

# History and Evolution of Nigeria-US Military, Security, and Political Relations

Dapo Thomas

Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria

This paper examines the dynamics, the politics, and the significance of the security relationship between Nigeria and the United States. Both countries, operating at different levels of military strengths, consider and regard themselves as partners who should establish some form of cooperation for defence purposes. Though the United States enjoys massive military capability advantage over Nigeria, the relationship between the two of them was meant to assist Nigeria, the weak partner, or better still, the client state, to overcome the challenge of its defence policies, and to reinforce its military infrastructure. This will be in the areas of training, technology, equipment, professional orientation, and political management. However, there seems to be lack of trust between the two of them with Nigeria becoming too sensitive and concerned about its defence infrastructural deficits, and the possibility of the United States exploiting this to its own advantage. Such worrisome suspicions are capable of tinkering with the objectives of the security arrangements between the two of them. In this kind of suspect friendship where one partner has transformed into a protector state, it became difficult for defence pacts and agreements to achieve the desired objectives. Hence, the regular collapse of such pacts and lack of definitive defence policy actions between the two countries. The findings showed that every attempt by the United States to help stabilize Nigeria's political system and environment was seen by Nigeria as an unwarranted intervention and meddlesomeness capable of destroying the fragility of its polity as it almost did during the June 12 crisis of 1993.

*Keywords:* security relationship, client state, protector state, defence infrastructural deficit, defence pacts, unwarranted interventions

## Introduction

One of the issues raised in this chapter is the extent to which the partnership between Nigeria and the US can take care of Nigeria's own national security interests, most especially in the restructuring and reorientation of the Nigerian armed forces. The main focus of this chapter is Nigeria's future, which hinges on the extent to which it can transform its security sector into a professional, affordable, and accountable sector, and also, the extent to which effective and enduring civil oversight over the activities of the armed forces can be maintained in the future.

The Nigerian defence policy has been designed around a proper understanding of the national interests and objectives of the state. This affords us a proper perspective of the mission or goals which the country's policies are designed to achieve (Bassey & Dokubo, 2011).

At the time, Nigeria was still basking in the euphoria of her newly discovered power brought about by the

tremendous increase in resources from petroleum, the *Adedeji Foreign Policy Review Panel*, in its report of 29 June, 1976 stated the main objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy as:

- (a) The defence of our sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity;
- (b) The creation of the necessary political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world which will facilitate the defence of the independence and territorial integrity of all African states, while at the same time, fostering national self-reliance and rapid economic development;
- (c) The promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the developing world; the promotion of justice and respect for human dignity of the blackman, and the defence and promotion of world peace' (Wright, 2018).

However, the mission and goals achievable influence and are themselves influenced by the political, military, economic, social, psychological, and technical inputs from regional and international sphere.

In other words, the path of influence is dual and the choice of policies will depend on which of the directions of influence is strongest at a particular time.

Considering the dynamics of events in Africa, it is in Nigeria's interest to influence the course of events in the whole of Africa and to be the dominant power on the African continent. To achieve this, Nigeria would need to mobilize all its political, economic, military, and technological resources. However, because the level of inputs which are mobilizable to achieve stated national objectives and interests are not readily achievable, it is forced to redefine the scope of and restate her national objectives in order to bring them to an operational reality. Nigerian's foreign policy objectives clearly emphasise the defence of the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Consequently, there was massive infusion of resources from petroleum which is the major strategic economic resource of the country into the defence project. But the moment the nation's economy nosedived as a result of many years of misrule and economic mismanagement which caused some instability in the polity, it became difficult to achieve this objective.

### **South Africa's Leadership Threat**

This systematic reduction in the defence budget affected the zeal to aggressively pursue the country's defence objective. But the major and obvious implication for the country was that Nigeria's leadership role in Africa became threatened with South Africa positioning itself strategically for Africa's leadership. Besides, the emergence of Nelson Mandela as the president of the country and the successful integration of formerly implacable adversaries into a cohesive national defence establishment endeared many countries including the United States to South Africa. Also, the existence of a sound economy and a strong state as well as the lengthy negotiated settlement created a framework within which Security Sector Transformation (SST) had little choice but to succeed (Luckham & Hutchful, 2010).

There were four key elements to the successful South African transition. First, it entailed the integration of eight formerly warring armed formations into a cohesive national defence force—a process that was completed in 2003. Second, it witnessed the creation of powerful parliamentary defence, policing, and intelligence committees whose role was not only confined to legislative oversight but also included active involvement in the process of formulating defence policy.

Two major transformational initiatives emerged in the South African defence arena during 2003: The acquisition of the first equipment items with which the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) will execute its task in the coming decades; and the initiation of a transformation process within the country's

sizeable reserve force, which held many lessons for other African defence establishments (Batchelor, Dunne, & Lamb, 2002).

In November 1998, the *South African Parliament* and the Cabinet approved a *Strategic Defence Package (SDP)* based on recommendations presented to and approved by both bodies in October. The contract for the package was signed in 1999 at a total cost of 30.3 billion rand (\$4.8 billion) spread over a 12-year period starting from fiscal year 2000-2001. The *SDP* provided for the purchase of four corvettes from a German frigate consortium, three submarines from the German corporation Ferrostaal, 28 Gripen fighters from a British Aero-space (BAE) system/Saab consortium, 24 Hawk jet trainers from BAE, and 30 Agusta A-109 light utility helicopters from the Italian company Agusta.

Moreover, South Africa is blessed with a strong infrastructure, a sound currency, and vast natural resources. These assets make its economy larger and more vital than any other on the continent including that of Nigeria. Since South Africa was no longer considered an international pariah, it worked to develop robust trade and financial links around the region and the globe. A hub for these connections, South Africa could stimulate growth throughout the southern cone of Africa.

Inspired by this discovery of a possible strategic partner within the African continent and the desire to control the sea-lanes around the Cape of Good Hope in the case of widespread trouble in the Middle East, the US decided to consolidate its strategic interests in Africa using South Africa as a dependable partner. The US was, however, in a dilemma which revolved around the relative merits of anti-communism and anti-racism as the guiding themes of US-South African relations. As the inevitable process of African independence continued to gather, support for South Africa by the US risked not only the alienation of future black government on the African continent, but also would offer the Soviet Union an opportunity to brand the US as an opponent of decolonization. Yet, in the charged Cold War atmosphere of the late 1940s to the 1970s, the imperatives of anti-communism and containment of the Soviet Union clearly outweighed any misgivings over the racial policies of the Afrikaner government. Besides, because South Africa was the United States' largest trading partner in Africa and with vast economic potentials, its fate would affect American trading and financial interests in that country. Consequently, American policy toward South Africa reflects its importance as a pivotal state. This was a serious threat to Nigeria's "big-brother" status in Africa.

### **Nigeria's Non-aligned Posturing**

The close relationship established between Nigeria and the United States after Jimmy Carter's election as president in January 1977 was in many respects symptomatic of a more comprehensive evolution of Nigeria's status in the international system. Unlike the arguments of some authors, the Nigerian Civil War which ended in January 1970, weakened the ideological, cultural, economic, and financial links which existed between Nigeria and the Western countries in the early 1960s with Nigeria becoming a non-aligned nation rather than becoming pro-West. The substantial military aid which the then Soviet Union and some East European countries gave to Nigeria during the 30-month conflict provoked a new orientation in Nigeria's foreign policy. Indeed, during the 1970s, Nigeria acquired a limited yet real capacity to negotiate and redefine the forms of its incorporation into the international capitalist system. This capacity was due (1) to the size of the country's internal market; (2) to the federation's oil resources and revenue; and (3) to the government's increasing control and authority over Nigerian society.

From January 1978 onwards, Nigeria's membership of the Security Council favoured its assertive role as a

privileged interlocutor of Western countries and especially of the Carter administration, which remained concerned that Nigeria should adopt an attitude of neutrality, if not of support, towards important US moves in Southern Africa. Significantly, it was while visiting Nigeria in April 1978 that Jimmy Carter announced that the Western countries' five-nation contact group on Namibia intended to get in touch again with South Africa and table new propositions for a solution to the Namibian problem. Thus, in August 1978, secret discussions were held in Lusaka between Joshua Nkomo and Ian Smith with a Nigerian umpire: the former foreign Minister Joseph Garba (Williams, 2009). Yet, no serious disruption of US-Nigerian relations occurred; although in 1979, the Nigerian Embassy in Washington made it known, on two occasions that Nigeria might consider the adoption of an "appropriate response" were the US to lift economic sanctions against Rhodesia. In actual fact, such declarations were directed not so much at the American presidency or administration as towards Nigeria's public opinion and the US Congress.

### **Defence and Strategic Cooperation**

In Nigeria, rapprochement with the US provoked accusations of subservience to American interests in Africa from the press and in academic and trade union circles. However, federal government representatives in reply pointed to the overall positive role of the new American stance in Southern Africa. As early as February 1977, the federal government officials were quoted as saying that it was necessary for the US to intervene in the Rhodesian issue since Britain had failed to solve it. Three years later, President Shehu Shagari justified US-Nigerian relations in a similar fashion when he told the American Vice President, Walter Mondale on the latter's visit to Nigeria, that after Zimbabwe's independence Namibia and South Africa "must be free if the friendship between Nigeria and the United States is to thrive".

The political misunderstanding and disagreement notwithstanding, Nigeria and United States have demonstrated enough political will to reinforce the relations between the two countries through effective and active military cooperation and strategic partnership. In strategic studies, defence and security cooperation are designed as a broad plan of joint action between a client state and the protector state on the training of military personnel, arms transfer, and classified security assistance. For the protector state, military cooperation is a variant of the officially accepted means of penetration and intervention in the military regime of the client state.

In bilateral military cooperation, a client state is the weak and needy partner. It is in need of an external assurance of strength and protection in support of a clearly defined military programme. The goals include (Timberman, 2016):

- (a) Boosting the military strength of a country by way of arms supplies and to qualitatively improve training and orientation strategy, tactics, and operational art;
- (b) Boosting the defence and security image of a country in international politics and in the strategic game.
- (c) Introduction of greater military discipline in the client state;

These are some of the externally oriented goals of strategic military cooperation on the part of the client or weak partner. It is also not ruled out that military cooperation may be a prelude to a military pact or a defence agreement. The often ignored aspect of military cooperation is the possibility of intervention of the protector, the strong military partner, in the internal affairs of a client state to safeguard or install a leadership of its interest in a threatening crisis situation. By every strategic measurement, the weak partner is the disadvantaged. The protector state is strategically at an advantage not only by arms supplies and other military services, but also through opportunities for espionage activities.

For the protector or strong military partner, the willingness to enter into military cooperation with a client state arises from a number of strategic and tactical goals and aspirations. These include:

- (1) Projection of power from a position of strength;
- (2) Expansion of the sphere of military and strategic influence;
- (3) Access to the resources of the client state;
- (4) Usage of the client state as a military base to exercise influence in the sub-region or region;
- (5) Usage of the client state to attract neighbouring states for expanded military cooperation;
- (6) Promotion of some classified political and economic goals.

### **The Defence Pacts**

Specifically, Nigeria's strategic partnership with protector states began immediately after independence in 1960. As soon as Nigeria attained political independence, it entered into the *Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact*. It was simply a defence pact between Nigeria and the former colonial power. In Britain's thinking, Nigeria had the potential to lead Africa and be a mouthpiece of the West and Britain in Africa. For Britain, a defence pact with Nigeria was not contingent upon the fear of stronger neighbours. Rather it was designed to:

- (a) Secure British access to Nigeria;
- (b) Be a part of training and developing the Nigeria Military force;
- (c) Strengthen its influence in West Africa sub-region which has been dominated by Franco-phone states with "formalized" defence pacts with France;
- (d) Assist Nigeria to nurture and mature an enduring democratic nation.

The fundamental purpose or reasons for initiating and venturing into the *Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact* are still very contentious and debatable, but suffice it to say that Nigeria conceived it as an image booster. Nigeria, rather erroneously, also perceived the defence pact as an additional military element to project its ambition of leadership in Africa from a position of strength rather than weakness. Erroneously in the sense that it is difficult to ascertain the readiness and willingness of Britain to commit its military personnel and equipment to the political ambition of a particular country at the expense of its relations with other strategic and important partners, like Libya and South Africa.

As an infant nation, Nigeria was inexperienced about contradictions in the inherited, structurally dependent political economy. The politicians and leaders were rather quite optimistic about the lifespan of Nigerian democracy. They did not perceive their weak West African neighbours as threats. To some people, there was no internalized strategic thinking that the *Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact* could be of a value in foiling military coups. But there are others who believe that our politicians were, in fact, very smart strategic thinkers who have already factored in this reality before agreeing to the pact.

The confusion and controversy generated by the defence pact particularly among the elite and the intelligentsia necessitated its abrogation in 1961. As Nowa A. Omogui observed:

Looking back, whether the Anglo-Nigerian pact of 1960 would have changed Nigeria's political stability will never be known. But it cannot escape attention that the sympathies of the middle ranking army officers, who struck on January 15, 1966 were with the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA)—political soulmates of those who opposed the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact of 1960 (Akpuru-Aja, 2003).

Significantly, however, it should be noted that the relationship between a protector state and a client state through a defence pact may or may not prevent a coup. To some extent, it may or may not necessarily imply loss of sovereignty. In military strategy, a defence pact is a positive sum game. Though a defence pact ought to be about partnership, the *Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact*, however, lacked this standard as there was an obvious systematic advantage for Britain.

For decades, the United States has treated Africa as a basket case. Following the end of the Cold War, the US began to focus more sharply on the economic, strategic, and military matters in Africa. The visit of US President Bill Clinton to Nigeria in August 2000 had many significant dimensions. The Federal Government of Nigeria admitted entering into military cooperation with the US and President Olusegun Obasanjo was alleged to have signed Nigeria-US military cooperation with President Bill Clinton. Part of the inspiration for this cooperation appeared to have come from a kite flown once in the National Assembly that the nascent democracy of Nigeria should enter into a defence pact or military cooperation with a power that would defend the democracy of Nigeria in the event of a military coup. In contrast, many Nigerians, including strategists, defence analysts, and former foreign ministers have opposed the help of any foreign power to defend Nigerian democracy. In any case, defending democracy is more about good governance than anything else. In spite of the opposition against a foreign defence pact or military cooperation, the president has signed the military cooperation agreement for the following reasons:

- (a) Providing training to some battalions of the Nigerian Army;
- (b) Providing eight patrol vessels for the Nigerian Army to police the oil producing areas;
- (c) Meeting broad objectives of protecting oil installations in the Niger Delta;
- (d) Training the Nigerian Army for Peacekeeping operations.

Consequently, both countries immediately began to explore their renewed rapprochement. A group of US-based consultants visited Nigeria sometime in August 1999 to meet with the Nigerian military authorities on areas of cooperation and assistance to the government. The eight-man team led by retired Major General Bruce Moore of the US Army was from a private military consultancy, Military Professional Resource Incorporation. According to Gen. Moore, the objective of the team was to hold preliminary discussions on training and exchange programmes. It was also part of the efforts to offer training programmes to the country's military personnel so as to strengthen them in coping with the challenges of a democratic government. This exchange programme would stimulate cooperation and collaboration between the two countries and further enhance professionalism and ensure that the military subordinate themselves to civil authorities.

Though the then Commandant of the National War College, Rear Admiral Gabriel Shiyabade explained that the visit was to enable the College and the Nigerian Armed Forces reach an agreement for a package of programmes and assistance that would benefit the country, the objective was obviously more than mere programme packaging. He then went on to list the areas where the War College would need assistance. These include teaching aid, war-game facilities as well as improvement in its acquisition of books for its library and research projects.

In a very weak defence of the pact, the Minister of Defence, Lt. Gen. Theophilus Danjuma explained that Nigeria was seeking suitable places for the training and re-training of the members of its armed forces. "We are going to reorganize the armed forces and ensure professionalism, so that they will subordinate themselves to civil authorities", he stressed.

But this was just an integral part of the major plan to forge a very strong partnership with the US. For instance, the US began the training of three battalions sometime in September 2001. This was officially confirmed as one of the ways to establish a working agreement between the military and the civil authorities in order to consolidate Nigeria's democracy.

In another record boost to military ties between Nigeria and the US, a bilateral naval proficiency training was also organized. It was tagged "Joint-Combined Exchange Training". The training programme was designed to bring the naval personnel of both countries together for the purpose of building an understanding and help improve military ties between the two countries. The main purpose of the programme was to ensure that both nations not only keep their own military skills current but also to develop inter-cultural skills.

The training of three battalions was also aimed at enhancing their professionalism and equipping them with modern weapons. According to the US Ambassador, Mr. Howard Jeter, the objective of the training was to show the commitment of the US in assisting Nigeria in building a very strong base for its armed forces and to extend the hand of friendship to the armed forces by restoring the capacity and pride of Nigeria's military institutions. He affirmed:

Domestically, the Nigerian armed forces are turning in the same new direction as the nation—a fundamental democratic and political transition that, I assure you, will make this country greater, more prosperous and more stable in the future. The Nigerian armed forces will win the respect of the Nigerian people as corruption ends, as the standards of training and professionalism increase, as leadership takes on a democratic spirit, as the (military) bases and installations are recognized as good neighbours in the community they serve and as people see soldiers, sailors, and airmen engaged in useful tasks. Internationally, your troops are a vital force for peace and stability in Africa. Nigerians should know it, Africa should know it and the world should know it. But it will fall to you to tell these stories of honour, achievement and success.

The Nigerian military was urged to build a bridge of understanding with the Nigerian people through the media. The belief was that once this bridge is secure, the military will be well on their way to regaining the confidence and admiration of the Nigerian people who are interested in a military they can be proud of.

The US military assistance was not limited to just training programs and exchange of ideas, the United States also gave financial aid to Nigeria. In one of such moves, President George W. Bush signed some memoranda clearing the way for US military aid to Nigeria and some other countries. While signing the memoranda, Bush declared that supplying these countries with defence equipment and services will strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace. In the case of Nigeria, it was said that "an unforeseen emergency exists that requires immediate military assistance. He, therefore, directed that some \$4 million in excess of Defence Department equipment and military training services be provided to Nigeria.

### **The Controversial "Emergency" US Military Assistance**

This particular assistance generated some furor because the Nigerian military authorities claimed that the package was unsolicited and the failure of President Bush to state the nature of the "emergency situation" that was in the memorandum did not help matter. There was no specific explanation on what the emergency situation could be and no US public officer was willing to expatiate. But the American president was expected by law to explain the circumstances to his country's Congress which seems to be the only way such emergencies could be known. It was also not certain whether such information would be made public even after the US president had explained the circumstances to the Congress. The package was titled: "Determination to

authorise the furnishing of emergency military assistance to the government of Nigeria”. It reads: “Pursuant to the authority vested in me by section 506(a)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, 22 U.S.C. 2318(a)(1) (the “Act”), I hereby determine that:

- An unforeseen emergency exists that requires immediate military assistance to the government of Nigeria;
- The emergency requirement cannot be met under the authority of the *Arms Export Control Act* or any other law except section 506(a) of the Act. I therefore direct the draw-down of defence articles and defence services from the Department of Defence, and military education and training, of an aggregate value not to exceed \$4 million, to provide assistance to the government of Nigeria.
- The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to report this determination to the Congress and to arrange for its publication in the *Federal Register*.

The reaction of one of the top military brass who begged for anonymity was both cynical and humorous. According to him,

I believe if such aid is coming to any of the services, we ought to be aware of it. As of now I am not aware of it. I do not have details of anything pertaining to that. Is it part of the MPRI (Military Professional Resources Incorporated)? Is it for the modernization of the bomb disposal units or for training slots for Nigerian officers in the United States? Nobody knows for now.

He added:

I believe when it is presented formally, we will get all the details you need ... If they are giving us the money, I think it is good news for us. We can do with any extra cash to really professionalise our military, reactivate our platforms and retain our military on modern military-civil relations.

### **Military Cooperation and National Interest**

Like defence pacts, military cooperation is also a crucial issue in strategic policy and its implementation must be defined and understood. The hallmark of military cooperation is national interest. That military cooperation is not the same thing as a military pact does not make it a less serious strategic issue. The only fear was whether Nigeria knew the full implications of the *Nigeria-US Military Cooperation Agreement*. No doubt, the US has a well-developed strategic doctrine, defence policy, military force, and security consciousness.

In defence and strategic analysis, what Nigeria has presently is a political rather than a professional army especially the officer corps. The popular belief is that the rank and file seem more dedicated to both their nation and their responsibilities. More so, the lack of a clear national vision puts Nigeria at a disadvantaged position in benefiting from military relations with the US. Nigeria is the largest market for the US in Africa. The US may pursue its oil and other economic interests through military cooperation. There are other disturbing issues as well. These include:

- (a) The process leading to the military cooperation;
- (b) Gaps in area of military cooperation;
- (c) Legal aspects of military cooperation;
- (d) Aspects of military training;
- (e) Prevention of coup d'états.

Military cooperation is goal-specific and the objectives are normally spelt out clearly. On the part of Nigeria, the openly known objectives of the military cooperation with the US are:

- Train and re-train the military force;



- Protect the nascent democracy against military incursions;
- Provide patrol vessels for the Nigerian military (navy) to police the oil producing areas;
- To protect oil installations in the “Niger Delta”;
- Train and re-train the Nigerian military for peace-keeping operations.

However, it overlooks what a military cooperation/partnership should fulfill in the protection of porous borders of Nigeria against frequent external threats, subversion, sabotage, and aggression. For Nigeria, one advantage of the present military link with the US is that it boosts the country’s strategic image internationally because US is certainly the World’s Super Power.

Reservations that have been articulated on Nigeria-US military cooperation are principally about:

- Processes and procedures which involve the legislative power of the National Assembly, and in-puts from Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, among others;
- Clarity over Nigeria’s national interests including what use Nigeria would make of US troops in domestic and external relations;
- Nigeria’s limitations in US external military relations;
- Limiting conditions which Nigeria would need to have in building military cooperation with other countries.

In a systematic attack on the Nigerian government for building any kind of military partnership with US, Omoruyi queried the basis for this initiative. His major worry was that the Nigerian political leadership was going into a kind of partnership which they did not seem to understand. Another worrisome aspect of the whole deal was the methodology of its introduction as the government was not willing to carry the people along. He asked:

Is this US military pact within the national interest of Nigeria? Whither Nigerian Armed Forces? What is happening to the Training And Doctrine (TRADOC) of the Nigerian Army? What is our Defence Policy? If Defence Policy means identifying who are Nigeria’s enemies, one would then ask a pertinent question, who Are Nigeria’s enemies? Is the US to tell us who our enemies are? What are the terms of the new “Defence Pact” between the US and Nigeria? What are the domestic implications of the military pact? These and other questions are the kind of issues, which the National Assembly should have been inquiring into. Nigeria since 1966 has always solicited for military assistance from a position of strength throughout her history before the period of Obasanjo. Why should that be changing now? The new US involvement in the military organization of Nigeria has many issues that should be discussed. This is a fundamental change of foreign policy. Shouldn’t the Nigerian people know about this? I think they should.

The US does not seem to understand the domestic import of her decision to offer training to a selected unit of the armed forces. No one in the US understands the political orientation of the Nigerian Army. What about its poor human rights records! It would appear that the US trainers are under the erroneous impression that they could deal with the political orientation. The political orientation of the Nigerian armed forces has both attitudinal and environmental components. The US cannot change any of them; they are too fundamental for the US to understand. They cannot therefore be dealt with within the US quest for her national security interests. Domestically, Nigerians do not seem to understand the full implications of the US military involvement in Nigeria except that the US was sending some military officers to train some Nigerian soldiers.

There is no doubt in the minds of Nigerians that Nigeria ceased to have a professional army since 1966 especially after the civil war. What Nigeria has had since 1966 is a political army with a regional political agenda. No Nigerian government, civilian, or military, since the end of the civil war has been able to resolve

the ratio of the defence budget to the national budget. Up till now, no one knows how many men and officers are in the Nigerian armed forces. No one knows the ratio of spending on personnel and on equipment. Nigeria does not know what a professional army is.

According to Omoruyi the fear was that the US trainers are just rehashing the programme drawn up from the US experiences in the Balkans. The programme of retraining ought to have the depoliticisation of the orientation of the armed forces (Omoruyi, 2001).

According to a research finding from the Centre for Democratic Studies, it was discovered that the Nigerian soldiers conceived of their career as extending to political posts, like military governors and administrators of states, and parastatals and commanders in peacekeeping assignments. They see political posts as avenues for moving from Majors to Generals without any evidence of training. They would rather want to be political generals and become millionaires and billionaires and front men for foreign companies. They do not attach importance to upward mobilization through training or through professional assignment. They undertake professional assignment, like “peace-keeping” because it has foreign exchange component to it.

He explained further:

What the Nigerian armed forces need is not just training. There is an urgent need for a fundamental restructuring of the armed forces to make the so-called Nigerian military representative of the Nigerian ethnic nationalities. The US should not be made to just assemble battalions and offer them training unless we know the composition. This is not the job of the US trainers. It is a fundamental issue which is at the root of the survival of the federal system. The US still has not told Nigerians its track records with respect to how to convert a political army into a peacekeeper on the one hand and a professional army on the other. The re-training of some soldiers in the use of American equipment is a recipe for another problem. What happens to the other officers who would not have the benefit of such training from the US Marines? The implication is that we may be having two types of armed forces and if we are not careful and of course, the two-army plan has a potentiality for internal crises within the armed forces.

However, this position differs greatly from that of the National Assembly which believed that a defence pact with the US would not only safeguard democracy in the country but would also assist Nigeria in getting regular and adequate military assistance in form of better training and orientation towards making the military perform only its constitutional role of defending the territorial integrity of the country. The initiative was applauded and was even described as a bold and progressive initiative towards check-mating ambitious military officers who may want to stage a coup d'états. It was seen as a move that would help defend, sustain, and make democracy a permanent system of government. Another major reason why the National Assembly was in support of the idea was that other African countries would emulate Nigeria by entering into similar defence pacts. Fundamentally, however, this seems not to make any sense.

Condemning the pact and its sponsors, Prof. Tam David-West, in a seminal article published by *This Day*, described the pact as not only ridiculous but also very scandalous. He wrote:

It is also amazingly simple on the part of the Senators, not to realize that the envisaged military pact (or pacts) could be double-edged sword. For instance, these foreign countries can now contractually “invade” the country with their sophisticated Security officers (operatives) who would be strategically placed to decide or dictate which Nigerian government is worth defending. In short, they could turn out to be subversive agents. This could be a second or another brand of colonialism; and with great probability of being even more pernicious.

Perhaps, the attack was justified because even from the framing of the motion, it shows that the sponsors lacked the details of the implications of their action. The text of the motion read:

In view of the fact that democratic governance in Nigeria has been rather unstable and vulnerable to military incursions, and considering the fact that there has been eight coup d'états in Nigeria since independence in 1960, and also the need to uphold, protect, maintain and treasure democratic principles, values and structures in Nigeria, the Senate do hereby direct that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should immediately commence negotiation and sign a military pact with the United States of America and any other democratic European nation for the protection of democracy in Nigeria.

The motion was sponsored by the following senators: Adolphus Wabara, Gbenga Ogguniya, Adeseye Ogunlewe, Vin Obasi Osulor, David Gbua Brigidi, Femi Okurounmu, Afolabi Olabintan, and Ayo Oni.

According to Prof. Emmanuel Akanki, Dean Faculty of Law, University of Lagos, you cannot have a tyrannical government and expect a defence pact to help you. In his words,

If a society is not happy with the way things are done, there is the tendency that it may rebel. And once you have entered into a military pact, you are saying and telling the whole world that you cannot protect yourself. What is important is training our minds to do the right thing. If the people leading us are respected by the people because of their good conduct, no military will ever dream of taking over the reins of government.

Military partnership may contribute to protecting and preserving national sovereignty. It has to be a matter of legislation by the states involved and should not originate or end in the perceptions of two presidents. Military partnership between Nigeria and US is no longer an issue of doubt or debate in academic and defence circles. Since 2001, both the Nigerian and American governments have issued political statements admitting military cooperation/partnership but not a military pact. In spite of misgivings on due process, military cooperation existed between the two countries.

Two developments are important. The first has to do with the impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US. Perhaps, the military cooperation with Nigeria became very dear to the US in "fighting" terrorism globally. And, cooperation is needed with states which harbour terrorists in Islamic communities. If a state is suspect in the eyes of the US, it invites trouble. The Nigerian leadership, however, has tried quite hard to dissociate itself from harbouring terrorists of any sort.

The other even relates to the US suspension of military cooperation with Nigeria. On March 20, 2003, the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a public announcement, which linked withdrawal of military aid as due to Nigeria's opposition to the US-led war on Iraq. Since then, US-Nigeria military relations have created strains in both the political and the defence establishments.

### **Decertification Conflict**

The issues of security and military partnership are not the only areas where Nigeria and US seem to have a cordial understanding or relationship. Even this cannot be described as a perfect arrangement or agreement. Like any other relationships, there are bounds to be some imperfections which may be provoked by mismanagement of certain matters between the two friends. These disagreements, differences, and disputations may border on matters of principles, national interest, and outright or flagrant violation of some fundamental laws of either of the two countries by one of them.

One of such cases which many considered as a political action against Nigeria in order to whip it into line when there was a complete derailment of all programmes aimed at achieving a smooth transition in its political arrangement, was the ban or suspension of flights from Nigeria into the US.

The US government through the American Aviation authorities stopped all flights from and to Nigeria to

“maintain and administer effective security measures” at the nation’s premier airport.

But there was an immediate reaction from the government of Nigeria which saw it as being “motivated by personal and political considerations and certainly not aviation problems”.

The reason given by the US authorities was described as “malicious and false”. The American government had stated that the killing of four people by armed robbers at the premier airport was an indication of a total breakdown in the security network of the airports. As at the time, the action was taken, only the Nigeria Airways and the American Trans Air were operating flights from Nigeria to New York and vice versa. As stated above, the action was taken at a time of strained relationship between the American government and the Nigerian military leaders over the political impasse. The ban or suspension was therefore seen by aviation and diplomatic experts/watchers as one of the harsh measures lined up by Washington to press the military to hand over to a civilian administration.

But the American Department of Transportation which issued the cancellation of Flight Services noted that the decision was taken after complaints by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on October 8, 1992, about the security lapses at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport and several meetings with the Nigerian aviation authorities. The directive, issued by the Department of Transportation and signed by Mr. Federico Pena, its secretary, said that the department was discontinuing the authority of air carrier to operate between the United States and Lagos Airport. He added:

Specifically, I am adding a condition to the permit held by Nigeria Airways Limited so as to prohibit it from operating from Lagos Airport and the United States, and I am adding a condition to all US air courier certificates and exemptions so as to preclude these air carriers from operation into Lagos Airport.

With this position, Nigeria was decertified, with the implication that the country could no longer enjoy any unfettered assistance from the US government, and by extension its allies. This stalemate became protracted until the first week of July 1999 when President Bill Clinton sent a six-man delegation to Nigeria to see if all the conditions for lifting the ban had been met. Some of the conditions included installation of more modern navigational aids at the airports across the country, streamlining of security operatives stationed at the airports and the installation of modern screening and communication gadgets which increased facilitation of the airports. This means that the Nigerian government was required to introduce a quick baggage claim system. Each one should also operate a computerized check-in and check-out system.

The Nigerian government through its Information and Culture Secretary, Uche Chukwumerije stated

That all scheduled flights have been conducting their operations without any hitch ... Nigeria Airways flight from New York, British Airways and other flights operated. Cameroun, Egypt and other flights have come and departed. Indeed, West European airlines which in any case carry the bulk of the international passengers, have absolute no problems with our airports. Only the US sees the imaginary danger in our airports.

However, the Nigerian government succumbed to the demands of the US government by improving the standards of the country’s airport and aviation facilities. This position was informed by the adamant stance of the US which deliberately decided to ignore the introduction of political considerations by the Nigerian government. Having satisfied that all its conditions and demands for the lifting of the suspension had been met, the United States government lifted air ban on Nigeria on the 22nd of December 1999. The US Transportation Secretary, Rodney Slater announced the decision saying the Murtala International Airport (MMA) in Lagos “now maintains and carries out effective security measures”. The American Embassy also issued a statement in

this regard: "... The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) assessed the airport's security procedures and found that they now meet international security standards".

### **US and the June 12 Election Annulment**

The ban on flights to and from Nigeria almost caused a kind of diplomatic rift between the two countries but it never had the kind of impact that could threaten a complete showdown, like the one experienced during the Babangida transition programmes. The United States, which is the major promoter of democratic governance all over the world descended heavily on Gen. Babangida and his government for tinkering with the transition programmes, truncating electoral exercises, transforming from military to civilian leadership, and gross violation and abuse of human rights. The Babangida administration enjoyed tremendous support from the United States until the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections believed to have been won by the late Bashorun M. K. O. Abiola. While the entire nation was thrown into a state of pandemonium and anarchy, the United States recalled all her citizens and also engaged the civil society in constructive dialogue on how to resolve the stalemate. It was thought that the US was going to use force in forcing the military leadership into relinquishing power without further delay. The Nigerian government in return accused the US of interfering in its internal affairs. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida had warned that the Nigerian government would take necessary action against any interest groups that sought to interfere in the country's internal affairs. In an obvious reference to the US role, Babangida stated:

The Presidential election was not an exercise imposed by the United Nations or the wishes of some global policemen of democracy ... I hereby state unequivocally that my administration will not tolerate "foreign meddlers" who are interfering in our internal affairs and undermining our sovereignty.

The US had all along been critical of the Babangida transition programme. The process began with the coming into power of General Babangida in August 1985. *Ab initio*, the military president announced that the programme "would be a gradual process through which members of the political class could proceed with political learning, institutional adjustment, and re-orientation of their political culture". Launching what he called "Search for a new political order" in 1987, Babangida set up a 17-member Political Bureau with the task of reflecting on Nigeria's past political failures so that it could propose a new political blueprint for the country, including the framework for the transition process.

When the removal of ban on party politics was announced, close to 88 political associations emerged, with 13 ultimately submitting applications. In spite of ranking by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), according to six criteria and referring the top six contenders to the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the Federal Military Government refused to register the two leading contenders which were the People's Solidarity Party and the Nigerian National Congress (NNC).

In a broadcast, the president repudiated all the political associations, and instead announced and declared two political parties into existence by military fiat. The two parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), one "a little to the left" and the other "a little to the right".

The long drawn transition programme of General Babangida which began in August 1985, reached its climax on June 12, 1993, with the presidential election. Unlike the previous elections in Nigeria, this election was unique because it was the most internationalized with a total of 3,000 observers taking part in the exercise nationwide. Out of this figure, 135 observers were foreigners.

Secondly, the election was a watershed that symbolized two transitions: The first, from the military to the civilians after 10 years of continuous military rule; and the second, from the North to the South in terms of “locale” of power from Northern hegemony to Southern elite in Nigeria’s body politik. After all the preparations for the election, on 10th June 1993, a case was brought before Justice Basse Ikpeme by an unregistered Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) restraining the National Electoral Commission (NEC) from holding the election; the judge ruled that the election be deferred until the substantive suit is determined.

It was, however impossible for NEC to defer an election which was less than 48 hours away because of the possible political crisis that might follow. Justifying the wisdom in NEC’s decision to hold the election, a top government functionary was reported to have stated *inter alia*: “definitely we are going ahead with the election. It was very embarrassing for us. We respect the judiciary but the political turmoil that would arise from the cancellation of the election would be considerable”. He was shocked that such a monumental case was assigned to Ikpeme who was appointed a judge only in December 1992. The judge started two months ago and the ABN suit was her first major case. It is on record that the late night court ruling of Ikpeme, issued only two days before the vote, prompted mass confusion about the election.

With the stalemate, the leader of ABN, Chief Arthur Nzeribe, called for the cancellation of the election on the ground that “the so-called election was a fraud, a flop, illegal, unconstitutional, undemocratic, and absurd”. This claim was proved wrong by the repentant Director of Organisation of the ABN, Mr. Abimbola Davies, who retorted that “the Association (ABN) has no other mandate than to plan and work out how the incumbent military President, General Babangida would remain in power for at least two more years”.

On June 23rd, 1993, Babangida’s government broke its silence when it suspended the NEC and annulled the election results. Justifying the annulment of the election General Babangida disclosed that: “There were authenticated reports of election malpractices against party agents, officials of NEC and voters ... There were proofs of manipulations, offer and acceptance of money and other forms of inducements”.

According to him, evidence available to government put the total amount of money spent by the presidential candidates at over 2.1 billion Naira.

To consolidate the government’s action on the annulment, three new decrees were hurriedly promulgated ousting the jurisdiction of the courts to entertain any case on the June 12 presidential election. They included Decree 39, 1993, which repealed the Presidential Election (Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisions), Decree 13 of 1993, Decree 40 of 1993, which amended The Transition to civil rule political programme and Decree 19 of 1993. The third one is Decree 41 of 1993 which completely annulled any proceedings pending over the June 12 presidential election.

It was the spontaneous reaction from the civil society that made Gen. Babangida to “step aside” leaving all and sundry to believe that he had no intention to relinquish power. An Interim National Government, headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan took over from him after a prolonged crisis.

On November 17, 1993, a Lagos High Court, in a law suit instituted by the assumed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, Chief M. K. O. Abiola made a declaration that the Interim National Government (ING), which was hurriedly put in place by Gen. Babangida’s administration was illegal. Thereupon Gen. Sani Abacha staged a coup d’etat, dissolving all the existing democratic structures retained by the ING and once again returned the country to a full blown military dictatorship. This provoked the intervention of the United States of America through various political and diplomatic actions.

The Clinton administration came up with a proclamation against all those who were active participants in

the political crisis in Nigeria. The US president's proclamation stated that the sanction would affect "immigrants and non-immigrants of certain Nigerian nationals who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that impede Nigeria's transition to democracy and the immediate families of such persons". The US president derived the powers of the proclamation and the portion of it which he has vested in the Secretary of State from Section 121(F) of the *US Immigration and Nationality Act*.

The Act states that:

Whenever the President finds that the entry of any aliens or of any class of aliens into the United States would be detrimental to the interests of the United States, he may by proclamation, and for such period as he may deem necessary, suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or non-immigrants, or impose on the entry of aliens any restriction he may deem to be appropriate.

### **In Defence of Their Countries**

In an apparent show of power, the US took this action to show that it was not ready to be insulted by a "small nation", like Nigeria. The Nigerian government had on June 21, 1993 reacted angrily to a statement issued by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and signed by the Director of the Agency, Mr. Michael O'Brien to the effect that the United States was not going to accept any further postponement of the election. This was after the Abuja High Court had restrained NEC from going on with the election.

The Nigerian government described the statement as a threat to the country's sovereignty, direct interference in the internal affairs of the country and gave the US government 72 hours ultimatum within which to withdraw the Director of the Agency, Michael O'Brien and also directed the Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) to withdraw the accreditation issued to eight Americans who were to monitor the presidential election.

Though no country worth its name can afford to toy with its sovereignty and independence neither would it allow unsolicited interference in its affairs, the US is known for its strict adherence to the principle of democracy and the self-appointed defender of democracy all over the world. The US therefore viewed the recall order on O'Brien as an act of insolence by the Nigerian government hence its decision to issue a proclamation against all those who participated in both the Babangida and Abacha administrations.

Given the sole super-power status and the self-appointed role of the US as the watchdog of the world, its intervention in nations' affairs especially in political matters has almost gone without questioning. This, it has been able to achieve through its ability to manipulate the world through vital institutions, such as the United Nations.

Politically, the US as the self-appointed defender of world democracy has never hidden its displeasure toward "undemocratic" governments. The US may not be the oldest democracy in the world; it has, however, over 200 years experience in that system of government. While it may also be true that the Babangida government never came under direct attack by the US, signals that Washington was not happy with his administration manifested in the body language of Vice President, Mr. Dan Quayle who came visiting in September 1991.

The government's earlier shifting of the hand-over dates coupled with the ban on US wheat in 1991, have not helped matters in the relationship between Nigeria and US. Although, President Babangida was privileged to visit the US during the face-off to address the General Assembly of the United Nations, he did so only in his capacity as the chairman of OAU. His moves to use the opportunity to visit the White House were rejected by State Department officials.

One man who stood out during this impasse between the two countries was the American Ambassador to Nigeria, Walter Carrington. He impacted forcefully on the turbulence that characterized Nigeria's domestic politics in his capacity as the representative of the world's most powerful nation on earth. The military government would describe the impact of Carrington as negative but the pro-democracy activists saw him as a crusader for a better Nigeria. Between these two divergent spectrums of perception was a man committed to the ideals of his home country's foreign policy. As ambassador, he was the repository of American values and views. It is in consonance with the policy directives from Washington that he acts and if he confronted military rule and human rights abuses in this country, he merely holds aloft the flag of democracy and constitutional rights which the American political system fiercely embodies.

According to Carrington: "It is extremely important for the United States to remain engaged in a way that lets the people of Nigeria know that we support their longing for a return to democratic nation".

Buttressing this position further, an American Professor of International relations, Max Hilaire noted that when Ambassador Carrington first arrived in Nigeria, he was not treated well in that many Nigerians felt that the US was down-grading its relationship with Nigeria by sending a black person to Nigeria instead of a white person.

Delivering a lecture on "American Foreign Policy and Crisis Management", under the auspices of the African Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV), Prof. Hilaire declared:

... my own impression is that it is probably even better to have a black ambassador who can identify with some of the problems in Nigeria, somebody who can identify with its (Nigerian) history. There is a common linkage between US and other parts of Africa. And ambassador Carrington has a long history of relationship with the people of Nigeria. He was here in the 1960s. He has been here many times thereafter. To him, it was a climax of his career to serve in Nigeria.... I think part of the problems that Carrington had, the reason why the relationship went sour or became troubled was that there was a number of issues that happened during Carrington's tenure that would have led to the prolonged healing period.

Under the Obasanjo administration, three events would have caused a very serious diplomatic rift between the two countries. But while two were well managed, the third one caused a major disagreement between them. The first issue was about an intelligence report prepared for the National Intelligence Council of the United States which predicted that Nigeria may break up. The report stated that the break-up could be as a result of the leaders insisting on a union, against the people's wish. It further states that the break-up of Nigeria would be one of the most important occurrences that would accelerate decline in Africa.

But the government played the issue down by narrowing it down to blackmail. A statement issued by the government explained:

If our detractors cannot see our far-reaching reforms, our fight against waste and corruption, the new culture of produce and service delivery that is gradually emerging, the political reforms including the on-going National Political Reform Conference as well as the sacrifices our people are making to ensure economic progress and democratic consolidation, as indicators of progress and a radical departure from the past, then they must have dubious or diabolical benchmarks for measuring efforts at ensuring oneness, unity, stability, indivisibility, prosperity, development and growth of our dear country.

But the reaction of the government was somehow hasty and unnecessary because after a thorough examination of the report, it was discovered that the report which was put on the internet had warned in the opening words that:



The views expressed are those of the individuals and do not represent official US intelligence or policy positions. The National Intelligence Council routinely sponsors such unclassified conferences with outside experts to gain knowledge and insight to sharpen the level of debate on critical issues.

To even the most patriotic Nigerian, this possibility is neither fanciful nor far-fetched. Indeed, we came close to break up in 1966/1967 and again in 1993 and we have been struggling with centrifugal tendencies since 1999. A Nigerian commentator writing on the intelligence reports stated that:

... I disagree with the conferees attribution of junior officers coup as a possible source of that collapse, but then that is their opinion. In my view, Sharia, the Niger-Delta and autonomy demands from the Igbo, Yoruba and Ijaw if pushed to their logical conclusion are more realistic indicators that Nigerian cannot yet be taken for granted.

But then such a downside risk elevates Nigeria to the status of a strategic nation in the eyes of US and global policy makers, especially when combined with Nigeria's position as a major source of US and global oil supply. In simple language, this simply means that the world has a stake in the survival and indeed the prosperity of Nigeria. Nigeria can now begin to leverage this strategic stakes to make our case for debt relief, military and intelligence support, aid, Foreign Direct Investment, and greater international engagement with and in Nigeria.

The second event which was almost assuming an explosive direction was nipped in the bud by the National Assembly. It was the celebrated or orchestrated Third Term Project of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Though it never got to the level of diplomatic crisis between the two countries, the United States was able to pass the message to the Nigerian government that it was not in support of any self-seeking project that would disrupt the democratic process in Nigeria. Much as it was not its business on who rules Nigeria, it was its responsibility to ensure that democratic process in any country at all, is not disrupted.

Hence, the project was terminated abruptly by the National Assembly which organized open sessions that were televised by both local and international media. Through these sessions, debates, and contributions by members of the National Assembly were conducted and the general consensus was that there would not be any third term for the President no matter how well his administration had performed.

The American government lauded the decision and stated that the country would now face the issue of governance which was relegated to the background because of the full attention given to the Third Term project.

### **The Enemy Between: Managing the Taylor Saga**

The third event was the most volatile and critical of all. It almost led to serious diplomatic crisis between Nigeria and the US. It was the Charles Taylor saga. Charles Taylor was part of dictator Samuel Doe's government in 1980 before being exiled to the United States. In the United States, he was jailed for allegedly stealing \$900,000 in Liberian government funds only to escape from a Massachusetts prison, along with some petty criminals, in 1985 after a year in captivity. In 1989, he returned to West Africa and launched a revolt from the Ivory Coast against Doe, an ethnic Krahn who had taken power in a military coup. Taylor's campaign turned into an ethnic conflict with seven factions fighting for control of the country and its resources—particularly iron ore, timber, and rubber.

Taylor's forces included children, who usually dressed in costumes and blond wigs. Often under the influence of drugs, they were noted for their brutality. An estimated 200,000 people were killed in that phase of

the war, and more than one million were forced from their homes. The United Nations, United States, and African States mediated a peace of sorts in 1996. Taylor's faction emerged from the fighting as the dominant force, and when special elections were held in 1997, he and his National Patriotic Party won an overwhelming victory.

But despite the landmark support given to Taylor both by the local people and the international community, his government was still not popular because it was characterized by all sorts of atrocities, such as killing, raping, maiming, corruption, and genocidal activities. However, under the aegis of an ECOWAS brokered agreement in July 6, 2003, the Liberian leader, Charles Taylor accepted an offer of asylum from President Olusegun Obasanjo, and on August 11, 2003, he stepped down as President, handed over power to the Vice President, Moses Blah and came to Nigeria. Subsequently, Taylor was indicted for crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. In dramatic twist of events, the United States then offered \$2 million cash reward for the capture of Taylor.

It could be recalled that Taylor intervened in the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone in support of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which claimed up to 250,000 lives between 1989 and 2003. But beyond this dour statistics and controversy surrounding Taylor's relocation to Nigeria, was the role of Olusegun Obasanjo. In one of his numerous visits to the US, Obasanjo stoutly defended Nigeria's extension of political asylum to the former Liberian president. According to Obasanjo, Taylor's exile to Nigeria helped end bloodshed in Liberia. His words:

General Collin Powel and I worked together to prevent a bloodbath in Liberia. We put our heads together and decided that Charles Taylor must be eased out because if we failed to ease him out, he would dig in there and there would have been a tremendous destruction of lives and property. We were mindful of our duty and responsibility to humanity, the people of Liberia and West Africa.

As a way of getting the Nigerian government to yield to the American pressure, the US government offered to waive all debts Nigeria owes it, in exchange for the handing over of Taylor to the UN-backed special War Crimes Court in Sierra Leone. According to a statement issued by a White House spokesman Scott McClellan, US government's offer was made in Washington D.C. during a meeting between the US President George Bush and his Nigerian counterpart Olusegun Obasanjo.

All the talk about debt forgiveness was seen as an American carrot by the National Assembly which took a hardline stance towards the country's unflattering larger debt scenario. The national legislators have in a populist move been pushing for debt repudiation in defiance of whatever position the Paris Club and others were saying.

When it seemed this was not having the desired impact on the Nigerian government, the US made a categorical statement that the release of Taylor to the War Crime Court was going to be tied to Nigeria's request for a UN seat. The US government made it known that its support for a UN seat for Nigeria was not going to come cheap except it handed over Charles Taylor to face war crime charges before the special UN-backed War Crime Court in Sierra Leone. This put the Nigerian government in a dilemma since it was very desperate to secure UN seat to boost its international image.

The Nigerian government, again refused to hand over Taylor to the US. This was inspite of the preponderance of both local and international opinions which were clearly not in favour of the Nigerian government position.

African and international civil society groups were formed to ensure Nigeria's surrender of Charles Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Taylor was accused of 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, against the people of Sierra Leone by the special court. The crimes include killings, mutilations, rape, and other forms of sexual violence, sexual slavery, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, abduction, and the use of forced labour by Sierra Leonean armed opposition groups.

The Mano River Union which consists of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, issued a communiqué which agreed to call for a review of Taylor's temporary stay in Nigeria.

The Communiqué read as follows: "Nigeria is swimming against the tide of international justice. It is in the country's best interest to review its position so as not to be isolated by other nations ..." In addition, the European Parliament came up with a resolution to condemn Nigeria's continued refusal to hand over Charles Taylor. During a visit to West Africa, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour called for Taylor to appear for trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone and for African leaders to urge President Olusegun Obasanjo to hand over Taylor.

At the local level, there was massive opposition against the Federal Government position. For instance, Nigeria Coalition on International Criminal Court issued a 14-day ultimatum to the Federal Government within which to either extradite Charles Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone or start a legal action against him. The group threatened that failure on the part of government to heed this warning would leave the Coalition with no other option but to launch a national and global campaign to bring Taylor to justice.

The leader of the Coalition, Mr. Ameen Ayodele said the Coalition would at the expiration of the 14-day ultimatum embark on joint programme of popular mobilization, rallies, and processions beginning from Calabar to make Nigeria hot and unsafe for Taylor.

Understandably, the Nigerian media stoutly and vehemently opposed the granting of asylum to Taylor considering his indictment in the death of two Nigerian journalists, Tayo Awotusin and Krees Imodibie while on official assignment in Liberia.

Chairman, Centre for Free Speech, Mr. Richard Akinola said:

I feel embarrassed that Obasanjo can say he will not hand over Taylor to the UN tribunal despite the atrocities he has committed. It is an insult on us as journalists that after killing our colleagues and other Nigerians, he did not even have the courtesy to apologise. It is a slap in the face.

Another journalist, Andy Ike Ezeani observed that from whichever dimension one viewed it, Taylor coming to Nigeria was wrong. According to him, there were better ways through which Nigeria could achieve peace in that country without granting him asylum. Granting him asylum, he said, was wrong because it sent the wrong signals to the international community about Nigeria.

Though the editorial comment of the Daily Champion on the issue posited that Nigeria's initial opposition to the granting of asylum to Charles Taylor was based on ennobling moral values, there was no legal platform on which the asylum could also be justified. Traditionally, territorial asylum is the protection granted by a state to a foreign citizen against his own state; and designed primarily for the protection of those accused of political offences, excluding common criminals at the municipal level and those who committed crimes against humanity at the international level. The hollowness of asylum derives from the philosophical fact that in ancient times, it designated a place of refuge or protection from which a person could not be removed forcibly

without sacrilege—places like the temples, altars, and in the Christian Church.

Thus, it is inconceivable how such a hallowed or sacred institution like asylum can be used to shelter persons who have violated or sponsored the violation of humanity, as Charles Taylor was alleged to have done. The symbolic sacredness of the institution of asylum, therefore, explains the exclusion of criminals from its ambience. What this suggests is that the Nigerian president may not have considered the philosophical contradiction in saying that with respect to Taylor's asylum in Nigeria, his government would not entertain any request, "not by any organization or country for showing this humanitarian gesture".

International law is clear that although every state has a plenary right, acting in sovereignty, to grant territorial asylum, there are some restrictions. These restrictions exist at the municipal sphere if the asylum seeker is a common criminal, especially when involved in acts that constitute a deliberate crime against life, among others.

The Taylor saga, however, came to a dramatic end when Charles Taylor made an abortive attempt to escape from the country. His eventual arrest and his sudden deportation to Liberia to face war crime charges in Sierra Leone captures vividly the character of the relations between Nigeria and the United States. At the time of Taylor's escape from his asylum residence in Calabar, the Nigerian leader, Olusegun Obasanjo was visiting his US counterpart, President George Bush on what was officially regarded as "matters relating to security in West African sub-region in particular and Africa in general". Though it was also speculated in both local and international media that President Obasanjo was making subtle case for his failed "Third Term Agenda" by imploring the US to show some understanding in this respect, the official position was that this never formed part of the discussion between the two leaders.

The haste, dispatch, and seriousness with which the Nigerian government handled the matter were a sufficient proof of the determination of the US to hold the Nigerian government and its leadership responsible for Taylor's escape. President Obasanjo was reported to have been embarrassed by this development. The US reaction was captured in a statement made by the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice while appearing before the Senate. She said: "... if it is true that Charles Taylor escaped indeed, there would be serious consequences". To avoid "these serious consequences", President Obasanjo ordered all security agencies to ensure the immediate arrest of Charles Taylor as well as his deportation back to his country, Liberia.

But Charles Taylor attributed the treatment he received from Olusegun Obsanjo to high level politics during his testimony before the Special Court in The Hague that tried him for War crimes. He explained that since he was not imprisoned in Nigeria, the issue of escape never arose. It was his contention that he was only a victim of power play. He stated:

When you are dealing with the level of power play that I saw during that particular period, it is amazing ... Obasanjo knew that I was traveling, where I was going to, and when. He informed me that he was on his way to the United States to meet with George Bush. But throughout the three years in Nigeria, Obasanjo had constantly reminded me that Nigeria was under tremendous pressure to turn me over, and he had said he could not do that... you know as I sit here I am still perplexed. I can't claim to understand all of the intrigues that happened to me. I would probably want to find out from him, "why in the hell did you do this?" now, why my dear friend told the world that I was escaping, I swear may be one day he will come and tell these judges and the world.

### **Obama's Visit to Africa**

Nigeria's leadership claim in Africa is being challenged by Ghana's growing image that is fast spreading not only beyond the Sub-Saharan Africa but also across the globe. Of late, Ghana has become a model for good

governance in Africa conducting very peaceful transition elections where the incumbent political party lost the presidency to the opposition. Though the first results ended in a stalemate, the way and manner elections were conducted in the stalemated zones without the eruption of violence and the transparency of the conduct of the elections, as well as the acceptance of the election results by the defeated parties without recourse to tortuous and tedious legal contestations, singled out Ghana as a very unique African country with important values to promote.

When in July 2009, US President Obama was to make his first trip to Africa, it was therefore not shocking when he chose to visit Ghana instead of Nigeria, United States' largest trading partner in Africa. Explaining the choice of Ghana over Nigeria and other African countries,

Obama stated in an interview with *allAfrica.com*:

Well part of the reason is because Ghana has now undergone a couple of successful elections in which power was transferred peacefully even in a very close election. We are trying to lift up successful models of good governance in Africa. And so, by traveling to Ghana, we hope to highlight the effective governance they have put in place.

Though the Nigerian government in its usual pretentious attitude seemed not to be bothered about this, it was obvious from the attitude of its officials that Ghana's choice was very instructive to Nigeria's ebbing reputation as an influential nation in Africa.

Defending Obama's position in a piece titled: "Obama's Choice", Wole Soyinka lampooned the government of Umar Yar'Adua for its inaction and wondered how the government expected Barak Obama to visit a country that was politically unstable and on the fringe of crisis. He was of the opinion that the Nigerian state had degenerated to a level that no reasonable and responsible leader of Obama's personality would find it attractive to visit.

Though Obama's visit was only a one-day affair, he was convinced, with what he saw in the country, that Ghana was becoming a fast growing industrial nation in Africa with strong infrastructural base and conducive business environment. The American president would surely reflect on these positive business indicators and explore the possibility of relieving Nigeria of some business overload. In an age when survival of nations is dependent on strong economic base, the US could not be oblivious of the fact that it would be in its interest to strengthen economic ties with its partners and ignoring a nation, like Ghana, at this crucial moment and at this stage of its development would be unwise.

Ghana's prospering economic fortunes and industrial growth are pointers to the stress the relations between Nigeria and the United States are undergoing. These situations would not allow Nigeria any rigid posturing in its relations with the United States. Whatever gave Nigeria that character for that hard stance over the MPLA issue in Angola had been negated by contemporary developments. The democratization of South Africa's polity; the termination of apartheid rule; the anathemisation of military rule in Africa, and in Ghana in particular, which now allows room for massive economic development have presented options and alternatives to the United States on issues of trade.

Besides, the discovery of oil in Ghana in 2008 and its determined efforts to begin exploration in 2010 as well as Ghana's present aggressive drive for industrial development should be a wake-up call to Nigeria and its policy makers that truly, "David is on the trail of Goliath".

## Conclusion

The complex nature and dimensions of the US-Nigeria military and political relations as they relate to strategic cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries and effective management of certain political disagreements especially on democratization and democracy as well as the Charles Taylor saga capture the inequality in the countries' stature and status. But despite the imbalance between the two countries, Nigeria, which is obviously the smaller partner, has on many occasions, demonstrated its capacity to resist US meddlesomeness even if such resistance has been very feeble and to some extent, inconsequential. But the fact that US retaliatory actions to Nigeria's stance have not gone beyond the diplomatic level, indicates the existence of mutual respect.

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