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THE ROLES OF DOMESTIC FACTORS IN NIGERIA-ISRAEL BILATERAL RELATIONS, 1960-2007

ABSTRACT
This research traces the historical development of Nigeria-Israeli relations from 1960-2007 and then find out how internal and international politics influenced their relationship at different stages of their evolution. The study looks at the various epochs in their relations with emphasis on the following periods:

1) 1962 – 1966, Era of Peaceful Diplomatic Relations
2) 1967 – 1972, Era of Unstable Diplomatic Relations
3) 1973 – 1991, Era of Severed Diplomatic Relations
4) 1992 – 1993, Era of Restoration of Diplomatic Relations
5) 1994 - 1998, Era of Decline in Diplomatic Relations
6) 1999 - 2000, Era of Stable Diplomatic Relations.

Furthermore, the study provides relevant information on Nigeria’s relationship with Israel in key areas such as economic, political and socio-cultural exchanges. Attention was given to the instruments employed by the two countries to conduct external relations. The findings of this research shows that the changing role of Israel in Nigeria which could benefit the country in the fields of education, military, technology, tourism, trade, culture and politics.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The bilateral relationship between Nigeria and Israel date from the late 1950s, and in 1960, full diplomatic relations was established between the two countries. Between 1973 and 1992, diplomatic relations were severed. During this period, Nigeria’s relation with Israel generated “heated controversy”\(^1\). The controversy was based on political and religious divisions especially among Nigerian ruling class. The ethnic fragmentation and religious heterogeneity of the country has posed a great “dilemma” on the government’s decision to severe diplomatic ties with Israel due to mixed feelings among the country’s diametrically opposed religious structure.\(^2\) According to Ojo (1986), Muslims felt that the move to break ties with Israel was not only timely but also desirable, whereas the Christians saw the move as a wrong foreign policy (FP) option. However, when the Nigerian government decided to renew diplomatic ties in 1992,
the Muslim group vociferated over this policy decision, whereas the Christians saw it as a welcome idea.³

For the purpose of this study, Nigeria-Israel relations are best understood when categorized into periods:

a. 1960 – 1966, Era of Peaceful Diplomatic Relations
b. 1967 – 1972, Era of Unstable Diplomatic Relations
d. 1992 – 1993, Era of Restoration of Diplomatic Relations
e. 1994 - 1998, Era of Decline in Diplomatic Relations
f. 1999 - 2007, Era of Stable Diplomatic Relations.⁴

This categorization was made by the researcher, following the order of political events that occurred between the two countries in the period of our study. Each era featured unique events that subsequently impacted the bilateral relations between Nigeria and Israel. For instance, between 1960 and 1966 (Era of Peaceful Diplomatic Relations), Nigeria initiated series of agreements with Israel on developmental projects running into millions of pounds.⁵
More so, between 1960 and 1966, Nigeria and Israel had series of bilateral agreements that cut across trade, agriculture, educational network, medical institutions and technological training. Hundreds of Nigerian farmers, experts, educators, academicians, students, doctors, community workers and engineers were trained in Israel. Top level ministerial meetings of both countries were held and friendly relations, beneficial to both peoples, were developed. Mutually beneficial economic ties were also developed, including many joint ventures including the Israel-Nigeria Water Company. Major Israeli companies and private entrepreneurs became involved in the development of the newly independent Nigeria.

However, by 1966, beginning with the military coup d’ etat in Nigeria, the two countries entered into a phase of unstable peace in their diplomatic relations. The Nigerian-Israeli relations equally suffered a great set back as a result of the civil war that bedeviled the nation for about 30 months. Nigeria perceived a foul play towards Israel for its alleged sympathetic role played by supporting the defunct Republic of Biafra during the country’s civil war. Thus, between 1966 and 1972, Nigeria-Israel relations, though unstable, still witnessed growth in economic and trade ties.6
Between 1972 and 1992 (Era of Severed Diplomatic Relations), Nigeria-Israeli relations suffered a major setback due to the outbreak of the October 1973 Middle East War (or Yom Kippur War as tagged by Israel). Gen. Gowon blamed Israel for the renewal of hostility in the Middle East. Being the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, Gowon strangled ties with the Israeli government which invariably made other OAU members to follow suit.

After the Gowon’s administration was overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed, subsequent administrations in Nigeria have towed the pro-Arab FP in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the fact that the Obasanjo’s regime renounced the use of terms like Zionism to categorize the Israeli political system, Major General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, the second in command, declared in Saudi Arabia in 1979 that “our friends are the Arabs, we shall always support them.”7
Beginning from 1991, efforts were made by Nigerian Head of State General Ibrahim Babangida to restore diplomatic relations with Israel. However, this came into effect in 1992, when for the first time; Nigeria established an Embassy in Israel, headed by one of its most experienced Ambassadors. Unfortunately, this Era of Restoration of Diplomatic Relations (1992-1993) did not last long. As the two countries were preparing for closer cooperation, crisis erupted in Nigerian foreign relations under Abacha’s regime.

Thus, between 1994 and 1998 (Era of Decline in Diplomatic Relations), the two countries witnessed another era of poor relations. The Abacha administration forced Nigeria to enter into a period of isolation, which invariably deteriorated the mutual cooperation established by the Babangida regime.

Towards the end of 1998, changes in Nigerian internal politics paved way for the preparation of Israel to chart new diplomatic relations with Nigeria. The General Abdulsalami Abubakar administration was relieved
the tensions between Nigeria and Israel. In 1999, Nigeria entered another phase of democratic government which in turn had positive impact on her relation with other countries including Israel.

In other words, Nigerian-Israeli relations between 1999 and 2007 (Era of Stable Peace) was warm and firm. The newly elected President Olusegun Obasanjo, with his global shuttle diplomacy, restored Nigeria’s relation with Israel. This was expressed in reciprocal visits by high-level government officials and the intensive exchange of technical and professional knowledge through MASHAV (the Israeli Centre for International Cooperation) programmes. Economic and commercial relations between the countries also thrived during this era, as more and more Israeli companies from various sectors were attracted to invest in Nigeria.8

Statement of the Problem

Bilateral relations between Nigeria and Israel between 1960 and 2007 had a dual character: acrimony and friendship. Between 1960 and 1965 it was
stable but from 1966 to 1990, it degenerated into a full scale diplomatic tussle where Nigeria saw Israel as a threat to peace in the Middle East. However, from 1991 to 1998, the situation was not cordial as General Sani Abacha frustrated all attempts to foster peace between the two countries. From 1999 to 2007, the two countries resumed cordial diplomatic ties. Although, several scholars have made attempts to analyse Nigeria’s relation with other countries, much has not been done on Nigeria-Israel relations. This calls for scholarly attention.

**Objectives of the Scope**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives: -

(i) Provide a detailed background to Nigeria-Israel relations between 1960 and 2007

(ii) Review the foreign policy objectives of Nigeria and Israel and how they determine their bilateral relations

(iii) Discuss the political and economic bilateral relations between Nigeria and Israel with emphasis on Nigeria’s successive regimes up to 2007.
(iv) Examine the domestic factors that shaped Nigeria’s relation with Israel from 1960 to 2007

**Scope of the Study**

This research covers the historical development of Nigeria-Israel relations between 1960 and 2007 and then finds out the determinants that influenced their relationship at different stages of their evolution. It also examines key bilateral areas such as economic, political and socio-cultural exchanges. However, not all areas of their bilateral relations were touched such as the military.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is very important for certain reasons.

First, it gives a historical background of Nigeria-Israel relationship between 1960 and 2007 thereby shedding more light on the dynamics that characterized their relations.
Second, it shed more light on the patterns of Nigeria’s external relations with Israel. Not only that, the study will aid our understanding of the domestic factors driving Israel foreign policy towards Nigeria.

Finally, this study is useful to scholars’ especially diplomatic historians, political scientists, economists and international relations experts in their research on Nigeria’s relation with Israel. Diplomats like ambassadors, high commissioners and staffers of foreign ministries will benefit from the work.

**Literature Review**

Literature review is sine qua non in the determination of the nature and existing works in diplomatic history. The knowledge of existing literature is crucial to raising research questions. This study therefore reviews existing literature to ascertain the level of historical knowledge in Nigeria-Israeli relation especially between 1960 and 20007

The foundation of Nigeria-Israeli relations dates back to the early 1960’s when Israeli delegation visited Nigeria in 1960 seeking to establish
diplomatic ties with the country. Ever since then, Scholars of foreign policy have produced research works on the bilateral relationship that exist between Nigeria and Israel, though, in small quantity when compared to other developed countries such as Nigeria’s relation with the United States of America.

Review of related materials on Nigeria-Israel relations shows that there have been fluctuations in their relations. In fact, the three eras that Nigeria and Israel enjoyed cordial relations is not up to 20 years when put together (1960 to 2007). This is not so good when compared with the acrimonious years of their relationship (which amount to about 29 years).

N. A. Terhemb and K. M. Adegboyega, The Impact of Domestic Factors on Foreign Policy: Nigerian/Israeli Relations, examined the domestic structure that influenced the evolution of Nigeria-Israeli relation from 1960 up to year 2007. This work is useful to this study because it touches important areas that bring the two countries together. However, Terhemb and Adegboyega’s work failed to address the areas of non-state actors that shape to a large extent, the relations between Nigeria and Israel.
Nevertheless, it gives a general overview of the relationship between Nigeria and Israel. The work makes a good reading.

O. Ojo, “Nigeria and Israel”. In: Nigeria’s External Foreign Policy: Twenty-Five Years”, gives a comprehensive study on the first twenty-five years of Nigeria-Israeli relations with emphasis on the political scene\textsuperscript{11}. While Ojo focused on the actions of Nigeria taken over the Yum Kippur War, he presented a balanced historical discourse on the evolving relations between the two countries. Although, Ojo did little to examine other vital areas of Nigeria-Israel relations, his work lays the foundation for scholarly activity in Nigeria’s diplomatic relation with Israel for the first twenty years.

N. Nereus, Influence of Domestic Factors on Nigeria-Israel Rapprochement,\textsuperscript{12} looks at critical areas such as the political situation in the two countries, the economic policies, cultural and religious affinity in analyzing the relationship between Nigeria and Israel. Nereus presented his work during the time when Gen. Babangida had restored diplomatic relations with Israel. Despite the usefulness of this work, Nereus did not look at how the
international system, especially the Middle East crisis impact Nigeria-Israeli relations.

Y. Oron (Ed), Middle East Record Volume 1, 1960, examined the historical foundations of Nigeria-Israel relations especially during the First Republic. It is not a comprehensive study on Nigeria-Israel relation but rather, it reveals significant events that would later impact the future of Nigeria-Israel relations.

I. Gambari, Party Politics and Foreign Policy: Nigeria under the First Republic, has also argued that the domestic political structure and process are of great impact on the nature and character of Nigerian foreign policy because they serve as the channel for internationalization of the international environment and events, thus making them intelligible and of value to the participants in domestic political roles. Though, Gambari’s work focused on party politics in Nigeria, it reflected on the correlation between politics and foreign policy formulation in Nigeria. Gambari’s work is relevant to
this study as it described the foundation of Nigerian foreign policy in political terms.

O. Aluko Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy\textsuperscript{15} focused on the evolution of Nigerian foreign policy by demonstrating how internal pressures affect foreign policy formulation in Nigeria. Though, the work did not discuss in detail Nigeria’s relation with Israel, it however provides a background study on domestic factors such as the military, political class, economic resources, ethnic composition, etc., and how each of these factors affect Nigeria’s relation with other countries.

In the same vein, F. Otubanjo, Foreign Policy Analysis\textsuperscript{16} asserts that the domestic environment which includes geographical location of the state, its peculiarity, natural and human resources, the nature of the political system, quality of leadership, the nature of the interaction among groups in the society, etc. all directly affects the evolution of a country’s relations with others. When applied to Nigeria-Israel relations, it implies that the location of Nigeria in West African sub-region and Israel in the Middle East affects their geopolitics and external relations. According to Otubanjo, the
domestic environments of Nigeria and Israel are largely responsible for their changing relations in their many years coexistence. While Otubanjo did not discuss the evolution of Nigeria–Israel relations, the work is useful to this present study in analyzing various domestic factors that shaped their bilateral relations between 1960 and 2007.

These works show that much is yet to be covered in Nigeria-Israel relations in the period of our study. This is because more research is yet to be conducted in the areas of influence of non-state actors on the relations between these two countries; and, on the educational, military, technological and cultural ties which Nigeria shared with Israel between 1960 and 2007. This study therefore seeks to provide well researched information in these identified areas.

**Research Methodology**

This study adopts the historical research method which involves making use of primary source including interview, government publications, newspapers, diaries, and archival materials relating to Nigeria-Israel
relations between 1960 and 2007. Moreover, this study depends on secondary sources such as books, journals, conference proceedings and internet sources to enrich this work.

Definition of Terms

Foreign Policy: A country's foreign policy, called the international relations policy, consists of strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interests and to achieve its goals in international relations. The approaches are strategically employed to interact with other countries. In recent times, due to the deepening level of globalization and transnational activities, the states will also have to interact with non-state actors. The aforementioned interaction is evaluated and monitored in attempts to maximize benefits of multilateral international cooperation.

Bilateral Relations: Bilateral may refer to any concept including two sides, in particular:

- Bilateralism, describing the political and cultural relations between two states.
Bilateral symmetry, symmetry between two sides of an organism

**Diplomatic Relations:** Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states. It usually refers to international diplomacy, the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, culture, environment and human rights. International treaties are usually negotiated by diplomats prior to endorsement by national politicians.

**Civil War:** A civil war is a war between organized groups within the same nation state, or, less commonly, between two countries created from a formerly-united nation-state. The aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region, or to change government policies. It is high-intensity conflict, often involving regular armed forces, that is sustained, organized and large-scale.
**Yum Kippur War:** Ramadan War or October War or the Yum Kippur, (also known as the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the Fourth Arab-Israeli War), was fought from October 6 to 25, 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria.

**Israel:** officially the State of Israel, is a parliamentary republic in the Middle East located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. With an estimated population of about 7,602,400 people, Israel is one of the major powers in the Middle East with vibrant diversified economy and possession of nuclear weapons.

**Nigeria:** officially the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a federal constitutional republic comprising thirty-six states and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The country is located in West Africa. The three largest and most influential ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In terms of population, Nigeria is the largest in Africa with enormous mineral resources including crude oil.
1.2. Acronyms

**MASHAV** (the Israeli Centre for International Cooperation)

**OAU** (Organization of African Unity)

**FP** (Foreign Policy)
End Notes


4. The researcher, drawing largely from the events that occurred between Nigeria and Israel from 1962 to 2000, carefully categorized the evolution of their relations into six eras.

5. Y. Oron (Ed), Middle East Record Volume 1, 1960, The Israeli Oriental Society, 1960, p 314


13. Y. Oron (Ed), Middle East Record Volume 1, 1960, P. 629


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