

NIGERIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS, 1999 TO 2012

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The history of Nigeria's foreign policy towards United States since 1960 has constantly been changing, though the principles guiding her foreign relations remain the same. Strategic events are largely responsible for the unstable external relationship between the two countries (Adebajo and Mustapha, 2008: 22). Since Nigeria's foreign policy is deeply rooted in Africa with emphasis on political and economic cooperation, peaceful dispute resolution, and global nonalignment, Nigerian leaders also have their attention fixed on the successful implementation of these principles which sometimes come in conflict with the US foreign goals.

Historically, Nigeria at independence began to conduct her foreign relations under the political and governmental leadership of its Prime Minister, the late Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. His administration emphasized Africa to be centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. His own foreign relations was pro-West particular with Britain, Nigeria's erstwhile colonial master. With the bloody military coup of January, 15, 1966, the late Major-General J.T. Aguisi Ironsi came to power only to be killed in a counter coup staged six months later.

This development brought the retired General Yakubu Gowon to power (Abegunrin, 2001: 12-20).

General Gowon borrowed a leaf from Alhaji Balewa administration by being pro-West in his foreign affairs. He entered into agreement with Britain, the United States and other European countries. However, his administration reluctantly allowed the Soviet Union to open its embassy in Lagos (Ofoegbu, 1979: 135). The General Gowon-led Federal Military Government was sacked in a bloodless coup which led to the assumption of power by the late General Murtala Ramat Mohammed and the retired General (now Chief) Olusegun Obasanjo who was his second in command and Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters.

The assumption of power by these two strongmen served as a catalyst in the history of international relations as far as Nigeria was concerned. Their government injected new innovations and dynamism into the nation's foreign affairs. Mohammed was prepared to counter the imperial moves of the Western Powers especially the United States who had emerged as a major power broker in Africa particularly in Angola (Robert, 1991: 57). Britain and Portugal also became targets of the new military administration while not leaving Cuba, a surrogate of the Soviet Union both of whom were present in Angola, challenging

the United States' (US) presence there. These Western Powers, Cuba as well as South Africa became the targets of the Mohammed/Obasanjo military regime in Africa. One basic truth that must be stressed is the fact that this was the age of the Cold War during which the US and the Soviet Union were competing for military supremacy and searching for satellite countries who would support them in their bid to permanently polarize the world into Capitalist and Communist Blocs under the US and Soviet Union respectively (Robert, 1991: 67).

Given the above situation the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime pursued confrontational diplomatic in its resolve to emancipate African countries that were still under the tyranny of colonial masters. The government also had conflict with the US in its bid to eradicate neo-colonialism, racism and apartheid on the African continent particularly colonies in Southern Africa (Davies, 1978: 15).

With all these involvements in international politics, Nigeria became a regional power and centre of influence, particularly in Africa, making her to adopt confrontational foreign policy posture towards the US. This combined with a viable economy until the mid-1980s, Nigeria was a toast of many states seeking either its influence or support on global issues or financial assistance (Ate, 1987: 93).

However, after the June 12, 1993, Nigerian presidential election was annulled, and in light of human rights abuses and the failure to embark on a meaningful democratic transition, the United States imposed numerous sanctions on Nigeria. These sanctions included the imposition of Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act to refuse entry into the United States of senior government officials and others who formulated, implemented, or benefited from policies impeding Nigeria's transition to democracy; suspension of all military assistance; and a ban on the sale and repair of military goods and refinery services to Nigeria. The U.S. Ambassador was recalled for consultations for four months after the execution of the Ogoni Nine on November 10, 1995.

After a period of increasingly strained relations, the death of General Abacha in June 1998 and his replacement by General Abubakar opened a new phase of improved bilateral relations. As the transition to democracy progressed, the removal of visa restrictions, increased high-level visits of U.S. officials, discussions of future assistance, and the granting of a Vital National Interest Certification on counter-narcotics, effective in March 1999, paved the way for re-establishment of closer ties between the United States and Nigeria, as a key partner in the region and the continent (Adebajo and Mustapha, 2008: 80-120).

When the new democratically elected government in Nigeria took power in 1999, the United States (US) pictured a bright future with a strategic country in the African sub-region. They envisioned a strong partnership in political, economic and security realms. Although, the US has consistently labeled their bilateral relationship with Nigeria as 'excellent', however, a number of recent events have meant that Washington has been challenged to take a fresh look at its relations with Abuja. Nigeria was in the forefront of African countries that publicly opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (ThisDay Newspaper, 2003).

The growing influence of Islam in northern Nigeria has also been a cause of concern to some policymakers in Washington, particularly in light of America's war on terrorism. Diplomatic relations between the two appear threatened over the foiled attempt by a Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to blow up a Northwest Airlines jet on Christmas Day (December 25, 2009) which led to the inclusion of Nigeria on US terrorism watch list and subsequently, making the Nigerian Senate to give the United States authorities a seven-day ultimatum to remove Nigeria from their watch list (Tell Magazine, 2012). Despite challenges that marred Nigeria-US relationship in 2010, the bilateral relationship continued to improve, and cooperation on many important foreign policy goals, such as economic collaborations and regional peacekeeping has been good.

The Nigerian government has lent strong diplomatic support to the U.S. Government counter-terrorism efforts in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Government of Nigeria, in its official statements, has both condemned the terrorist attacks as well as supported military action against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Between 2007 and 2012, Nigeria has played a leading role in forging an anti-terrorism consensus among states in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tell Magazine, 2012). It is the general aim of this thesis to explore the strategic importance of Nigeria as a crucial ally of the US and the needed synergies between the two nations to ensure regional and international stability.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bilateral relations between Nigeria and the US from 1999 to 2012 had a dual character: acrimony and friendship. Between 1999 and 2003, their relationship was cordial; between 2003 and 2004 it degenerated into a full scale diplomatic tussle where Nigeria regarded the action of the US government on Iraq invasion as inappropriate; between 2005 and 2009, diplomatic relations was cordial with the increase in economic activities; between 2009 and 2010, their relations was sour as a result of Nigeria's inclusion on the terror list by the US government; and between 2011 and 2012, their relations became stable and entered a new phase of strategic partnerships in the fight against terrorism. The

steps taken by these two countries to stabilize their relations during these periods call for careful study.

Moreover, since the main focus of the research is centered on Nigeria-U.S relations, perhaps, their relationship is primarily driven by economic motives, which in turn shape other areas of the relationship between the two countries. Nigerian economy represents hope, not only for West African countries, but also foreign powers such as the US who believes that Nigeria's leading role in Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and African Command (AFRICOM) would provide the motivation for other African countries.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What is the historical background of Nigeria-US relations?
- ii. How does AGOA influence Nigeria-US economic relations from 1999 to 2012?
- iii. Does democracy and good governance affect Nigeria's relation with the United States?
- iv. What effect does AFRICOM have on Nigeria's relation with the United States?
- v. How does internal and global terrorism affect Nigeria-US relations?

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Against the background of the foregoing, the primary objective of the study is a critical analysis of the relationship between Nigeria and the US from 1999 to 2012. This is further aimed at empirically evaluating whether the US initiative in the name of African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as well as US African Command (AFRICOM) had any impact on the development of Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims at achieving the following objective:

- i. Examine the historical background of Nigeria-US relations
- ii. Investigate the influence of AGOA on Nigeria-US economic relations from 1999 to 2012
- iii. Examine how democracy and good governance affect Nigeria's relation with the United States.
- iv. Discuss the role of US African Command on Nigeria's relation with the United States
- v. Analyse how internal and global terrorism affected Nigeria-US relations between 1999 and 2013.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study covers Nigeria's foreign relations with the United States of America from 1999 to 2012. The study examines the bilateral relations between

the two countries particularly the economic, cultural and political and military relations from 1999 to 2012. Other areas which this study covers include how the interplay of domestic factors shaped the relationship between Nigeria and the United States of America.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is very important for certain reasons. First, it historicizes Nigeria-US bilateral relations, during military regime and under the democratic leadership of Nigeria, thereby shedding more light on the dynamics that characterized their relations.

Second, the study made conscious effort to address the endogeneity issue, and provide justification for the unrelenting efforts of the government to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), through its economic relations with the US.

Third, it is useful to scholars' especially diplomatic historians, political scientists, economists and international relations experts in their research. Diplomats like ambassadors, high commissioners and staffers of foreign ministries will benefit from the work.

Finally, the policy makers and political class will learn, through this study, the need for them to create enabling business climate and make functional policies that would:

- i. Integrate Nigerian economy into global market through the establishment of a liberal markets economy;
- ii. Promotion and diversification of exports in both traditional and non-traditional;
- iii. Effective participation in trade negotiation to enhance economic gains in multilateral trading system; as well as regional and bilateral arrangements.
- iv. Enhancement of national security

1.7 Limitations of the Study

In the course of carrying out this research work, the researcher encountered certain limitations. This includes problems in meeting the right person at the right time, shortage of fund and the time allocated for the research work. Considering the limited time the researcher has in going out for research, there will also be constraints in accessing necessary and vital information required. All these and other anticipated problems would in no doubt affect the accuracy of this work and perhaps limit the generalization of the interpretations.

1.8 Literature Review

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1.9. Research methodology

Historical research method was also used in carrying out this study. However, a critical examination of the dramatic relations between Nigeria and US will be analyzed using findings from both primary and secondary sources.

A detailed step in the process of primary data collection is pertinent here. In this research interviews were conducted with officials from the major trade-related agencies in Nigeria that have something to do with AGOA and from some U.S. trade representatives in Nigeria. In addition to these officials, open-ended questionnaires were administered to the officials of those considered experts in the field of foreign policy analysis. Specifically, for the interview in Nigeria, the officials from the following think tanks, agencies and industries were contacted and interviewed:

- Nigeria-American Chamber of Commerce
- Office of the Special Adviser to the President on AGOA
- The US Embassy in Nigeria
- Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

The interviewed subjects were adults between the ages of 21 and 65 and are citizens either of Nigeria or the U.S. All questionnaires were administered to respondents in two forms: through the electronic mail (email) and also at their offices at Lagos and Abuja Nigeria. Where a face-to-face interview was not

possible, an open-ended questionnaire was sent to the respondent by e-mail. Permission to conduct the interviews was obtained both from the supervising officials in each organization and from the selected respondents.

The selection of subjects in this interview was based on their position in the organizations mentioned above. It was considered appropriate to target individuals who are knowledgeable about US policy towards Nigeria. Since the interviews involved individuals from both the public and private sectors—Nigerian and the U.S. government officials/workers, and the private sector stakeholders in Nigeria—there is no suspicion by the researcher that their opinions would be biased. However, we cannot rule out entirely elements of biases as long as human subjects are concerned. This is an acknowledged limitation of social inquiry which is also the case in this study.

Moreover, government publications, letters, correspondence, documentaries and newspapers were largely accessed to analyse the relationship between Nigeria and United States. The secondary data sources that were consulted comprised of published books, newspapers, journals articles, government documents and reports, project and policy documents; promotional materials on trade; aid and investments in Nigeria. These sources were libraries and resource centres of institutions and organizations in Nigeria.

The wealth of secondary sources helped augment or support information from the primary sources to enable the research present an informative impression of this ongoing developmental account of Nigeria-United States relations.

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