

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

US, Russia and the Politics of Influence in Pre and Post Colonial Nigeria

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Abstract:

Most major powers, Britain, France, United States, Russia and China, have always found Nigeria attractive naturally because of its vast resources. Even before its independence in October 1960, Britain, Russia, and the United States have made efforts to carve some influence for themselves in order to gain political leverage and economic advantage. By the design of the powers themselves during the scramble for and partitioning of Africa in 1879, the British overcame strong and feeble oppositions to its dominance in Nigeria.

However, seeing the huge potentials in the country, the United States signed a Consular Convention with the United Kingdom which made it possible for the United States to initiate direct contacts with leading African nationalists and specifically, made it possible for the United States Department in 1954 to extend its cultural Exchange Programme to future Nigerian leaders. This convention galvanized activities between Nigeria and the United States in such a way that both countries wished to promote their interests in the evolving post-colonial regional setting.

In a game plan which the United States never anticipated, the Russians came up with resolution 1514 which was meant to guarantee complete independence for African states. The passage of this resolution by an overwhelming majority in the United Nations General Assembly made the US and its European allies unpopular in Africa for daring to oppose openly a Resolution that would remove the impediment against their independence. In a contrasting situation, Russia's influence and image soared in Africa especially in Nigeria where some Nationalists favoured strong relations with Russia. This was the politics that played out in pre and post colonial Nigeria between the United States and Russia.

Keywords: *Influence, political leverage, scramble and partitioning; post-colonial regional setting, resolution 1514, post-colonial Nigeria*

1. Historical Perspectives

The history of relations between Nigeria and the United States was nothing to write home about until after Nigeria's independence when the US observed the potential of this new country emerging on the West African coast a few years after Ghana's independence.

Invariably, the United States intensified its marginal interest only in 1960 when things were taking shape in the country. Early US interest in the affairs of this former British colony was initiated largely by private organs. In 1920, for instance, the Phelps-Stokes Commission on Africa – the product of humanitarian efforts by private individuals – visited Nigeria to study the problems of education in the country and recommended ways of solving them.

Also, throughout the 1930s, major US cocoa dealers made serious efforts to buy cocoa directly from farmers in Nigeria (and Ghana), but their efforts were without success due to obstructionist tactics employed by established European firms and the British colonial office.

Fundamentally, however, the historical roots of Nigeria-US relations can be traced to three specific American concerns in the period between 1914 and 1960. The first was the traditional Anglo-American connections dating back to Jay's Treaty of November 19, 1794, which not only established the basis of diplomatic relations between Britain and her breakaway North American colony now called the United States of America. Thus the new world born out of the ashes of a bloody revolution established rapprochement with her sullen and defeated old master as well, inaugurated and enshrined a spirit of cooperation and concord that has endured to this day. The survival of this natural affinity between the two countries and their alliances in times of war and peace have been variously explained as a bond built on ties of blood and culture.

Consequently, all official contacts during this period took place indirectly between Washington and London. For example, although the United States opened its first Consulate in Lagos in the early 1920s in response to the emerging interests of US Missionaries and trading organizations in the territory, the first major act by the United States which had an impact on the decolonization process in Nigeria before 1960 was the Consular Convention signed on June 6, 1951, between the

Truman administration and the United Kingdom. The ratification of this Convention in 1952 paved the way for the United States to initiate direct contacts with leading African nationalists and, specifically, made it possible for the US State Department in 1954 to extend its Cultural Exchange Programme to future Nigerian government leaders, such as the country's first Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who became a beneficiary of the programme in 1957. Further, the US Congress showed keen interest in the future of Nigeria as an autonomous political entity by adopting, on August 27, 1954, a joint resolution that heralded the prospective attainment of "complete self-government" by that colonial territory. Beyond these acts there were few tangible links between the United States and Nigeria on the eve of the latter's independence in October 1960.

Yet one year later, the political leaders of both countries became highly conscious of their mutual desire to cultivate an intensive relationship, each wishing to promote their interests in the evolving post-colonial regional setting. The pace and extent of the developing links between the two countries were so rapid that by 1965, it was possible for Nigeria to diversify its foreign economic and political policies.

This arrangement enabled the government of the United States to make contacts with the various nationalist leaders, as well as monitoring the political events in those areas. This rather bold step on the part of the United States was prompted by a number of developments regarding Britain's continued ability to stave off the growing nationalist sentiments in many of her colonies as evidenced by the events in the Middle East and the independence of India and Pakistan. In Nigeria too, since 1946, the tide was running steadily against continued British presence. For example, the Richard's constitution handed to Nigerians by the British in 1946, contained an article creating three regional Houses of Assembly made up of Nigerian citizens although, having advisory powers only in regard to impending legislations. In the Macpherson constitution which came into effect in 1952, the British made more concessions and granted Nigerians more share in shaping policy and in the direction of executive government.

Due to mounting political pressures, the British government gave America the green light to proceed with her increased political contacts with Nigerians. As a result of these events, the Cultural Exchange Programme which was geared towards bringing future and potential African leaders to the United States for a guided study-tour of the country for 90 days was extended to Nigerians in 1954.

Among its recipients were the country's future Prime Minister and some prospective ministers in his Cabinet. The effects of this cultural exchange programme on the Nigeria-America relations were remarkable. Its impact on the general political and foreign policy orientation of Nigerian leaders could be measured only in the attempt at special relations which developed between Nigeria and the United States during the civilian era in Nigeria (1960 – 1966).

2. Coming to Africa

On the eve of Nigerian independence, Balewa told his astonished colleagues in the Parliament that, "the greatest contribution we can make to Africa, and to world peace generally, will be to show how a country, containing so many diverse elements can find a peaceful solution to its internal difficulties". For Sir Abubakar and many Nigeria leaders after him, comparing American problems and aspirations to Nigeria became a matter of record. America has since then stood for these leaders as an example of success in federalism as well as a real lesson in politics in a plural society.

But, it was the political events in Africa and the rest of the world that were responsible for post-World War II American interest in Nigeria. By mid-1950s, American policy makers were faced with two problems that demanded urgent attention – containing expansionist communism and responding to rising nationalism in Africa and Asia. So, in order to both understand Africa as well as draw up an appropriate policy position, several studies were commissioned by both the American government and some private organizations. The American University campuses were moving into the front-line, as African studies programmes began to proliferate in a manner never before seen in America.

In 1957, the report of one United States Special Mission to Africa defined American interest in Africa as follows:

An interest in the evolution of Africa in a manner not inimical to our democratic type of government, the exclusion of influences unfriendly to our way of life, the hope of having access to the raw materials of that continent, especially to safeguard our minimum strategic needs; to increase our trade with all African countries and to exercise a moral leadership as benefits of our honorable traditions.

However, with regard to Nigeria specifically, the Commerce Department did a comprehensive study of both the opportunities and policies related to foreign investment. The study was geared toward encouraging the American business community to invest in Nigeria and categorically stated that, "almost all economic indicators point to a sustained expansion growth within Nigeria." The report, which was favorable to Nigeria analyzed the social and political situations in the country and emphasized the determined efforts of Nigerian leaders to achieve both a diversified and growing economy. The position taken here emphasizes that American involvement in Africa and Nigeria in particular during the late 1940s and 1950s was the direct result of the process of a gradual colonial disengagement on the part of Great Britain and the colonial powers.

On a bilateral (economic) level, Nigeria, in 1973-1979, sold to the United States about 38-56 per cent of its total oil exports (compared to 11 per cent in 1965), and this accounted for about 18-26 per cent of the total US crude imports. The effect of these developments on the economies of the two countries was profound. On the one hand, Nigeria became, in a period of acute scarcity in the world energy supply, the second largest exporter of crude oil to the United States. On the other hand, US market demand for Nigerian oil provided the major source of the immense accumulation of foreign exchange

reserves available to Nigeria's federal governments in this period – the oil sector accounted for about 85-90 per cent of total reserves.

At this time, Nigeria's regional diplomacy and US Africa policy have become joined in a functional complementarity. Each nation regarded the other, especially since, the Angolan Civil War of 1975-1976, to be of substantive relevance to its regional interests and objectives. Before 1966 Nigeria and the United States were indeed *de facto* allies, an alignment borne out of mutual necessity given the novel challenges facing them in the first decade of Africa's political independence. That early pattern of regional alignment was determined, in essence, by a bilateral context of dominance and dependence, which explained, to a great extent, Nigeria's celebrated "moderate" orientation in African affairs. As an indication of Nigeria's bilateral dependence, the United States, together with the United Kingdom, supplied more than 70 per cent of all official economic aid received by Nigeria before its political crisis of 1966.

From 1970 to 1979, however, Nigeria strained to relate to the United States in African affairs from a position of relative economic independence. During this period, although the country remained substantially economically dependent on the United States (and Great Britain), the structure of its international economic relations had become modified in significant ways. As a result of greater economic growth and relative financial self-sufficiency - conditions that paradoxically were fuelled by a new form of dependence on one export commodity (oil) - officials and public at large no longer perceived their economic ties with the United States in terms of dependence but rather of interdependence. Many Nigerians, in the euphoric atmosphere of the period, were convinced that the "economic kingdom" was at last within their country's reach and that oil wealth was to be utilized in consolidating Africa's political mobilization.

The process of mobilization began with the formation and consolidation of the United Nations. The United States was one of the leading founding members of the United Nations. According to an American Statesman, the United States was present at the creation of the United Nations and participated in the formulation of the organisation's policies on decolonization which were categorically stated in the UN Charter. Therefore, to the extent that the United Nations Charter contributed toward decolonization, it must be viewed as reflecting the support of the leading members of the organization. Hence, the United States' attitude on decolonization within the United Nations framework had some implications on the development of Nigeria-American relations either directly or indirectly. As most observers of international politics at the United Nations since the late 1950s can testify, among the world's new states (including Nigeria), no issue has more importance than their commitment to securing a speedy and complete end to colonialism. It constituted the central focus of their foreign policy objectives and diplomacy in the United Nations.

This means that Nigerian leaders in their struggle for independence could not be oblivious to the general and specific roles of the United States and other great powers within the United Nations in order to facilitate the liquidation of colonialism in the world. Perhaps, no one made the issue of anti-imperialism and its importance to the colonial subjects as clearly as did Ghana's late President Kwame Nkrumah who said, "We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility." The founding fathers of the United Nations were well aware of this growing nationalist sentiment that followed the end of World War II.

For example, Chapter XI, Article 73 of the United Nations Charter sought to deal with the colonial question. According to this Article (73):

... members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government, recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories.

Besides the generalities stated above, while (Article 73, Section 9) expressed concern for the just treatment and protection of the colonial peoples against abuses, (Section B) specifically recommended that the colonies be assisted "to develop self-government" as well as urged the colonial powers "to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions."

In a broader sense, decolonization has been the most profound political reality in Africa since the end of the Second World War. One can delineate two essential definitions of decolonization – one juridical, the other more substantive. In its juridical sense, decolonization denotes the transfer of sovereign political authority from the colonial rulers to indigenous nationalist leaders in conformity with United Nations rulings most precisely stipulated in Resolution 1514(XV), December 14, 1960, of the General Assembly. Within the legal frame of the UN Charter, decolonization translates into the concrete exercise of the rights of colonized peoples to self-determination and independence. The satisfying criterion of this definition appears to be the relinquishing of formal sovereign jurisdiction over colonial territories.

On the more substantive level, decolonization entails an awesome effort toward transformation of the political, economic, social and psychological dimensions of the existing power relationships between the colonizing nations and the colonized peoples. This definition does not, by any means, presume a complete break in relations after independence between the former rulers and the ruled. The necessity of the power transformation follows from the very nature of the original colonial relationship. Even if we accept that colonization, according to one observer, entails only "the political control of underdeveloped people whose social and economic life is directed by the dominant power," then a fundamental change in this mode of relationship in all the crucial dimensions – in order to restore effective power of control to the people of the colonized society – becomes the basic object of decolonization. Put more precisely, decolonization involves the retrenchment of the

colonial structures of the colonial system and the progressive development of autonomous systems of power in the new sovereign regions.

Consequently, decolonization should, if effective, result in wider decision-making freedom from foreign constraints for authorities of the independent states.

Nigeria's policy makers in the early 1960s found the management of a conservative leadership on African decolonization most distinctly marked by an advocacy of an orderly, non-transformative transition to independence, to be subjected at home to incessant stresses. The great majority of the foreign policy public felt that the regional status of Nigeria, with its "manifest destiny" content, required its government to pursue an aggressive, mobilizing leadership in the struggle to retrench colonialism, at least in the Nkrumahist "power" sense.

An early indication of the public's preference was demonstrated in 1961. In August of that year, all three hundred delegates to the All Nigeria People's Conference pressed, among other resolutions, "that Nigeria (should) make an unequivocal declaration in favour of the political union of African states". Though they agreed with the government that Nigeria should initiate concrete cooperative arrangements in the fields of economics, science, culture, and so forth, with its African neighbors, they nevertheless agreed with Ghana that these links should be forged within a framework of an African political union.

However, from the more practical point of view of the ruling federal regime, adopting such a course on decolonization was clearly at variance with a number of realities, among which were the structure of the country's socio-economic and political systems: the interests – security, political, and financial – of conservative and powerful elements in the federal coalition; and, above all, the necessity to secure Anglo-American support (financial, political and military) in the regime's perennial contest with domestic and regional forces of opposition. Nigeria's leadership could not operate in a material vacuum; it had to contend with these imperatives.

3. Balancing the Necessity of External Dependence

The country's bilateral relationships with the United States and Great Britain constituted critical external factors in the conceptualization and pursuit of its decolonization policy in the regional context.

The Balewa government had to balance the necessity of external dependence in the realization of crucial state interests against the virtue of domestic pressures regarding the desirability of a mobilizing, radical anti-colonial regional posture that would threaten Anglo-American interests and objectives in Africa. The two Anglo-Saxon powers, were in this period Nigeria's dominant foreign economic partners in the areas of capital aid, technical assistance, private investment, and trade. The United States had by 1963 emerged the most important external source of financial aid and high-level technical personnel in connection with the implementation of the first national development plan. The United States also complemented the United Kingdom in its political and diplomatic support of the Balewa regime's regional policy and domestic security interests.

As a background factor in Nigerian-American relations one is essentially interested in how the United States' performance on this issue affected its relationships with Nigeria. For one thing, the optimistic expectation of Nigerians was historically justifiable to the extent that Americans did not have any direct colonial role in Africa. However, on the other hand, the post-World War II international developments introduced new factors that were to be of greater significance to Americans than the "spirit of 1776". Among these developments introduced were the collapse of Western Europe and its heavy dependence on American power as well as the rise of the United States to a position of world leadership. This rather new development prevented Washington from living up to the expectations of some Nigerian leaders or utilizing its potentials to meaningfully contribute to a more peaceful cooperative evolution of most of the colonial territories into statehood. Somewhere along the line, the United States' security interests compelled its leaders to sacrifice their anti-colonial reputation. Hence, the advent of the colonial questions as an object of international concern in post-World War II put the United States government in a dilemma. As a result, American policy on colonialism became generally viewed as ambivalent by most Nigerian nationalists. This began the gradual erosion of the United States' reputation as an anti-imperialist champion and consequently the growing suspicion of the United States in all matters involving decolonization. This development was in contrast to the Soviet Union which continuously gained the reputation for being a bulwark against colonialism. Therefore, as the issue of decolonization transformed itself into an object of the Cold War rivalry, the United States began to realize her increasing isolation from many countries who received enormous economic assistance from her but were in agreement with the Soviet Union on the colonial question.

Given the existing Cold War environment of international relations, this view i.e. that Nigeria's exclusive economic and political dependence on the Western powers particularly the United States and Great Britain, imposed prohibitive effects on its freedom of action in foreign affairs, was reinforced by two underlying assumptions. One was that there existed a nexus of US-British political-security interests in Africa. The second was that as a result of its economic and political dependence on this Anglo-American force, Nigeria was compelled to identify and comply with Western policy positions in Africa, thereby jeopardizing its national as well as collective African interests. The critics were arguing, in essence, that within a structure of vastly unequal economic and political relationships, Nigerian leaders could not conceive, much less sustain, an autonomous foreign policy directed at serving the country's best interest. Adopting the same general line of reasoning, Patrick McGowan and Klaus-Peter Gottwald concluded that "African foreign policy, while adaptive, is more influenced by national attributes and linkage phenomena than the traditional emphasis on personalities and ideologies suggest."

The Balewa government sought to conduct its overall foreign policy relationship with the United States on two broad tactical planes. To convince domestic critics that its regional leadership capacity was in no way hampered by the emerging structural ties to the United States, it attempted to pursue a calculated (not balanced) non-alignment position on Cold War issues at the United Nations. However, where its vital concerns were directly involved – for example, on issues of African security and decolonization – the regime strained to exercise its leadership through steadfast cooperation with the United States, be it at the UN or in African Diplomatic councils.

It was obvious from developments within the United Nations that the introduction of the Cold War into the United Nations' efforts towards decolonization was the handiwork of the Soviet Union. The Soviets saw it as a goldmine in their struggle against the Western bloc led by the United States. With it, the Soviet Union sought to win the sympathy of the increasing anti-colonial minded new members of the United Nations. In doing this, the Soviet Union in comparison with the United States had a cleaner slate. Neither the Soviet Union nor her allies had any colonies in Africa and this gave the Soviets a tremendous advantage over their American rivals. Many African nationalist leaders in turn, appreciated the Soviet stand on the colonial question. Hence, once decolonization became intertwined with the Cold War conflicts, it threatened American-European alliance, and became a threat second only to the threat posed by communism itself. Even some Americans saw anti-colonialism as nothing short of a communist conspiracy and thus seriously viewed the decolonization process as a new form of Soviet offensive. Therefore, the entire decolonization process posed a difficult problem for the United States government regarding its relations to the United Nations, to the anti-colonial nationalists and to its European allies. These were reflected in the growing United States' resentment of the United Nations General Assembly where the United States has been progressively losing both her influence and power to control events while the Soviet influence grew comparatively.

3.1. Contending With the Russian Game Plan

There was serious conflict of ideological interests between the Soviet Union and the United States over what later became known as Resolution 1514 or the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on Colonial Independence. It was so serious that the United States though not a colonizer, almost lost its support and friendship with very strategic and important African countries including Nigeria.

In 1960, the Soviet Union leader, Khrushchev introduced what seemed an earth-shaking resolution in favour of the immediate grant of complete independence and freedom, "to colonies, trust territories, and other non-self-governing areas, and the elimination of all strongholds of colonialism, in the shape of possessions and leased areas or of any special rights or advantages in the territories of other states." This rather sweeping resolution covered among other items, all American military bases abroad including the Panama Canal zone. American and Western European opposition led to a modification and incorporation of some aspects of the Soviet resolution into the Third World Resolution.

This resolution specifically stated that:

- The subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and cooperation.
- All people have the right of self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.
- Inadequacy of political, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext to delay independence.
- All armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected.

Unfortunately, this popular Resolution was not supported by United States and its European colonial collaborators even though the United States claimed they never had colonies abroad especially in Africa. Despite their opposition to the Resolution, it was passed by an overwhelming majority in the United Nations General Assembly. The United States, by abstaining officially joined Great Britain, Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, Republic of South Africa and Australia, as the enemies of decolonization, placing Washington "where the communist speakers had always said it was; on the side of the colonialist-imperialist exploiters."

The American delegation was seriously disturbed by this vote (90-0-9), first, because the United States delegates had indicated that they would vote in favour of the resolution if it could be modified. Secondly, they were also concerned about the impact of the Resolution on the United States' international image particularly if it were to be so closely identified with the colonialist-imperialist European countries. Their action contradicted the general impression people had about them as anti-colonial revolutionaries. To Americans who were not used to seeing themselves as colonialists or imperialists despite the fact that the United States possessed territories abroad or even fought wars for some territorial possessions, abstaining constituted a serious embarrassment. However, one unmistakable effect of the 1960 Resolution on colonial independence was to demonstrate how long Americans had ceased to be anti-colonial revolutionaries even though they did not know it.

The Nigerian nationalist leaders, like most other nationalists in Africa and Asia, were disappointed by the American position on the colonial question. But unlike most of them, the Nigerian leaders understood America's unique difficulties in fulfilling two irreconcilable obligations. One has to do with a reputation for a history of anti-imperialist revolutionary tradition and the other has to do with America's new international position.

American delegates at the United Nations after this fateful voting attempted to explain that it was the intention of the United States Government to vote in favour of the modified Resolution, but that the last minute change in their position was made on orders from President Eisenhower himself. Eisenhower had received an urgent and direct plea from the British Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan requesting that the United States join Britain, France and other Western bloc countries in voting against the Resolution. In other words, by 1960 the whole colonial question had become inextricably interwoven with not only the issue of national self-determination or the racial aspects of human rights but also irrevocably tangled with issues of the United States' national security and international obligations. As such, the United States by supporting her European allies preferred to deal with more pressing security problems over retaining the image of an anti-colonialist revolutionary. The American officials appreciated the understanding shown by the Nigerian leaders and regarded it as evidence of mature political leadership.

Events in 1958 were indicative of the growing ties between the United States and Nigeria. The US International Cooperation Administration contracted with Ohio University to send educators on a three-year programme to Nigeria. The first US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa visited Nigeria with a delegation of US scientists. A high-level Trade Mission met with over 500 Nigerian businessmen in 15 cities. Some 258 Nigerian students – the highest number for sub-Saharan Africa – were enrolled in American Universities.

The United States quickly recognized Nigeria's independence in 1960. On October 1, 1960, President Dwight Eisenhower commented: "I am confident that in the years to come our two countries will stand as one in safeguarding the greatest of all bonds between us, our common belief in a free and democratic way of life."

3.2. A Defined Mission

Between 1960 and 1966, the Nigerian-US relationship hinged on two tangible conditions. One was the concrete economic aid and technical assistance that the Nigerian political leadership hoped to obtain and actually received from the United States toward the execution of its national development programme. The other was the political – diplomatic support that each country sought and gained from the other in promoting its regional objectives in Africa.

Economic and political connections were crucial in binding the real interests and actions of the two countries in their overall relationship. To the Nigerian leadership, economic ties especially, assured Nigeria's access to the most valuable external development and political assets. To United States policy makers, these ties provided a functional and regulated channel through which they could affect both the general decision making environment of Nigeria's foreign policy and specific Nigerian policies on regional issues of mutual concern. This was why in 1961, President Kennedy praised Nigeria for detailing police and army units to the United Nations' command in the Congo (now Zaire) during that nation's struggle to maintain its integrity after independence. That same year, President Kennedy welcomed Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who returned to the United States on an official visit as Nigeria's Prime Minister.

In the context of the development of Nigerian-American relations, both the individual and elite (group) variables play a crucial role. In fact, these two variables must be understood and emphasized because Nigerian political process, cannot be explained adequately except in the context of the activities of the political leaders acting individually or as a group. However, the individual or elite groups discussed herein have one thing in common above and beyond their Nigerian citizenship – they were all or almost all American-educated or have had American connections, either in the form of exchange programme or semi-official visit to the United States before independence.

To all, America was not a fairy tale, they have been in one way or another exposed to the American society long before Nigeria's independence in 1960. The concept of elite variable refers to the aggregate characteristics of Nigeria's foreign policy-making elite. Several scholars have maintained that in every country, foreign policy is actually made by a relatively small group of men and women; and that the idea of the democratization of the foreign policy-making process, although viewed as ideal, has had no success in practice because of the sensitivity or secretive nature of certain foreign policy issues. However, the central issue here is to identify these Nigerian elites and analyze how their perceptions and images were translated into the foreign policy acts of the country they represented. In fact, the influence of a few, but conspicuous American-educated Nigerians was a decisive factor in the development of Nigerian foreign policy toward the United States and to some extent guided American reactions toward events in Nigeria itself.

Somehow, the image of America which these men acquired mostly through their prolonged period of education in the United States gradually made its way into the entire Nigerian society. This image was predominantly the product of both the general American liberal educational and socio-political philosophies as well as personal contacts with American citizens and officials. From the point of view of the United States officials, Nigeria possessed two attractive features. The first was the size of Nigeria's population – a promising African giant expected to play a leadership role within the Africa sub-system. Secondly, the ideological orientation of the Nigerian leaders favored both anti-communism and conservatism. The Nigerian leaders on the other hand recognized Nigeria's economic needs, particularly in the form of public or private investments, loans and grants. In addition, most of these leaders were aware of the political benefits derivable from a close relationship with the United States in terms of a balance against over-dependence on the government of Great Britain. Hence, it was their realistic appraisal of Nigeria's political and economic needs which set the stage for nurturing an atmosphere of friendship and cordiality in Nigeria's dealings with the United States during this period.

Generally speaking, the Nigerian civilian leaders accepted the growth of political and economic ties with the United States because they saw such ties as inevitable if they were to achieve their goal of economic growth and development. In order to fully understand and appreciate the major events that shaped this period in Nigerian-United States diplomacy, one is obliged to look into three essential areas: the political-diplomatic; the economic motives and the cultural – educational factors. Considering the nature of Nigerian state interests in the period from 1960 to 1966, it should not be surprising that the pattern of Nigeria's diplomatic-political ties in the same period evolved in response to its foreign economic links, for a country's decision to establish diplomatic relations abroad, and with whom, is determined primarily by the type of interests those relations are supposed to serve. The need for discrimination becomes even greater when the country in question is deficient both in financial resources and in trained diplomatic personnel.

3.3. *The Return of the Soviets*

On the surface, early Nigerian-Soviet bilateral contacts seemed merely to have been a victim of mutually harmful impressions held by authorities in the two countries. Until about 1962, the Soviet Union hardly thought of Nigeria as a "progressive" or even a "national-democratic" African state with whom it could expect to join forces for its anti-Western crusade in the African continent. In sharp contrast to their impression of the leaders of such States as Ghana, Guinea and Mali, Soviet analysts felt that the Nigerian leadership constituted an amalgam of "bourgeois reactionaries" and 'local feudals' incapable of and unwilling to, engineer a widespread national liberation movement. Contemptuously, Soviet spokesmen viewed the entire country as still being under the grips of the Western "imperialists". In addition, individual Nigerian political parties and their leaders came under the critical scrutiny of Soviet writers.

It should be noted, however, that the Nigerian political leaders themselves contributed in provoking this negative Soviet attitude through their public and essentially self-serving expressions of pro-Western sentiments, hardly promotive of the Soviet Union's own desires in Africa. In 1959, during the course of the pre-independence election campaigning, leaders of the three parties competed ardently to woo Western support for their causes. For example, Awolowo, after describing the Communist ideology as "atheistic materialism" that was "threatening to destroy or stifle all that is best and noblest in man", declared his party's intention to bind Nigeria firmly to the Western bloc.

The NPC more steadfastly indicated its determination that an independent Nigeria under its leadership must "maintain the closest relationship with the United Kingdom and should aim at retaining and expanding her existing ties and friendship with the United States of America."

In October 1960, the Soviet Union initiated efforts to reverse its previously unfriendly stance toward Nigeria. Apparently, the Soviet leadership had read a positive trend in the abruptly changed environment of Nigeria's domestic politics after the 1959 general election. It seemed that perhaps internal pressures might after all prove strong enough to force the ruling Nigerian regime to adopt at least a "positive neutralist" or independent orientation to global East-West political issues. Consequently, the Soviets decided to present Nigeria with an alternative to complete reliance on Western economic and diplomatic support. Upon Nigeria's independence, the Soviet government announced its hope that "friendly relations based on mutual understanding and close cooperation would be established." While in Lagos for the independence celebration, Joseph Malik, the leader of the Soviet delegation, informed Prime Minister Balewa of his country's desire to open an embassy in Lagos and its readiness to offer economic assistance for Nigeria's development.

The Nigerian leadership was however very hasty in deciding on what and how to accept the Soviet's initiative. The Nigerian leaders, by 1960, were of the view that open relationship with the Soviets would jeopardize the prospects of receiving the assistance of the Western bloc. They also had misgivings about the developmental effectiveness of Communist aid. They were well aware of communism's ideological prescriptions for the socio-economic transformation of underdeveloped societies, in particular the emphasis on the socialization of the primary means of production preferably under the political leadership of the working class. Such prescriptions conflicted with the liberal-capitalistic social order the Nigerian leaders championed.

It was to some extent because of these considerations that Nigeria failed to establish an embassy in Moscow until 1963, although the Soviet Union was permitted to open its Mission in Lagos in early 1962. By contrast, at independence, four of the five diplomatic posts opened by Nigeria outside Africa were in Western Nations. Nigeria's support and bias for the US was responsible for the restriction placed on the number of Soviet diplomatic personnel to ten while placing no restriction on the number of US and British personnel.

The American interest in Nigeria can be properly contextualized within the larger framework of the US foreign policy in Africa. Three factors historically have contributed to bureaucratic influence within the policy-making process during the post-World War II era: the low level of attention typically paid to African issues by the President; the executive's traditional assumption that, due to their colonial heritage, the European allies should assume primary responsibility for Western interests in Africa; and, at least prior to the end of the Cold War, the East-West dimension of a particular situation.

The American Presidents were forced by necessity to select those countries, geographical regions, and functional issues which will receive priority attention by their administrations. Although contacts between the US and Africa have expanded in both quantity and quality during the post-World War II period, unlike Presidents J.F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, Presidents Harry S. Truman and George Bush paid the least amount of attention to Africa, relative to other regions of the World.

This emphasis on the lack of presidential attention to Africa relative to other regions of the world is not meant to suggest that the Presidents should be intimately involved in the day-to-day running of US-Africa policies – in essence conjuring up images of Presidents serving as *de facto* “desk officers” for African problems. Rather, the crucial theme is that the personal predilections of individual Presidents toward other regions of perceived greater concern, combined with the vast range of presidential responsibilities, yield outcomes which make US-Africa policies, perhaps more so than those directed toward any other region of the world, subject to the influence of bureaucrats within the national security bureaucracies.

It is also imperative to mention that Africa’s enduring relationship with Europe is a second element that reinforces the president’s tendency to allow US Africa policies to be heavily influenced by the national security bureaucracies. All Presidents (although in varying degrees) traditionally have looked upon Africa as a special area of influence and responsibility of the former European colonial powers. Therefore Presidents generally have deferred to European sensitivities and maintained a low profile during routine periods when one of these countries has taken the lead on a particular foreign policy issue.

In particular, White House recognition of European sensitivities prevailed prior to the 1960s when policymakers generally perceived European colonialism on the African continent as “progressive”. Ultimately, the belief was that colonial rule would lead to modernization and political and economic stability. When the strength of African nationalism and the inevitable process of decolonization and political independence became apparent during the 1960s, this position evolved. Policymakers attempted to walk a diplomatic tight-rope between the potentially mutually exclusive goals of support for decolonization and the continued strength of the Atlantic Alliance. Yet when African demands clashed with policies considered crucial to US security relationships with Europe, presidents ultimately decided in favour of the Atlantic Alliance.

This European component, which resulted from a shared democratic political culture significantly strengthened through Allied cooperation during World War II, was best summarized in 1968 by George Ball, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy administration. Ball noted that the US recognized Africa as a “special European responsibility”, just as European nations recognized “our particular responsibility in Latin America.” Although these spheres of influence increasingly have become broached by both sides from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, there is no disputing the fact that the White House, and, to a lesser degree, Italy, Belgium, and Portugal were prepared to take the lead in their former colonial territories.

Fundamentally, the US interest in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular was further stimulated by the East-West rivalry. Since 1947 when George F. Kennan formulated the doctrine of containment and the Soviet Union and Communism became the central concerns of US strategic thinking, policymakers have tended to view Africa from an East-West perspective. This view centered specifically on the threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies to US interests. The importance of the Soviet threat was stated most vividly by Kennedy administration at the height of the African independence movement during the early 1960s. “What we do or fail to do in Africa in the next year or two will have a profound effect for many years,” noted a memorandum signed by Kennedy. “We see Africa as probably the greatest open field manoeuvre in the worldwide competition between the (Communist bloc and the non-communist world)”.

Although there were variations in the assessment of the Soviet threat and utility of containment as originally conceived, all Presidents from Truman to Bush (at least prior to the decline of communism and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union in 1991) sought to limit Soviet influence in Africa. The result was increased presidential attention to African issues when the former Soviet Union and its allies became significantly involved on the continent. Yet when the East-West element was lacking, there existed a high probability that the Presidents would remain distant and uninvolved in African issues.

The day-to-day responsibility for overseeing policy was left in the hands of the national security bureaucracies. As it became readily apparent in 1991 that, for all practical purposes, the Cold War officially had come to an end, African scholars and policymakers increasingly began to worry that this state of affairs would result in the decline of already low levels of presidential interest in African continent (and thus, reinforce the influence of the national security bureaucracies in the policymaking process).

Besides, there was indeed a more potent constraining factor in the Nigerian-Soviet relationship throughout the period. And that was the strong belief held by important elements in the Nigerian leadership that any close contacts with the Soviet Union would directly or indirectly provide an opportunity for the subversion of both the Nigerian state and the ruling regime. The very name of the Soviet Union, in the regime’s mind, was synonymous with a mindless destruction of the existing political system. To cultivate close economic and political ties with such a power, especially when the new leadership was still struggling to establish its control over the entire system, was regarded as tantamount to committing national suicide.

Not leaving anything to chance the Eisenhower administration appointed Joseph Palmer II to oversee the Nigerian-US relations with a view to consolidating and building upon the existing understanding between the two countries prior to independence. Palmer was no stranger to Africa or Nigeria. His second Foreign Service posting after joining the State Department in 1939 was in Africa where from 1941-45 he served as the US Consul in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1958, he was Secretary of State, Dulles’ principal adviser on Africa and was instrumental in the establishment of the African Bureau, and in 1959, as US Consul-General and Minister to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland supervised the establishment of American Consular posts in most of Southern and Eastern Africa. Palmer’s influence in the development of the US African policy was well recognized by his colleagues at the State Department. It was this highly placed official who was selected to lead the US delegation to attend Nigerian independence celebrations in October, 1960 and whom Eisenhower later appointed as the first United States Ambassador to Nigeria. Palmer developed such a good working relationship with the Nigerian leaders that much of what is called ‘special relations’ between Nigeria and the United States should be credited to him. One of

his greatest successes was the intimate and personal friendship which developed between Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's Prime Minister and President John F. Kennedy.

3.4. Balewa's Visit to the United States

The relationship between Nigeria and the United States was officially formalized during a summit meeting between Kennedy and Balewa in July, 1961. During Balewa's UN visit in October, 1960, he conferred in New York with several of United States officials, who hinted that no matter who won the November (1960) election in the United States that the Prime Minister would be invited to make an official visit to Washington in 1961. Soon after Kennedy's inauguration, an official invitation was extended to the Nigerian leader who made the visit between July 24 and August 1, 1961. The highlight of the visit and the one issue that indicated the character of their developing relationship came on July 26 when Balewa was accorded the honour of addressing a joint session of the United States Congress. This gesture of friendship became one of the consolidating factors of the Nigerian-American diplomacy during the civilian period in Nigeria. What the Nigerian Prime Minister saw in America and its citizens was a land representing a special meaning of liberty, of freedom from outside control and opportunity for the fulfillment of one's national desires and cultural heritage. But above all, he also found friends, "we are highly gratified that in this part of the world, far from our own house, we have found friends willing to listen to our own point of view and understand the purpose and impulses that underline our actions and our faults." The emerging special relations between the United States and Nigeria in addition to Nigeria's commitment to the UN helped the Balewa regime to reconsider the thorny issue of over-dependence on Great Britain. Thus began the strategy of utilizing the new American connections to counter-balance the preponderant influence of Great Britain in Nigerian affairs. This gave little or no opportunity at all for the Nigerian-Soviet relations to have the desired depth. But the Soviets never believed that it was a hopeless situation.

These anti-Soviet dispositions had less to do with Communist ideology than with the perception of the Nigerian regime that the Communist states had the potential to threaten its physical security. When, for instance, the regime decided to cooperate with the United States to check Soviet influence in Africa, it was not influenced so much by the prospect of Communism spreading throughout the continent as by its perception that the Soviet Union was an ally of its regional and domestic opponents bent on destroying its political authority. Clearly, both Nigeria and the United States regarded the expansion of Soviet influence in Africa as a security threat. But the two countries had different perceptions of the essence of that threat. Nigeria took a narrow view, concerned with how such a development could affect its immediate domestic and regional security interests; the US view was far more encompassing, linked to its global ideological concerns with the spread of Communism. Also, pertaining to the contrasting images of threat that the Nigerian leadership associated with US and Soviet aid was the fact that the Nigerian regime, was, on balance, more willing to condone the political-security implications of the US economic programme than that of the Soviet Union – a measure of the value that Nigerian regime attached to its basic links with the United States. This was even more revealing because U.S. development aid was mostly in the form of grants, which created opportunities for foreign technical personnel to directly influence domestic policies. Soviet offers of economic assistance, on the other hand, stressed loan credits at very low interest. Thus to the Nigerian leadership, the potential risk to its security perceived to emanate from U.S. aid ties was less worrisome than that associated with a prospective Soviet contact. This diabolical world view of the Soviet Union, and Communist states in general, was not completely fanciful. There were a number of concrete incidents, some no doubt trivial, that helped reinforce this view. On July 16, 1961, a report in the British press stated that a Nigerian student in London had been invited to Moscow by Soviet authorities to undergo subversive training with the specific aim of "overthrowing the Nigerian government."

Nigeria's resolve to resist Soviet pressures for expansion in their bilateral relations was bolstered in no small degree by US-British exhortation and direct support. Without such support, it was probable that Nigeria's resistance would have broken down much earlier under concerted domestic-regional battering perhaps nurtured by the covert application of Soviet resources. Washington officials considered Lagos to be "second to none" among US-Africa diplomatic posts. Through regular public declarations of approval for Nigeria's internal and regional policies, U.S. officials sought to strengthen the domestic position of the ruling regime and to enhance its regional leadership capacity. In the immediate post-independence period, the Nigerian government readily granted permission for the installation in Nigeria of U.S. communication facilities such as Project Mercury, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service monitoring station (FBIS), and the SYNCOM (Satellite Communications) land station. The regime's expectation was that those facilities would, among other advantages, serve their security interests by helping to obtain vital information about activities of unfriendly foreign powers in neighbouring countries (with Ghana and Mali in mind).

In the bilateral sphere, the first prominent exhibition of defiant behaviour toward the United States occurred in relation to the escalating number of requests submitted to the Nigerian government for the expansion of U.S. communications and NASA satellite-tracking and scientific facilities in Nigeria. An indication of their rapid expansion since 1961 was the fact that in one year, 1962, and within only one of the categories listed above, more than five project requests were presented to the Nigerian authorities. As such requests multiplied in the first half of 1963, and coincidental with the baffling experience at the aid level, Nigerian cabinet officials became less compromising in processing the requests, in sharp contrast to their attitude during the 1960-1962 periods.

3.5. US: Funding Nigeria's Development Plans

Whereas the NPC as the senior government Party (and indeed the government as a whole) continued to regard the general ties to the United States as its best security insurance, individual members of that party were now showing open paranoia over the security aspect of those ties and urging the government to be more discriminatory in approving non-development-related U.S. projects. As one NPC member, M. A. Ibrahim, stated, "the volume of the American installations of the so-called rocket and satellite detection depots . . . in this country is getting dangerous and suspicious"

Ibrahim stated expressly: "Let us not be carried off our vital track of nation-building by the power of foreign aid . . . our nation would rather remain poor, but free, safe, peaceful . . . than rich and bound . . . This country is gradually but surely being made a target of destruction and that is because of the already existing number of satellite and rocket projects. A dangerous limit of installations has already been reached, and it is understood many more are coming shortly. These enterprises constitute two major dangers to Nigeria, the danger of being spied by America and the danger of being destroyed by Russia."

Despite this warning, the Nigerian leaders at this period still went ahead to indulge in collecting aid from other foreign countries most especially the U.S. They feared that the country's independence could be imperiled unless it was immediately followed by a programme of economic self-sufficiency. This kind of thinking began to crystallize in 1959 when on the eve of Nigeria's independence, the political leaders charged the new National Economic Council to prepare a National Development Plan for Nigeria. The objective of the Plan was primarily the achievement and maintenance of the highest possible rate of increase in the standard of living of Nigerians. The result was the first National Development Plan in independent Nigeria which began in 1962. The Plan reflected the serious commitment of the Nigerian political elite to transforming their new nation into a modern and rapidly developing country. To succeed in this endeavour, these leaders also realized that they would depend heavily on the goodwill and generosity of outside assistance in the form of grants or loans. Hence, from the beginning they looked eagerly for expatriate capital if the objectives of the plan were to be attained. They understood that the needed funds could be obtained only through limited sources such as:

- Private enterprise – foreign investments by individuals, or private corporations or firms.
- Foreign government loans or grants, and
- Development loans or grants from international financial organizations, such as the World Bank, UNDP, etc.

The United States' interest in assisting the new nation to obtain funds for her development through many of the aforementioned channels convinced the Nigerian leaders of America's genuine concern for their most crucial problem after independence. This, in turn, conditioned the attitude of the Nigerian leaders towards the United States. The two countries found a mutual interest in co-operating in economic matters. Consequently, various studies on Nigeria's economic potentials were undertaken by the U.S. Government, U.S. private foundations and even the American Society of International Law. Generally, all these studies painted a very favorable picture of Nigeria's economic future and encouraged Americans – individuals and corporations – to invest in Nigeria.

Some of the projects funded by the U.S. were the livestock disease control in which the U.S. made a commitment of \$700,000 in 1956; they also, through the 1958 fiscal year made available \$1.3 million for the Technical Co-operation Programme in Nigeria. As independence approached, the United States opened a commercial bank, Bank of America and through its Development Loan Fund, the U.S. Government loaned about \$3.08 million to the Nigerian Railway Corporation for the reconstruction of the rail lines between Enugu in Eastern and Makurdi in Northern Nigeria.

On December 12, 1961, for instance, the United States Government announced that it intended to provide about \$225,000,000 to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria in support of its 1962-1968 Development Plan. These funds included both loans and grants. The U.S. Government's decision followed two visits of a special United States Economic Mission to Nigeria. This Mission reported favorably on Nigeria's self-help efforts, its well-conceived development plans and the ability of the new nation to absorb foreign assistance. After he became President in November 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson explained why the United States was involved in such a programme of massive assistance to Nigeria or other developing countries in Africa. President Johnson said:

It is not only our interest but it is our desire that the young African nations have the economic health that will enable them to live not only in dignity but in proud independence . . . We in America welcome our new neighbours in Africa. We wish them well. We rejoice when they flourish and share their happiness in a bright future.

The significance of America's economic aid to Nigeria was even more startling because by March, 1962, "whereas less than a tenth of Nigeria's trade is with the United States, about one-half of the aid currently available to Nigeria is American". Also important is the fact that, "In 1959, Nigeria imported goods valued at \$535,000,000 but only \$18,000,000 worth of these goods came from the United States.

The U.S. Aid assisted Nigeria's agricultural development through programmes in agricultural education, experimental farms, mechanized cultivation, water supply and irrigation as well as in storage and marketing techniques. All these efforts were aimed toward the attainment of Nigeria's goal of doubling its agricultural production within ten years (1972) with a resulting farm income and improved diet.

To this effect, several departments or colleges of agriculture were established in several Nigerian universities and other institutions of higher learning. The United States assistance also came in the form of additional staff members,

equipment and funds. It was the American agricultural experts who helped in gathering and interpreting agricultural and other statistics vital for the planning and the formulating of Nigerian agricultural policies.

In 1964, an Agricultural Economic and Marketing Agreement was concluded between the Nigerian and United States governments. The objective of this project was to advise the Nigerian Government on the establishment and development of a planning unit in the various regional (State) ministries of agriculture. The total cost of this project was \$671,000, plus the cost of some short-term consultants and some commodities.

Education was the second field of U.S. massive involvement in Nigerian economic development programmes during this period. As in the Agricultural sector, the bulk of United States' efforts was focused on teacher training, technical and commercial education. In some parts of the country, the United States sponsored the establishment of comprehensive secondary schools which offered both academic and technical courses to prepare young Nigerians for careers or more advanced education in different areas. In some of these schools, American experts served as instructors, advisers or in other capacities. For example, on December 29, 1964, Nigeria and the U.S. Governments signed an agreement to establish the Port Harcourt Comprehensive Secondary School. This project was designed to increase the level of technical education opportunity in the Port Harcourt area of former Eastern Nigeria, as well as to blend technical and academic secondary education. The United States' efforts went into the construction and equipping of classrooms, dormitories, staff houses and administration buildings. The total cost of this undertaking was about \$1,800,000.

That the United States aid was essential can be illustrated by the zeal with which the Nigerian leaders sought it, as well as the level of their gratitude to the American Government and people. Equally important is that the United States aid was well diversified, most probably in response to the various economic priorities set by the Nigerian leaders.

3.6. The 30-Month War

It was however, unfortunate and tragic that the same Nigerian leaders that were speaking with one voice were the same people that could not prevent the threat to the unity of the country. The nation drifted from a series of escalating domestic political crises to multiple military coups, bloody ethnic massacres and finally, to a thirty-month civil war. This was one of the fall-outs of the attempts by the colonial masters to force different and incompatible nationalities to live under a single government. Between 1966 and 1970, these incongruities and incompatibilities manifested in a very long civil war that threatened not only the unity of the country but even the newly-won independence. The essentials of the war were fundamentally about the newly emerged ethnic nationalities trying to achieve self-independence within the collective nationality. There was no doubt about it that the Nigerian crisis that climaxed in the war between Nigeria and Biafra between 6 July 1967 and 12 January 1970 originated in the military coup d'etat of January 1966, and the counter-coup of July 1966, and the massacre of Eastern Nigerians in Northern Nigeria in May and September 1966. These latter events caused about two million Eastern Nigerians, mainly Ibos, living in the North of Nigeria to move back to the Eastern Region as refugees. The failure of the Federal Military Government under Colonel Yakubu Gowon and the Military governors of the West, Mid-West and North on the one hand and on the other the military governor of the East, Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, to agree on a financial and political arrangement which would ease the problem of the refugees and guarantee the security of the lives and property of Easterners in Nigeria intensified the emotional tensions on both sides and resulted in hostile exchanges between the Eastern and the Federal Government.

In March 1967, Ojukwu announced that he would stop the flow of revenues from the East to the Federal Government so as to use the funds to rehabilitate the refugees. In response to this move, Gowon mounted an economic blockade against the East in early April. In the following month, Gowon decreed the creation of twelve states in Nigeria, splitting the East into three states. On 30 May 1967, three days after Gowon's decree, Ojukwu declared that the East had seceded from Nigeria and had assumed the name of the Republic of Biafra. On 6 July 1967, Nigeria launched a military attack on Biafra to end the secession by force.

The Nigeria-Biafra conflict did not become a big issue among American groups until the spring and summer of 1968. By then, it had been widely reported and publicized that the war was being carried out with such unconventional brutality on Biafran civilians as to cause hundreds of civilian casualties.

The issue of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict in the U.S. was both political and humanitarian. The political issue concerned the problem of whether the U.S. should support Biafra's independence from Nigeria or accept Nigeria's preference for a united Nigeria. The humanitarian issue concerned whether a clear distinction between the political and the relief issues could be made. Should the U.S. exert all possible efforts to help the relief of the millions of the refugees in Biafra dying from starvation? Should it subscribe to the British and the Nigerian contention that relief questions could not be separated from politics, that starvation was a legitimate weapon of warfare, and that the U.S. should therefore not make any relief effort that was not approved by Britain and Nigeria?

3.7. US, USSR Interventions

Despite the pressure mounted on the U.S. for direct intervention in the civil war in Nigeria, the official U.S. policy throughout the Nigerian civil war had been one of direct non-involvement, politically and militarily. Based on this policy, the State Department announced on July 10, 1967, four days after the start of the conflict, an arms embargo against the two sides in the war. The July 10 arms embargo was made in response to the Nigerian federal government's request to purchase arms

from the United States for use in suppressing the rebellion. Federalists in Nigeria interpreted the U.S. decision as constituting support for the secessionists' cause of seeking to create a separate political entity, and the sense of bitterness and disappointment evoked in Lagos by this singular act was not minimized by the fact that the United States consistently recognized the Federal military government following Great Britain's lead, as "the legal government of Nigeria" or by the fact that the State Department played an outstanding role in combating a grossly hostile anti-Nigeria public opinion throughout the war. The policy of neutrality was, moreover, suspect in Lagos because U.S. authorities insisted on providing relief assistance directly to the rebels, in defiance of the Nigerian federal government, which sought to exercise control over the flow of international relief materials into the country. To the Federalists, there was really no clear distinction between the humanitarian and political aspects in the civil war – a distinction the Americans wished to make – for both the Federalists and the Biafrans were all aware of the fact that the humanitarian question could be manipulated in various ways to determine the political outcome of the war.

This, however, was not the position of the Church which to a large extent was more concerned with the humanitarian dimension of the war. The Church believed that a distinction could still be drawn between the political and the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. The Biafrans, hiding under the guise of the Church position, had explained the war as an attempt by the Moslem North to exterminate the Christian peoples of the East. Christian and Jewish religious sects in America would be expected to take an interest if there was a religious colouring to the crisis. But the groups remained relatively neutral until allegations of bombing of civilians by Arab pilots, of the massacre of Biafran civilians at the war fronts, and of the staggering refugee population and death from starvation began to be reported.

On March 20, 1968, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches made a joint statement signed among others by Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, an American Lutheran and Chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, General Secretary of the American Presbyterian Church. The statement called for an immediate cessation of armed hostilities and for the establishment of lasting peace by honourable negotiations. It urged respect for the sacredness of human life and for an end to all "atrocities, general massacre, mass hatred and vindictiveness". It asked all men, especially African Chiefs of State, for mediation of the conflict and for an embargo on external military assistance, and urged close co-operation between international relief agencies and the extension of both sides of facilities to them. These demands were intended to be neutral but were interpreted by the Biafrans as supportive of their own claims and by Nigerians as pro-secessionist.

However, this statement elicited unprecedented church activity in the U.S. in favour of an end to the civil war and of great humanitarian effort to relieve the starvation and suffering of civilian victims on both sides of the fighting line. A great part of the effort of the churches was directed towards influencing the U.S. government to promote humanitarian relief assistance and a ceasefire. On 3 August 1968, leaders of the American Jewish Community, U.S. Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Churches joined by some civil rights and labour groups sent a telegram to President Johnson urging the government to start a massive helicopter airlift to bring food to Biafra.

The religious groups were accused by the Nigerian Government of taking sides, that is, of supporting Biafra. It is true to some extent that the Church campaigns in favour of peace and relief might have indirectly generated political support for Biafra among the American public. It is also true to some extent that humanitarian relief could indirectly have sustained Biafra's continued resistance. But the religious groups were not politically motivated. They extended their activities to both sides and emphasized repeatedly that the humanitarian and political aspects of the war were clearly separable. They put priority on the humanitarian above the political outcome of the crisis. Their political concern was that hostilities should cease so that the innocent civilians would no longer become victims of a political conflict.

Perhaps, the most publicized of all the interventionists in the Nigerian civil war was the Soviet Union. For one thing, the USSR was never closely associated with Nigeria in any conspicuous way before the civil war. The strong anti-communist and pro-western foreign policy of the Nigerian civilian leaders made the Soviet Union perhaps, the most unwanted guest in Nigeria. On the other hand, the Soviet leaders showed no enthusiasm for Nigeria or for its civilian leaders, whom the Soviet press described in uncomplimentary terms. The Soviet Union welcome Nigerian independence with mixed feelings. Moscow's early assessment of Nigeria's internal political structure was very pessimistic. To the Russian experts, Nigeria's independence was already a heavily compromised affair, under which no hope existed for a genuine neutral or non-aligned foreign policy on the part of the new nation. "Nigeria's political independence, the Soviets maintained, rested on an economic super-structure controlled by British businessmen". The Soviet policy-makers were equally disturbed by Nigeria's mutual defence pact with Great Britain on the eve of her independence.

After the East seceded and the war began, the Soviet Union maintained a "wait and see" attitude on the surface while at the same time, indicating to the leaders of the East that they could count on Soviet assistance. This was understandable, for if before the war, the Soviet Union favoured any section of the Nigerian federation, it was the Eastern Region. The political leaders from the East were among those considered 'progressive' in contrast to the North, and it was equally known in Soviet efforts to persuade the Nigerian Federal Government to open diplomatic and trade relations with the USSR after independence in 1960.

The Soviet intervention in Nigeria attracted more attention than it deserved in the Western World, in Nigeria and in Biafra itself. In each case, the reason for giving it such publicity was selfish. First, to the West (particularly the U.S.A. and U.K.), Soviet intervention served as a self-fulfilling prophecy, demonstrating how communist Soviet Union goes around making

the world unsafe for democracy. To the Americans (already fighting Communists in Vietnam) the Soviet's 'reds' were once more embarking on a new adventure in Black Africa and they wanted the World to know and preferably condemn it. To the Nigerians, the more publicity given the Soviet Union involvement, the better the chances of scaring the Western countries out of their wits, in case they were considering assistance to the Biafrans.

The enormous publicity given to the Soviet intervention equally helped the Soviets themselves, particularly in improving their already tarnished image in Black Africa dating back to the Congo crisis. The motivating factor in the Soviet Union's intervention was certainly that inexorable force called "national interest".

The Soviets' calculation seemed to have been that if they could capture Nigeria body and soul, that would make up for all the other states which Soviet Union had lost in the recent wave of military coups that drove its allies or the pro-Soviet African regimes out of office. For the Soviet's, intervention was seriously considered when "the West's nervousness about embroilment in the crisis left a partial vacuum", hence the greatest puzzle about Soviet's involvement was "why did the Soviets step in so boldly where others feared to tread?" For one thing, to Alexander Romanou, Moscow's Ambassador in Lagos and one of the architects of the Soviet diplomacy in Nigeria, was clearly a great prize, and worth all the risks. Guided by even a wider consideration, such as the effects the civil war might have on Soviet relations with other African countries, most of whom opposed the secession, the Soviet Union took one bold step after another touching off a competition in arms supply to Nigeria between themselves (the Soviets) and the British. This time in Africa, the Soviets threw in all they could to demonstrate that when circumstances permit, they like the West, intend to play to win.

However, a sense of uneasiness overcame the U.S. Government officials over this policy when the Soviet Union massively intervened and threatened to displace London as the wielder of power and influence over the authorities in Lagos. Accordingly, it took the Soviet threat to provoke a dangerous cold war confrontation over the Nigerian crisis, before the Americans began to notice the relative weaknesses of their policy, or lack of it in that African conflict. Hence, alarmed and disturbed by the Soviet plunge into the civil war in Nigeria, the U.S. authorities sent Joseph Palmer II, to an eight-nation African tour including five days in Lagos conferring with Nigerian and American officials. Out of the lessons of this trip came what constituted the official U.S. policy for the remaining duration of the war. Essentially, these were (a) Intensification of diplomatic and political support for the Federal side and (b) A greater U.S. involvement in the humanitarian relief assistance to the victims of the war – particularly through acceptable international relief agencies.

The Nigerian civil war divided the U.S. Congress. The first category of people wanted a direct intervention in the political conflict while the other category of people only wanted the U.S. to limit its intervention in the civil war to purely humanitarian services. These are the people that believed that moral considerations should be given priority over political considerations, and those who believed that political considerations were more important. The one set of considerations tended to lead support for "one Nigeria" while the other tended to underplay political unity. The latter group found existing State Department policy in consonance with their own preferences. As a result, they did not make spectacular speeches at congressional sessions expounding their views. This group had a strong influence in both the Senate and the House and saw to it that funds for aid to Nigeria continued to be made available and approved by Congress for the duration of the Civil War. One of the most outspoken Congressional exponents of the 'priority of politics' view was Senator Edward M. Brooke (R.-Mass). He seemed to be deeply and emotionally committed to the Nigerian position in the conflict. To him the Nigerian Government was fighting for a laudable and justifiable cause and the crisis itself was the outcome of Ibo-domination, clannishness, nepotism, and unlimited political ambition together with Ojukwu's recklessness. In his view, the U.S. should bolster the ability of an African State to deal with an internal conflict. In the matter of relief, U.S. relief aid should be given in a way which facilitates rather than hinders an end to the war. The 'best answer' to the problem 'is still the one desired by the Nigerians and the Africans themselves: an African solution to an African problem.' The U.S. should therefore, not take the matter to the UN. The U.S. should look first at the political situation in Nigeria before looking at the starvation. A U.S. humanitarian relief effort outside channels such as the Red Cross which was acceptable to the Nigerian government was 'to intervene into a political situation.' "I think it would be bad policy, unfortunate policy, for the U.S. Government to engage at the present time in anything like intervention into the Nigerian people's internal conflicts," Brooke warned.

Thus the Congressmen who supported the primacy of politics were not necessarily opposed to U.S. humanitarian efforts but suggested that such efforts should serve the purposes of politics. This position was well summarized by Senator James Pearson (R-Kansas) when he said:

Let us never forget that not only do we want the war halted and further starvation prevented, but we want to do it in such a way as to ensure a strong Nigeria and a healthy regional Africa organization that will be better equipped to handle such a crisis should one ever arise again.

The U.S. policy of non-intervention and refusal to arm either side was favourably received by the Biafran authorities while the Federal Nigerians felt embarrassed and angered. Chief Akpan Basse, Biafra's official in London remarked, "I must pay tribute to America because they have said from the start they would not take sides and they have kept to this . . . America has done nothing for us and nothing against us and that's fair enough.

3.8. The Policy of Neutrality

Meanwhile the Soviet factor and the pressure from the Federal Nigerian Government put additional stress on the U.S. policy of neutrality in the conflict. As John W. Foley, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who was the director of the Nigerian Desk (1967), put it:

The Federal Military Government expected a pro-Nigerian policy from the U.S. Government. Their calculation was based on the advantage – both economic and political – of the United States in a United Nigeria. Another factor the Federal Military Government counted upon was the U.S.'s own experience with secession and civil war. And therefore expected U. S's sympathetic understanding of their case. The Federal Military Government put U.S. to the test by asking for arms not aid but on 'cash and carry' business deal.

Thus, the conflict exacerbated some differences between Nigeria and the United States Government. Hence, when the U.S. Government outrightly condemned the Soviet arms deal with Nigeria, the Federal officials in Lagos understandably infuriated, attacked the American Government in the harshest language ever exchanged between the two countries in their diplomatic relationships. President Johnson, through a statement by the State Department condemned the Russian involvement in the Nigerian conflict. He said:

Neither the U.S. nor the USSR has in the past been an important supplier of arms to Nigeria. Consistent with that fact, the U.S. decided for its part on the out-break of the current hostilities in Nigeria that it would not sell or otherwise supply arms and ammunition to either side . . . The U.S. has adhered fully to that policy. Its refusal to supply arms has been stated publicly and is well known to the Soviet Union. In those circumstances, it is a matter of regret to the U.S. that the Soviet Union has not shown the same forbearance, but on the contrary has decided to engage in the supply of arms in this internal conflict. While we do not know the reasons that prompted the Soviet Union to take this decision or the functions of Soviet personnel reported to have arrived in Nigeria, we believe all nations have a responsibility to avoid any exploitation of this situation for ideology or other political purposes.

Despite this reaction, initially Washington did not really seem over-anxious about Soviet influence in Lagos. The U.S. Government statement further stated that the U.S. Government's hope remained in finding a peaceful settlement to the Nigerian conflict. However, if there was one point worth noting in Johnson's policy on the Nigerian war, it was his consistency on the question of relief to the starving population of Biafra. No one explained Johnson's dilemma so well as Dr. Roger Morris who said that "the Civil War complicated the whole relationship between Nigeria and the United States.

According to Morris:

The United States would have given aid to Nigeria if the civil war came at another time than it did – preferably if it came earlier when the war broke out in Nigeria, Vietnam was a hot issue. Vietnam prevented a deeper United States involvement in Nigerian crisis. One has only to remember the political atmosphere under which the LBJ administration found itself in the summer of 1968. The mounting public opposition to our involvement in Vietnam, the Congressional debates, etc. The political atmosphere in Washington determined a lot of our reaction to the Nigerian civil war.

He added further that:

However, it must be mentioned that despite the earlier optimistic predictions about Nigeria's future, the U.S. did not care very much about Nigeria. Hence our policy toward her was based primarily on expediency. Nigeria was important in a way but Africa was not important to Washington after all. Given these factors – Vietnam and the low priority status enjoyed by Africa, LBJ could not afford to be involved in Nigeria.

Under L. B. Johnson, therefore, the crux of U.S. foreign policy in Nigeria consisted of a series of reaffirmations of U.S. support for "One Nigeria" and a series of appeals for more humanitarian relief aid to Biafra.

When Richard Nixon assumed office, he ordered a policy review by the National Security Council. His position could best be captured in this long but comprehensive statement he made on September 8, 1968:

The terrible tragedy of the people of Biafra has now assumed catastrophic dimensions. Starvation is daily claiming the lives of an estimated 6,000 Ibo tribes-men, most of them children. If adequate food is not delivered to these people in the immediate future, hundreds of thousands of human beings will die of hunger. Until now, efforts to relieve the Biafra people have been thwarted by the desire of the Central Government of Nigeria to pursue total and unconditional victory and by the fear of the Ibo people that surrender means wholesale atrocities and genocide. But genocide is what is taking place right now – and starvation is the grim reaper. This is not the time to stand on ceremony or to "go through channels" or to observe the diplomatic niceties . . . The destruction of an entire people is an immoral objective, even in the most moral of wars. It can never be justified; it can never be condoned. Voluntary Organizations such as the Red Cross, the Church World Service and Caritas have rushed thousands of tons of protein-rich nourishments and baby foods to the vicinity of the stricken region . . . Every friend of humanity should be asked to step forward to call an end to this slaughter of the innocents in West Central Africa. While America is not the World's policeman, let us at least act as the World's conscience in this matter of life and death for millions. The President of the United States is a man charged with responsibilities and concerns all over the world. But I urge President Johnson to give to this crisis all the time and attention and imagination and energy he can muster. America is not without enormous

material wealth and power and ability. There is no better cause in which we might invest that power than in sparing the lives of innocent men and women and children who otherwise are doomed.

With a statement like this and given Nixon's political background as an anti-Communist crusader, the Biafran authorities and Biafra's international supporters built an incredible faith in Nixon's ability, if not his determination to turn the U.S. policy around once he got into the White House. As soon as Nixon took office, he ordered a policy review under the auspices of the National Security Council, avoiding the Department of State which had established a reputation of having a pro-Federal Nigerian prejudice. Again, the Biafrans and Biafran lobby in America expected an immediate departure of Palmer II, who symbolized the State Department's anti-Biafran policy and Biafra's number one enemy in America.

However, this did not come until July 1969, when Palmer was taken out of the Department of State, and sent to Libya as the U.S. Ambassador. In his initial request to the Congress, Nixon emphasized the humanitarian concern already expressed in the Senate and the House by various resolutions:

But in the meantime, there was a definite expectation that the recommendation would lead Nixon to attempt a political settlement. For instance, Senator McGee, the new Chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee on Africa, proposed that Mennen Williams, Palmer's predecessor as head of the State Department's African Bureau undertake a mediatory role similar to the Jarring mission in the Middle East. U.S. officials in general acted on the assumption that there would be a political initiative.

As a result of this political commitment to the principle of 'One Nigeria', the State Department also saw all U.S. relief efforts as subordinate to need for achieving the reunification of Nigeria and for maintaining its friendship with the Nigerian Government. Thus, the United States should undertake such humanitarian efforts as the Nigerian Government allowed.

This meant that all contributions should be channeled through the International Committee of the Red Cross which was about the only relief organization recognized and authorized by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It meant also that the U.S. should support only those relief efforts that would hasten rather than delay the ultimate political objective of reunification. Thus the U.S. should not take the matter of relief to the United Nations. In keeping with the Nigerian position, the U.S. should support a land corridor from Nigeria through the Northern part of Biafra as the only practical and effective way of delivering relief to the needy in Biafra. When Nigeria authorized daylight relief flights into Biafra's airport, by planes flying through Lagos, the U.S. thought that this alternative was also the best.

Support for positions taken by Nigeria was matched with condemnation of Biafra's positions. Thus, Biafra was blamed for not accepting Nigeria's suggestions for a land corridor and for daylight relief flights from Lagos. Biafra's own suggestions for a land route from the South, for a combined land and river route, for the use of a separate airport in Biafra for daylight relief flights, and for improved night flights were described as unworkable or logistically inadvisable.

3.9. A Troubled Partnership

There was something essentially deceptive about the development of Nigeria- American diplomacy during the war. This concerned the false images of each other which were generally accepted in both countries. But unfortunately for these two countries as the enthusiasms, hopes and promises of the early 1960s wore off and these false assumptions were put to the test by some harsh political realities, particularly in the case of Nigeria, they began to pull increasingly apart. The State Department officials who had been responsible for sustaining and building these false images of Nigeria understandably resisted the realities and fought hard to vindicate themselves. For them, there was no other way to preserve their prestige or their official reputation than to see to it that Nigeria did not disintegrate. Since their own prestige and reliability as experts on Nigeria and Africa were at stake, they reacted strongly to protect both their own collective self-image and to sustain the Nigerian edifice, which they have helped to sell to the American Government and people. While doing this, they used all the political and administrative instruments at their disposal.

The harsh realities were that despite the fact that Nigeria became independent with none of her internal divisive problems solved, the State Department officials purposely ignored these and spoke of Nigeria only in glowing terms ignoring the new nation's immediate difficulties while emphasizing its future potentials. However, to the Nigerians and some objective observers, the Nigerian civil war came because of the country's internal problems. There were no foreigners plotting to destroy Nigeria, it was Nigeria's internal difficulties that brought the First Republic down, introduced coups leading to more chaos and the civil war. But all these meant little to the image of Nigeria that the State Department's "One Nigeria" experts fanatically adhered to, thus forcing the American Government and the public to accept their own rather emotional and subjective judgement of what were really the issues involved in the Nigerian conflict. That they succeeded, is a credit to their professional aptitude in the art of manipulation and the crucial position they occupied in the hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy making process.

There was a widespread belief that the civil war tended to complicate Nigeria-United States diplomacy. Problems arose mainly because of the exaggerated expectations on both sides especially the bureaucrats in Washington and Lagos. There was a prevalence of false images – such as seeing Nigeria as an ally, or Nigerians seeing the United States as a saviour and protector. However, none of the images was true. Nigeria was for Nigerians and the U.S. was not Nigeria's protector. The United States over-estimated how much benefit they would get in relationships with Nigeria and in anticipation that in the 1970s Nigeria would be a very powerful country.

The successful prosecution of the war, largely a result of mobilizing internal resources, leading to the restoration of territorial unity, had a tremendous effect in arousing a new sense of national awareness among most Nigerians, which was quite low in the 1960s. The wartime experience, moreover, seemed to re-affirm the old sentiment about Nigeria's leadership destiny in Sub-Saharan Africa; national self-confidence was at its peak, and thus naturally entered into direct relations with the United States after 1970. As related by John Foley, a U.S. diplomat in Africa, in the immediate post-war period Nigerian officials displayed a degree of independence in their bilateral contacts with their U.S. counterparts that was unimaginable during the Balewa era.

General Yakubu Gowon (Nigeria's new Head of State) for example, refused, until September 1971, to meet with any U.S. embassy officials in Lagos, including Ambassador William Trueheart. Repeated U.S. requests to provide bilateral humanitarian aid were rejected by the Federal authorities even after the goodwill visit of Secretary of State, William Rogers to Lagos in February 1970. Mobil Oil nearly lost its offshore production rights early in 1970 as a result of a highly "punitive decision".

However, Nigeria's new self-assertion and greater disposition to project independent behaviour in dealings with the United States rested on a firmer base than the emotional reaction to the U.S. position in the war. The fact was that oil was beginning to gain new significance worldwide just when the Nigerian civil war was drawing to a close at the end of 1969 – a fortunate coincidence of history. By this time, the scale of oil production and the total income accrued by the Nigerian government from this source was already more than double the pre-war level. Moreover, the Nigerian policy of State involvement in the operation of foreign oil companies originated at this time when a law was passed providing for 51 per cent compulsory state participation in all future concessions to be granted these firms.

Without the assurance furnished by oil, it was highly probable that responsible authorities in Nigeria would have sought promptly, irrespective of public sentiments, to restore the mode of pre-war ties with the United States for the practical reason that the United States alone was in a position to offer the level of capital aid Nigeria required for post-war reconstruction. Indeed, this line of action would have been inevitable for the additional reason that the civil war did not engender any basic changes in the traditional socio-economic structure of Nigeria. Further, the Soviet Union would not have been in a position to fulfill that need. Having played a critical role in ensuring Federal victory in the war, the Soviets were handicapped to offer what was most needed for reconstruction and future development.

Hence, the United States having decided on a policy of conciliation based on the recognition of the sensitiveness of the Nigerians on the matter of external interference in their domestic affairs, gradually but steadily sought to rebuild their shattered/shaken political and diplomatic relations.

4. Conclusion

There was no doubt that the US was reluctant to engage in any form of relationship with Nigeria before 1960 not because it was convenient to ignore Nigeria but because of the cordial friendship between Britain and Nigeria. But with its active and dramatic role in the Nigerian civil war, it showed the US all along realized the potential of this emerging powerful and rich nation but only waited for the right moment to do so. Therefore its intrigues and activities during the civil war in Nigeria provided the opportunity for its active engagement in the affairs of the country.

If there was any doubt before regarding the US interest in Nigeria, its deep seated commitment and unpretentious enthusiasm for Nigeria's economic potential immediately after the war, clearly indicated the major objective of this interest. And because the motive for the relationship was inspired by economic expediency, it did not take much time for the contradictions in the relations to unfold and develop into what can be called political albatross.

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