Commission did not meet in 2011. While serving as deputy president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma had visited Nigeria as co-chair of the BNC, but after he became the country’s president in 2009, new tensions arose between the two countries. In both Nigeria and South Africa, suspicions of the other’s intentions were perceived to be on the rise. Following the arrest of Henry Okah, one of the leaders of the Nigerian Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in Johannesburg in October 2010, Nigerian bloggers even alleged that South Africa had deliberately failed to inform Nigeria that bombings would take place in Abuja during the independence day celebrations in that year.26 In February 2012, MEND threatened to attack South African interests in Nigeria due to Zuma’s support for the federal government.27 But the most serious tensions in 2011 between the two countries related to the UN and the AU, and the friction that developed over Côte d’Ivoire and Libya.

Nigeria and South Africa at the UN and the AU

In 2005, Nigeria and South Africa were seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. In the event, the Security Council was not then enlarged, and so neither won such a seat, but the competition led to tensions in the bilateral relationship. Nigeria stressed that it was “the largest democratic Black Nation.” South African officials have noted that their country has the largest and most advanced economy on the continent—as measured by industrialisation and diversification—and they continue to draw upon the credit that South Africa was accorded globally for its relatively peaceful transition from racist rule to democracy between 1990 and 1994. Both countries like to see themselves as gateways for investment and trade to other parts of the continent, and seek to capitalise on this image. Nigeria was upset when South Africa was the only African country invited to meetings of the new group of 20 (G20) states in December 1999. While South Africa successfully hosted the football world cup in 2010, Nigeria lost its bid to become the first African country to host the

27 “Attacks on SA Interests in Nigeria Threatened”, Cape Times, 6 February 2012.
Commonwealth Games, and some Nigerians felt that South Africa had not given enough support to its bid.28

In 2011, Nigeria made clear that it did not approve of South Africa’s nomination of its former foreign minister and current home affairs minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, as the SADC candidate to succeed Gabon’s Jean Ping as Chair of the AU Commission.29 South Africa argued that Dlamini-Zuma would help reform the AU, but Nigeria (and some other African countries) feared that her presence in the post would give South Africa undue advantage in the organisation. Previous holders of the position had come from smaller countries. To help patch up such disagreements, Zuma sent a special adviser on international relations, Charles Nqakula, to meet with Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, in Abuja in August 2011 to explore reviving the BNC and making the issuing of visas to citizens of both countries easier. In December 2011, South African president Jacob Zuma, made an official visit to Nigeria, during which he discussed the Dlamini-Zuma nomination, among other matters, with Jonathan, and called on Nigerians to work with him “to save Africa from Western domination”.30

Though South Africa continues to reiterate that Nigeria remains “one of South Africa’s most important partners on the African continent in pursuing the vision of an Africa renewal”,31 the previous strategic partnership and close diplomatic co-ordination between the two countries has not existed in recent years.32 Both countries served in 2011 as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council and had seats on the AU’s Peace and Security Council, but they sometimes did not present a united voice in these and other bodies. On the contrary, Abuja and Tshwane took diametrically opposed positions on key issues. Côte d’Ivoire’s 2011 post-election contest between Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo might have presented an opportunity for Nigeria and South Africa to present a united front, but instead the two countries again failed to agree on how to deal with the new crisis. Nigeria recognised Ouattara’s victory in the election, while the South African Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) sought a negotiated settlement between Ouattara and Gbagbo, and raised questions about the accuracy of the poll. In January 2011, South Africa sent a naval vessel to the Gulf of Guinea, to be on standby if the South African embassy in Abidjan needed to be evacuated,33 an action that some in Abuja regarded as provocative. Nigeria recognised Libya’s National Transitional Council (NTC) as the legitimate government of that country in 2011 even as South Africa was leading efforts to prevent what it regarded as a premature recognition of the NTC. On the UN Security Council in New York, Nigeria and South Africa often adopted different positions on Libya and Côte d’Ivoire.

The Role of Civil Society

Civil society activists in Nigeria and South Africa have a potentially important role to play in bilateral relations, alongside the efforts of governments and the private sector. Yet, there has been no forum to foster this role between Nigeria and South Africa. Two meetings of the Nigeria/South Africa Dialogue on Civil Society and Africa’s Democratic Recovery were held

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29 See, for example, http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/opinion/dlamini-zuma-eyes-au-1.1154204.
in Lagos and Johannesburg in 1999, used by South Africa’s Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), but none have been held since. The BNC did not involve South African and Nigerian civil society groups in its formal meetings. The Lagos policy advisory group seminar in June 2012 will therefore discuss how the general publics of the two countries can be sensitised to appreciate the benefits that would flow from a closer relationship between both countries. While there is now a substantial Nigerian community in South Africa, few ordinary South Africans visit Nigeria or have much knowledge about the country. Among questions to be addressed by the Lagos seminar are: How can stereotypes and prejudices be broken down? How can the people of each country be encouraged to see the other as a key strategic partner, and to understand that real advantages that could, at least potentially, accrue from a close partnership?

The Future of Nigeria/South Africa Relations

The bilateral relationship between the two regional giants, Nigeria and South Africa, remains potentially the most important such relationship on the continent. How then can the two countries work together to promote conflict resolution and economic development in Africa? Were Nigeria and South Africa to work more closely together, especially on African issues, they could achieve much, given the financial and military resources they could draw upon. Africa would as a result be more likely to be seen in global fora as a continent capable of defining and defending its interests. Such continental institutions as the AU, NEPAD and the APRM remain fragile, and the leadership of Nigeria and South Africa is crucial for them to become more effective. Can these two countries form an “axis of virtue” to promote democracy and development on the continent? Can the BNC urgently be revived and reinvigorated? Can the two governments and their private sectors combine resources and intelligence to make a difference in such areas as the promotion of the economies of their respective sub-regions and the fight against trans-national crime? How can the governments of the two countries work more effectively together, both at the AU and the UN? Where do the national interests of each country diverge, and how can the effects of such divergence be mitigated? How do their respective regional interests - Nigeria’s in ECOWAS and South Africa’s in SADC - differ, and what are the implications of that difference? How can the two countries ensure that their actions are not seen as attempts to dominate the continent in pursuit of their own parochial interests? How might a new Pan-African vision be forged to bring the two countries closer together? These are some of the key issues that will be addressed by the policy advisory group in Lagos in June 2012.

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35 Cf. the comments of Lindiwe Zulu, adviser to President Zuma, in the interview with her in the Mail and Guardian, 25 November 2011, p. 11