

FRI-2G.510-1-ESIS1-04

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF ADMISSION OF AFRICAN STATES TO PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

Assist. Prof. Eva Parvanova, PhD

Department of Economics and International Relations

University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev”

Tel: +359882 434 944

E-mail: eparvanova@uni-ruse.bg

***Abstract:** The only United Nations body responsible for maintaining global peace and security – the Security Council, has remained unreformed almost since the day of its founding in 1945. The most debatable issue concerns the permanent members – the victors from the Second World War who also have the privileged of the right to unilaterally veto all decisions. Thus Russia, USA, United Kingdom, France and China have stronger voice in the UNSC. Since the start of the military conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza strip, the issue of UNSC reform has become even more topical and many state coalitions and individual states started claiming their right for permanent voice. African states have long claimed their right to at least one, even two, seats as permanent members – moreover that most peacekeeping missions take place on their continent. Although there are no unified criteria for admission, most authors stress the importance of economic factors such as the contribution to the United Nations budget and/or to peacekeeping operations, gross domestic product, military contribution (or percentage of GDP which the country is placing for its national military expenditure). The paper gives an assessment of the economic factors for eligibility of five most favored African states: Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa.*

***Keywords:** international security, United Nations Security Council, veto right, African Union*

INTRODUCTION

At its establishment in 1945, the United Nations (UN) consisted of 50 members. Due to European colonialism at that time, only four African states – Egypt, Liberia, Ethiopia, and South Africa – were part of the founding members of the UN. Currently, 54 African states are members of the organization. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the only UN body responsible for maintaining international security, and the only body whose decisions are legally binding. Consisting of five permanent and ten non-permanent members, the Council has not been reformed almost since its founding. The five permanent members – **Russia, USA, United Kingdom, France and China** – has not been replaced ever since. Apart from being always in the UNSC, they also have the advantage over the other members of **having veto right** over all non-procedural decisions. Since the start of the Russian military campaign in Ukraine in 2022 and other more recent conflicts in the Middle East, the issue has become extremely urgent for discussion. Although there are no particular criteria adopted for approval of new members, most scholars and diplomats acknowledge the importance of the countries’ economic potential – gross domestic product, contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping budget and overall contribution to the UN budget, military expenditure. The paper explores the economic potential of five most favored African states for permanent membership: Ethiopia, Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, thus evaluating their chances for joining the UNSC.

EXPOSITION

The rationale for fair treatment of African states and their inclusion as permanent members of the UNSC is clear: since the end of colonialism in the 1960s, many of the already independent countries not only became members of the United Nations but started to contribute, and still

contribute significantly, to peacekeeping missions¹. Countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Ghana are among the top ten contributing countries of troops to UN peacekeeping operations. Second, the African group of countries represents the largest group, with 28 percent of the UN membership² (Kumah-Abiwu, 2023). Africa has also produced two UN Secretary Generals, i.e. Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt, 1992–1996) and Kofi Annan (Ghana, 1997–2006).

May 2024 marks 60 years since the African Union's founding. The same year, the Security Council issued a statement (S/PRST/2024/2) by which it expressed its “*support for the role of the African Union and sub-regional organizations in promoting peace and security on the continent*” and its readiness to consider appropriate support, including African Union-led peace support operations through the implementation of Council resolution 2719 (2023) on a case-by-case basis (United Nations: Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2024). This is probably the beginning of enforcement of the desired “*African solutions to African problems*” principle in the UN. Next significant event was the expansion of BRICS to BRICS+ format. This became possible due to the decision of the forum to admit Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates as full members as of 1st January 2024. In the third place, the European Union invited the African Union to join the G20 forum in order to enhance the representation of the emerging parts of the world (Eurasian Research Institute, 2023). Although there exist some common problems of all African states such as corruption, poverty, poor governance, poor records of human rights, the calls for reform of the United Nations includes the need for involvement of the Global South – a greater part of it being the African continent. The international support and inclusion of Africa in international organizations and fora could give another momentum for the continent to build a clear position as to which African countries would pursue membership. The countries which have the greatest chances to obtain permanent membership, have different advantages and disadvantages, and are competitors with regards to their economic potential.

Algeria has the largest GDP per capita, and supplies the greatest army of all 5 countries, spending almost 5% of its GDP. Still, its spending is located exclusively to its domestic army – the country's contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping budget and troops is rather marginal, compared to other African states (see Table 1). On the one hand, Algeria has the advantage of representing the African Union and the Arab states at the same time. It is a founding member of the African Union and the Arab Maghreb Union. Since the election of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in 2019, Algeria has sought to position itself as an important regional and global actor. At the same time, its application for membership in BRICS was unsuccessful (Henneberg, 2024). The country has been most criticized by the Western nations for its long-term relations with Russia. It was the predecessor of Russia, the Soviet Union, that played a decisive role in the North African country's struggle for independence from France (1954-62) and helped build the post-colonial Algerian state and its military army (Zoubir, 2024). It still relies on Russia for its military supplies, which, with the current international image of Russia, could be an impediment for Algeria to obtain support from the other members of the UNSC and overall support from the international community.

Egypt is one of the 51 founding countries of the United Nations Organization. In a new sign of respect and appreciation of Egypt's role in the world body, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali was elected in January 1992 as **Secretary-General** of the United Nations. The country is represented in most United Nations Executive Councils, organizations and agencies. Egypt's credentials for obtaining a Security Council seat are numerous: in the first place, it is a

¹ more than 70 peacekeeping operations have since been undertaken by the UN with the engagement of many African countries. In addition, more the 50 peacekeeping missions have been undertaken across Africa since the 1960s.

² the Asia group comes next with 27 percent, while the Americas constitute 17 percent. The region of Western Europe constitutes 15 percent.

heavyweight state with Islamic, Arab, African and Mediterranean affiliations. Geographically it stands at crossroads – the Suez Channel connects 3 continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. It has one of Africa's major economies; it also ranks second in terms of population continent-wise and has the biggest number of diplomatic missions across the globe (State Information Service, 2023). As a representative of both the Arab world and the African continent, Egypt is a member of the following regional economic organizations: **the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), and the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA); the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), and the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)**. Compared to the other four most favored nations, its GDP is behind Algeria and South Africa but way higher than that of Ethiopia and even Nigeria. Its military expenditure is not considerable – although it takes the second place after Algeria, it slightly exceeds the modest 1%. Nevertheless, its contribution to peacekeeping operations by police, troops and other staff is significant and second to that of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia can be considered a regional economic center of East Africa – the poorer part of the continent. Ethiopia is a model for other African countries in **promoting and investing in renewable energy**. To help with its green growth, it has set up a climate finance fund. The country is also exporting hydropower to other countries in the region. However, it remains one of the poorest countries on the continent with GDP per capita 890 USD (World Bank, 2024). On the other hand, it stands out as one of the highest contributors to peacekeeping operations by personnel in the UN, and the highest contributor out of the five African states. Its involvement in peacekeeping missions on the continent and worldwide is due to the long history of Ethiopia as one of the oldest independent states in the world. It has historically relied on diplomacy to exert influence at the regional, continental and global level. Along with three other African states – Egypt, Liberia and South Africa – it was already part of the global system before the 1960s, when other African states gained sovereignty and joined the UN. Ethiopia also has a historical commitment to collective security that pre-dates the UN. As Abyssinia, it joined the League of Nations in 1923 and remained a member until the League was replaced by the UN in 1945. Nowadays, the country is considered the “**home of African diplomacy**”: its capital Addis Ababa hosts the AU Commission and several other international and regional institutions, including the **United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**. At the same time, the country is facing some internal political problems. The ruling government in Ethiopia has a persistent history of violent repression of independent media, civil society organizations and political opposition. Human rights organizations have documented arbitrary arrests, torture, injuries and deaths (Akwei, 2016). At the regional level, relations with its neighbors are worsening as well. The tense conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea has shown little improvement. Recently, Ethiopia has worsened its relations with Egypt as well by signing a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland giving Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via the port of Berbera in return for recognizing Somaliland.

Although Africa as a continent does not have clearly defined regional centers, *Nigeria* is generally considered the regional center of West Africa. It is the most populous country on the continent (over 227 million people) and the most populous black nation in the world. The country has strategic location and is abundant with natural resources. Most of the population in Africa look at Nigeria as a country that will bring prosperity not only to West African region but the whole of Africa (Gambari, 2005). As noted by Saliu (2016: 142), Nigeria “*unilaterally determine the course of action for Africa.*” The rich oil reserves discovered in the 1970s helped the country exert serious influence over the rest of the African continent over decolonization and apartheid (Saliu, 2016). It gave the country a voice in international affairs as well. Nigeria equally led the formation of **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** in 1975 which tried

in galvanizing economic integration of the Sub-region. Nigeria is also a member of the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** - one of the largest oil-producing countries in the world and the largest in Africa (Tella, 2019). As for its contribution to the United Nations, Nigeria has made an impressive record of global peacekeeping operations. However, her startling profile has been biased to Africa (Saliu, 2016). Most authors claim that, if Africa will have a slot in the expanded UNSC, Nigeria will be the most deserving country in the continent. As Imobighe points out, if the consideration is to give Africa two slots, Nigeria for sure would take the first slot before considering any other country in the continent (Imobighe, 2012). However, looking at the credentials of Nigerian state in the area of peacekeeping operations and compared with her competitors in Africa such as South Africa, Senegal, Ethiopia, Libya, Kenya, Algeria and Egypt, the chances of Nigeria are far less. In addition, there are some local problems that Nigeria needs to overcome. These include the pervasive corruption in the country, poor governance, poor records of human rights and above all - fragile security system. South Africa, for instance, has more subtle records of human rights and stable political system with economic stability. The presence of Nigerian criminal networks that are involved in drug trafficking are another point to consider.

South Africa is considered the major competitor of Nigeria for a permanent seat in the UNSC. The two countries are the biggest economies on the African continent and by far the biggest in their subregions but lag far behind their regional counterparts such as Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan in terms of variables such as the size of their territories, their defense budgets, their active military manpower as well as military power (World Bank 2024). Similar observations are made in respect of variables such as defense expenditure and active military personnel. Their contribution to the UN peacekeeping budget is almost as low as the contribution of other most favored African states but is still higher than theirs. Nevertheless, South Africa (14th) is ranked among the top 20 troop contributing countries to UN missions, while Nigeria in the recent years falls behind at 30th place (DPKO 2024). As far as its diplomatic records are concerned, South Africa has been rewarded with a number of leadership positions in and membership of international groupings such as the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (**BRICS**) **grouping and the Group of 20 (G20)**. In general, the international community views South Africa as being worthy to lead (Alden and Schoeman 2013: 241). Still, there are some challenges and one of them concerns relations with its competitor Nigeria. South Africa is criticized for the incessant xenophobia targeting Nigerians.

Current forecasts do not indicate any improvement for South Africa's economic growth; further negative growth is also expected for Nigeria. This continual slide may jeopardize South Africa and Nigeria's standing as two of the leading states on the continent since they may not be able to meet their future financial obligations to the UN.

Table 1. Indicators by country³

Country	Population (2023)	GDP per capita (2023, USD)	Military expenditure (2022, % of GDP)	Contribution to peacekeeping budget	Contribution to PKO (police, troops and other staff)
Algeria	46, 958, 898	4 342,64	4,78%	0,0276 (Level I)	2
Egypt	114,535,772	4177,61	1,06%	0,0372 (Level I)	1461
Ethiopia	126,527,060	890,35	0,90 %	0,0010 (Level J)	1538

³ Data retrieved from: World Bank and United Nations Peacekeeping: troop and police contributors <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Nigeria	227,882,945	2400	0,64%	0,0500 (Level I)	263
South Africa	63,212,384	6010	0,74%	0,0544 (Level I)	1141

CONCLUSION

Although many of the challenges that the African states need to deal with while chasing permanent membership in the UNSC, are similar, there are country-specific challenges as well. Most authors point at Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa as undisputable leaders among the candidates. They lead the “ranking” as representatives of their regions – West Africa and South Africa, respectively. They also lead in terms of most quantitative economic criteria: gross domestic product, contribution to the United Nations budget and to the peacekeeping operations budget.

The two states have some weaknesses, though, which hinder their claim. First comes the rivalry between them, and second – the suspicious treatment by their neighbors. This does not help the African Union come up with a clear statement – a necessary condition for the Security Council to take the candidacy seriously. Apart from the lack of position of the African Union, there is no clear position of the Security Council itself. Its 2024 Statement supporting Africa is not very clear about how many seats would be given to the continent.

One of two scenarios would be possible – depending on how many seats would the African continent be allowed to take. The first scenario would be fulfilled if two seats are allowed. This will make it easier for the African Union to support both Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa for an individual seat. In the second scenario, if only a single quota is given, then it will be harder for the organization to come up with a statement. If neither South Africa, nor Nigeria is enough supported by the African states, then the African Union could support a third nation – Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia or other. Taking account of the economic criteria, as well as the opinions of the international community about the relations between Algeria and Russia, we can assume that Algeria’s chances are far less than those of Egypt or even Ethiopia. Ethiopia can be considered, to some extent, a regional center of East Africa, which is the more conflict area of the continent. Secondly, Ethiopia is more engaged with contribution to police and troops for peacekeeping operations. On the other hand, Egypt is the country with the better overall economic performance. Also, it puts more into the peacekeeping budget. In the third place, Egypt is a representative of both the Arab states and the African continent as a whole. In a situation of only one available quota, Egypt would be the more logical choice.

** This research was supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science under the National Program "Young scientists and Postdoctoral Students - 2"*

REFERENCES

Abba, Mahdi Abubakar (2017) The politics of expanding the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent membership and the prospects for Nigeria to represent Africa. In: International Journal of Management Research & Review, Volume 7, Iss. 8, pp. 802-821. ISSN: 2249-7196

https://www.academia.edu/35524628/THE_POLITICS_OF_EXPANDING_THE_UNITED_NATIONS_SECURITY_COUNCIL_UNSC_PERMANENT_MEMBERSHIP_AND_THE_PROSPECTS_FOR_NIGERIA_TO_REPRESENT_AFRICA [accessed 25.07.2024]

Akwei, A., N. Southard (2016). Ethiopia: Human Rights Leadership at the UN Security Council Requires Human Rights at Home. In: Amnesty International.

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/ethiopia-human-rights-leadership-at-the-un-security-council-requires-human-rights-at-home/> [accessed 27.01.2024]

Alene, N. et al. (2023) Africa's Quest for Reform of the United Nations Security Council. In: ACCORD <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/africas-quest-for-reform-of-the-united-nations-security-council/> [accessed 27.01.2024]

Allawi, S. and Augustin Sassi Marvin. Why Africa Deserves a Permanent Seat on United Nations Security Council. In: Development Watch Centre. <https://www.dwcug.org/why-africa-deserves-a-permanent-seat-on-united-nations-security-council/> [Accessed 26.09.2024]

Gambari IA. (2008) From Balewa to Obasanjo: The theory and practice of Nigeria's foreign policy. In Adebajo, A. & Mustapha, A. R. (eds), *Gulliver's troubles: Nigeria's foreign policy after the Cold War*, South Africa: University of Kwazulu-Natal press

Henneberg, S. (2024) Algeria Takes a Seat on the UN Security Council. In: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/algeria-takes-seat-un-security-council> [accessed 11.10.2024]

Imobighe AT. (2012) Nigeria's quest for a permanent seat in a reformed UN Security Council: Challenges and prospects. In Imobighe, T. A. & Alli, W. O. (eds), *Perspectives on Nigeria's national politics and external relations*, Ibadan: University press

Klobucista, C., M. Ferragamo (2023) The Role of Peacekeeping in Africa. In: Council of Foreign Affairs <https://www.cfr.org/background/role-peacekeeping-africa#chapter-title-0-5> [accessed 26.01.2024]

Kumah-Abiwu, F. (2023) Africa's Search for Permanent Seats on the UN Security Council: A Matter of Justice and Democratic Rights. In: *On Policy Africa* magazine. <https://onpolicy.org/africas-search-for-permanent-seats-on-the-un-security-council-a-matter-of-justice-and-democratic-rights/> [accessed 28.07.2024]

Saliu HA. (2016) *Nigerian foreign policy under the fourth republic*, College press: Ibadan
State Information Service (SIS) (2023) Egypt and the United Nations <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/178318/Egypt-and-the-United-Nations?lang=en-us> [accessed 27.01.2024]

Tella, O. (Ed.). (2019) *Nigeria-South Africa Relations and Regional Hegemonic Competence*. In: *Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development*. Springer. 216 p. ISBN 978-3-030-00080-6. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-00081-3> [accessed 29.09.2024]

Thekiso, M. and Jo-Ansie van Wyk (2019) *The Quest for African Permanent Membership of the UNSC: A Comparative Assessment of Nigeria and South Africa's Eligibility* IN: (Tella, 2019 - book), pp. 43-63 [accessed 13.10.2024]

The World Bank in Ethiopia (2024)

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview> [accessed 26.09.2024]

United Nations Peacekeeping: troop and police contributors.

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> [accessed 26.09.2024]

World Bank. World Development Indicators.

<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> [accessed 03.10.2024]

Zoubir, Y. (2024). *Algeria-Russia Ties: Beyond Military Cooperation?* In: Middle East Council on Global Affairs. <https://mecouncil.org/publication/algerian-russian-relations-military-cooperation/> [accessed 11.10.2024]