

## Research Article

This article is published by Jozac Publishers in the *African Social Science and Humanities Journal (ASSHJ)*. Volume 5, Issue 4, 2024.

ISSN: 2709-1309 (Print)  
2709-1317 (Online)

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## Article detail

**Received:** 29 November 2024

**Accepted:** 23 December 2024

**Published:** 31 December 2024

**Conflict of Interest:** The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



## Half a century of engagement: Analysing Nigeria-United States relations from 1960-2014

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 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asshj.v5i4.12>

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the complex and evolving relationship between Nigeria and the United States from 1960 to 2014. The relationship began with a period of mutual belief in their leadership roles, marked by economic aid and cooperation. The study explores the bilateral relations through political, economic, security, and cultural interactions, identifying factors that influenced these dynamics. The relationship has evolved through various challenges, shaping a strategic partnership between the two nations. Findings reveal fluctuations characterized by cooperation and tension, influenced by Nigeria's political stability, oil production, and U.S. foreign policy objectives. The post-9/11 era saw an increased focus on security issues, impacting the bilateral agenda. Future relations appear promising, with opportunities for collaboration in trade, education, and health. However, challenges like governance issues, corruption, and human rights abuses must be addressed. The study employs a qualitative methodology, using historical analysis, case studies, and interviews. Recommendations include establishing robust diplomatic channels, fostering people-to-people exchanges, and reinforcing economic ties. This study contributes to the literature by providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate history of Nigeria-U.S. relations, highlighting the need for a balanced approach moving forward.

**Keywords** – Bilateral relations, Foreign policy, Nigeria, United States of America

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The formal diplomatic relationship between the United States and Nigeria began in 1960 with Nigeria's independence. This marked a period of belief in the similarities between the roles played by the leadership of the two countries in their regions (Amoa, 2022). As a result, the Kennedy administration offered Nigeria long-term development aid of \$25million in 1960 (Sanderson, 1974). The developmental aid by President Kennedy became the hallmark and the beginning of United State (US) diplomatic relation with Nigeria.

Following the initial establishment of relations, the United States and Nigeria maintained a mutually beneficial relationship, albeit with brief disruptions during the collapse of the Balewa Administration and the 30-month Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). During the conflict, the US adopted a relatively neutral stance, declining to provide weapons to the Nigerian military government led by Yakubu Gowon. Instead, US efforts focused on humanitarian aid, providing respite materials to civilian victims of the war (David, 2003). The US government's decision to send humanitarian aid to Biafra during the Biafra airlift was influenced by Cold War considerations and dynamics,

similar to other US interventions in Africa. The threat of communist infiltration in Nigeria was deemed remote, leading to limited US involvement in the Nigerian Civil War.

The strained relations led to a shift in Nigeria's foreign policy, with the Gowon regime seeking alliances with communist countries, reducing its dependence on the West, particularly the US (Art, 2003: 40). This change was driven by periods of unease in the US-Nigeria relationship, primarily due to the US's disapproval of military interventions in Nigerian politics (Gebe, 2010). The US viewed military rule as an anomaly, tolerating but not trusting soldiers in power due to their authoritarian nature, unpredictability, and disregard for democratic norms. This led to entrenched mistrust and tension in the relationship (Obiozor, 1992: 50). In response, Nigeria's military regimes embraced nationalism, rebuffing US attempts to influence the country's political landscape, which they saw as a threat to their sovereignty and an attempt to protect US interests and investments in Nigeria (Idonor, 2007:5).

The reality of economic interdependence has been the primary factor moderating the relationship between the US and Nigeria, leading to a pattern of compromise whenever issues threatened to disrupt their ties (Lee, 2006:318). During Nigeria's early years of independence, the US engaged with the country as a junior partner in international relations, due to Nigeria's military-dominated leadership (Joseph, 1991:65). However, Nigeria's strategic importance to the US, including its oil resources, large population, and prime location, made it a crucial market and investment opportunity (Lake, Whiteman, Lyman & Stephen, 2005:50). This led the US to adopt a tolerant stance towards Nigeria's military governments, despite their undemocratic nature, as US economic interests took precedence. Nevertheless, the relationship faced significant strain during General Abacha's regime, which began on November 17, 1993 (Osarentin & Ajebon, 2012). International condemnation prompted Abacha to defend his policies as protecting Nigeria's national interest, blaming his predecessor for the annulled 1993 presidential election and justifying his coup as necessary to address the country's chaos and insecurity (Atoyebi, 2003).

Despite his claims that the previous government was weak and ineffective, General Abacha's actions lacked credibility given his own involvement in prior military coups. Instead of seeking compromise with the international community, Abacha chose to be antagonistic toward them, particularly the US, through acts of oppression such as imprisoning Chief M.K.O. Abiola, hanging Ogoni rights activists, jailing alleged coup plotters, and attacking human rights groups (Maduagwu, 2023:13). These actions severely strained Nigeria-US relations, leading the US to impose unilateral sanctions and encourage European allies to follow suit (Imobighe, 2001:78). This resulted in significant socio-economic and political repercussions for Nigeria (Caratona, & Gardiner, 2022). Economically, Nigeria faced hardship as international financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and London and Paris Clubs suspended loans and debt relief (Cesarz, Morrision, & Cooke, 2022). The US also suspended military technology transfers. Nigeria's diplomatic isolation led to loss of political leverage, including suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations and diminished influence in the United Nations, where Nigeria had sought Security Council membership (Douglas, Kennedy & Okonta, 2022).

In reaction to the international pressure, the Nigerian government attempted to deflect criticism through swagger and propaganda to claim that the US was leading a neo-colonial effort to isolate Nigeria (O'Brien, 2003:57). Nigeria alleged that the US actions, including decertification for narcotics trade, flight bans, strict immigration procedures, and attempts to pass a UN resolution on human rights abuses, were blackmail tactics aimed at isolating Nigeria globally. The Nigerian government asserted that its internal affairs were being unfairly interfered with and sought to normalize relations with the US (Obi, 2004:26). With the emergence of the fourth republic, Nigeria made efforts to improve its international image. Official contacts were established to mend relations, and trade between the two nations has grown since the beginning of the millennium, as shown in tables 1 and 2. The US remains a key trading partner for Nigeria, and both countries prioritize maintaining strong economic ties.

## 1.1. Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to analyze the evolution of Nigeria-United States relations from 1960 to 2014, and highlight key factors that have influenced their bilateral relations in order to identify opportunities for future collaborations.

### Objectives

1. To explore the historical context of Nigeria-U.S. relations, with a focus on the initial establishment of diplomatic ties and the impact of significant events such as the Nigerian Civil War and military regimes on bilateral interactions.
2. To identify and analyze the political, economic, security, and cultural factors that have shaped the Nigeria-U.S. relations over the decades.
3. To evaluate the current state of Nigeria-U.S. relations and assess future prospective areas for collaboration while addressing ongoing challenges related to governance, corruption, and human rights abuses.

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

### 2.1. Support from the United State to Nigeria's Process of Democratization

Nigeria's political transition on May 29, 1999, marked a significant shift towards democratization, transforming the country from military rule to civilian governance and restoring sovereignty to the Nigerian people. The pursuit of ideal democracy in Nigeria remains an ongoing challenge, heavily influenced by the quality and character of elected officials. Despite this, the country has made notable progress since the advent of democratic rule in 1999. These achievements, though subject to debate, may be attributed to several factors, including; improved global perception of Nigeria following its reputation as a pariah state during General Sanni Abacha's military dictatorship; successful transitions from military to civilian rule; the peaceful transfer of power from the ruling party to the opposition in the 2015 presidential election; and the enactment of the freedom of information bill (Udeke, 2020).

Moreover, US support for democratization in Nigeria and other nations often aimed to control their politics and economy (Udeke, 2020). Thus, it's unwise for Nigeria to heavily rely on the US to achieve its democratic goals. While this view has some credibility, it also has flaws in an interdependent world. US aid can reinforce self-development rather than compromise it (Nkwocha, 2021). Nations are responsible for their development, but external aid can complement their goals. As Olusegun Obasanjo stated in a 2001 interview, "Nigerian democracy is ours, but development partners like the US can help achieve democratic dividends, strengthening our democracy" (Itugbu, 2001: 39). Therefore, democracy dividends offer opportunities to access resources for quality of life enhancement, as not all necessary resources can be generated domestically (Obasanjo, 2001).

Furthermore, while some Nigerians appreciate the United States' assistance efforts, others harbor concerns about the US's ulterior motives in supporting Nigeria's democratization process. Critics argue that the US does not engage in altruistic "Father Christmas" politics, but rather prioritizes its national interests under the guise of promoting democracy (Anyanwu, 2020). The US's support for African democratization has historically been tied to advancing its strategic interests, often leading to significant control over critical economic structures in beneficiary countries like Nigeria. Although Nigerians may be uncertain about the true drivers of US support for democratization, it is clear that US foreign policy has been shaped by various factors, including the Cold War era's inconsistent approach to building democracy in Nigeria and the post-Cold War era's more consistent pursuit of democracy as a foundation for political relations between the two nations. Notably, the US's interference in Nigeria's democracy may be aimed at securing a strategic economic partnership, leveraging Nigeria's status as Africa's largest market to expand US trade and commerce, and creating a favorable environment for dumping US manufactured goods (Igwe, 2021).

The United States has consistently demonstrated a keen interest in cultivating strong relationships with Nigerian governments through offers of economic assistance, a policy that has been in place for decades. American leaders, such as President John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s, have emphasized that this approach is driven by a sense of moral obligation, rather than self-interest, asserting that promoting democracy is simply "the right thing to do" (Goldstein, 1963). Moreover, US security interests are reinforced by the belief that democracy promotion reduces inter-state violence, creating a more stable and predictable global environment that facilitates the effective conduct of American foreign policy (Department of State, 1999: 67). As a State Department Official once noted, the growth of democratic systems serves both idealistic and pragmatic interests for the United States. Furthermore, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright observed that America has a deep security and economic stake in fostering a steady, independent, and thriving Africa, with Nigeria, as a regional power, playing a crucial role in this endeavor (Wright & Okolo, 2001: 119). The US foreign policy has historically prioritized political stability, even if it means tolerating authoritarian regimes, as seen in its support for Zaire's General Mobutu Sese Seko until his downfall, driven by fears of instability and radical infiltration (Wright & Okolo, 2001: 120). Similarly, the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" policy towards South Africa and collaboration with the apartheid regime reflect this preference for stability over democratic ideals (Philip 2000: 42).

Nigeria presents a complex case study, with the United States' reluctance to take decisive action against the Abacha regime, such as boycotting Nigerian oil, attributed to the country's intricate multi-ethnic dynamics. General Abacha, renowned for his political cunning, adeptly exploited the American preference for stability by launching extensive public relations campaigns in the US, showcasing the perceived socio-political and economic stability of his regime. The pursuit of political stability has been a paramount consideration in the US-Nigeria relationship, sometimes leading to a problematic compromise. By prioritizing stability, US policymakers effectively overlooked the egregious shortcomings of Abacha's regime, including its militarized, dictatorial, non-democratic, and corrupt nature. However, this approach is inherently flawed, as governments lacking popular support are inherently unstable, prone to unconstitutional military takeovers, and perpetuate a cycle of instability (Tepowa, 2012). Therefore, when assisting with Nigerian democratic initiatives, the US must be cognizant of the risk of undermining democracy promotion by anchoring its support on the stability of undemocratic governments, rather than prioritizing the empowerment of inclusive, representative, and accountable institutions.

Table 1: Non – Oil Imports by Country of Origin (Naira Million)

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	% Share of Total			
					2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Industrial Countries</b>	<b>866,631.46</b>	<b>926,527.14</b>	<b>987,567.77</b>	<b>1,192,782.54</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>55.3</b>	<b>57.0</b>
U.S.A	408,925.01	200,610.59	258,589.95	418,520.54	30.0	11.7	14.5	20.0
Japan	35,314.63	68,136.74	64,368.17	355,742.46	2.6	4.0	3.6	17.0
France	74,038.29	84,189.11	167,676.05	104,630.13	5.4	4.9	9.4	5.0
Germany	99,515.39	117,577.28	111,718.41	73,241.09	7.3	6.9	6.3	3.5
Italy	52,807.84	91,221.47	111,554.80	62,778.08	3.9	5.3	6.2	3.0
Netherlands	80,112.68	137,324.77	132,828.87	94,167.12	5.9	8.0	7.4	4.5
United Kingdom	115,917.62	227,467.18	140,831.52	83,704.11	8.5	13.3	7.9	4.0
<b>Africa</b>	<b>49,065.55</b>	<b>113,682.05</b>	<b>113,163.76</b>	<b>138,111.78</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.6</b>

Cote d'Ivoire	6,098.54	10,836.24	16,447.18	20,926.03	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.0
Ghana	4,989.72	7,880.90	10,011.33	10,463.01	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5
Niger	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
South Africa	37,977.29	94,964.90	86,705.25	106,722.74	2.8	5.5	4.9	5.1
<b>Asia (excluding Japan)</b>	<b>343,712.04</b>	<b>476,728.22</b>	<b>453,940.10</b>	<b>573,373.14</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>27.4</b>
China, P.R.	93,733.23	178,719.14	187,307.16	251,112.32	6.9	10.4	10.5	12.0
Hong Kong	19,502.73	25,483.69	13,634.92	20,926.03	1.4	1.5	0.8	1.0
India	76,786.21	121,365.93	94,928.84	125,556.16	5.6	7.1	5.3	6.0
Indonesia	30,482.59	33,338.38	18,194.80	41,852.05	2.2	1.9	1.0	2.0
Korea	33,126.18	68,760.89	71,867.04	73,241.09	2.4	4.0	4.0	3.5
Singapore	44,245.42	8,990.88	12,981.13	8,370.41	3.2	0.5	0.7	0.4
Thailand	45,844.68	40,069.29	55,026.21	52,315.07	3.4	2.3	3.1	2.5
<b>Others</b>	<b>104,447.71</b>	<b>198,671.76</b>	<b>232,263.26</b>	<b>188,334.24</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>
Russia	34,512.21	73,095.39	79,375.53	62,778.08	2.5	4.3	4.4	3.0
Turkey	10,118.04	11,427.31	21,095.30	14,648.22	0.7	0.7	1.2	0.7
Ukraine	5,266.92	31,917.66	40,402.86	27,203.84	0.4	1.9	2.3	1.3
Brazil	54,550.54	82,231.39	91,389.57	83,704.11	4.0	4.8	5.1	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,363,865.76</b>	<b>1,715,609.17</b>	<b>1,786,934.89</b>	<b>2092,60270</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Sources: Compiled from Monthly Returns on Crude Oil Exports by NNPC and Crude Oil Mining and Prospecting Co (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2005)

**Table 2: Direction of oil Exports**

Region/Country	Quantity (Thousand Barrels)					Value (N' Million)				
	2001	2002	2003	2004 1/	2005 2/	2001	2002	2003	2004 1/	2005 2/
<b>North America</b>	<b>321,797.8</b>	<b>240,642.7</b>	<b>329,233.1</b>	<b>408,856.1</b>	<b>427,318.5</b>	<b>758,995.0</b>	<b>600,373.9</b>	<b>1,236,018.5</b>	<b>2,086,689.1</b>	<b>3,167,959.8</b>
Canada	12,782.7	10,473.0	25,059.8	27,150.8	39,737.4	30,149.4	26,128.8	94,080.4	138,570.2	299,772.4
U.S.A	309,015.1	230,169.7	304,173.3	381,705.3	387,581.0	728,845.6	574,245.0	1,141,938.0	1,948,118.9	2,868,187.4
<b>South America</b>	<b>56,421.7</b>	<b>48,484.1</b>	<b>64,939.8</b>	<b>103,625.9</b>	<b>52,287.7</b>	<b>133,076.7</b>	<b>120,961.7</b>	<b>243,799.1</b>	<b>528,878.1</b>	<b>394,449.7</b>
Argentina	2,413.7	1,315.0	1,265.0	399.0	0.0	5,693.0	3,280.7	4,749.3	2,036.6	0.0
Brazil	44,448.1	38,492.3	55,015.1	88,458.9	29,247.0	104,835.7	96,033.5	206,539.6	451,469.7	220,634.4

Uruguay	1,230.4	0.0	948.1	3,899.3	14,695.1	2,902.0	0.0	3,559.5	19,900.8	110,857.0
Chile	5,472.9	5,783.5	2,945.8	9,024.5	3,856.3	12,908.5	14,429.2	11,059.3	46,058.6	29,092.4
Peru	919.6	996.7	3,856.3	996.9	1,948.0	2,169.1	2,486.6	14,477.4	5,088.0	14,695.7
Venezuela	950.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	958.9	2,241.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7,234.0
Mexico	0.0	948.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2,366.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
New Zealand	986.8	947.9	909.4	847.3	1,582.2	2,327.4	2,364.9	3,414.1	4,324.2	11,936.1

**Sources:** Compiled from Monthly Returns on Crude Oil Exports by NNPC and Crude Oil Mining and Prospecting Co (Central Bank of Nigeria 2005).

## 2.2. Current Developments and Patterns in American Assistance Towards Nigeria’s Democratisation

The desires and priorities of every nation are inherently dynamic, evolving in response to shifting times and trends. A notable example of this phenomenon is the United States' relationship with Nigeria, where despite a professed interest in the West African nation's economic and political well-being, the US occasionally appears more deeply invested in preserving Nigerian wildlife than in promoting the wellbeing of its populaces. The complex arrangement of the interests of Nigeria has been significantly impacted by two key factors: the emigration of its intellectual capital and the recurrent violent ethnic conflicts that have plagued the country. Paradoxically, the United States has benefited from Nigeria's brain-drain syndrome, rather than the other way around. Many Nigerian students who travel to the US to pursue higher education often choose to remain in the country after completing their studies, rather than returning to Nigeria. This phenomenon has given rise to a thriving community of émigré Nigerian-Americans, including notable individuals such as Philip Emeagwali, dubbed the 'Bill Gates of Africa', whose exceptional mathematical prowess was publicly praised by former President Bill Clinton during a landmark speech to a joint session of the Nigerian National Assembly on August 26, 2000 (Leonard, 2000).

The implementation of immigration policies, including the visa lottery program, which frequently favors Nigerian applicants, has significantly exacerbated the brain drain phenomenon, leading to an alarming rate of intellectual capital flight. A more harmonious and balanced relationship between Nigeria and the United States could play a crucial role in stabilizing this situation and mitigating its adverse effects. As aptly observed by Leonard Robinson Jr., former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, on the eve of President Clinton's historic visit to Nigeria in 2000: among a plethora of critical steps the U.S. can take is to assist the Obasanjo government in reversing the trend that has prompted the most talented and skilled Nigerians to flee to the United States and other destinations. Indeed, since the mid-1980s, there has been a massive exodus of middle-class and highly skilled Nigerians to the U.S. and Europe, with this trend initially limited to specific professions but now becoming an all-encompassing phenomenon with the introduction of visa programs aimed at filling workforce gaps in developed nations. This has resulted in a significant depletion of Nigeria's intellectual resources, with far-reaching consequences for the country's development and progress (Yomi, 2019).

The massive exodus of intellectual capital from Nigeria was likely exacerbated by the egregious mismanagement of the economy by successive regimes and the pervasive political instability that has plagued most African countries, including Nigeria, over the past four decades. This phenomenon has been further compounded by the failure of external bodies to effectively contain the unrelenting and lethal religious and ethnic struggles that

have severely crippled economic growth and political stability in Nigeria (Victor, 2019:35). In a survey released on the eve of President Clinton's historic visit to Nigeria in 2000, the renowned Professor Wole Soyinka ominously predicted that Clinton may prove to be the last serving U.S. president to set foot in a nation called Nigeria. This dire prophecy was likely prompted by the fact that one northern Nigerian state, Zamfara, at the time declared Sharia law as its adopted law, a move that threatened to undermine the state's longstanding tradition of secularism and religious plurality. Remarkably, Soyinka's assertion has proven to be prescient and accurate, as between 2000 and 2022, a period spanning over two decades, no U.S. president has visited Nigeria. This conspicuous absence is likely a consequence of the profound contradictions and complexities inherent in Nigeria's internal political system, which have undoubtedly deterred U.S. leaders from engaging with the country (Soyinka, 2000).

It is only logical that Nigeria should take the initiative to request external assistance in addressing its pressing challenges, particularly in terms of conflict resolution. The gravity and complexity of the country's problems appear to necessitate a proactive response from the United States and other concerned nations, which are eager to offer support and guidance. However, in the context of ethno-religious conflicts, former President Obasanjo's approach was often characterized by a tendency to downplay the severity of the issue or respond reactively to suggestions from Western powers that Nigerian democracy was teetering on the brink of collapse due to these conflicts. Obasanjo consistently maintained that national unity was sacrosanct and non-negotiable, while seemingly hesitant to consider convening a national conference of ethnic groups to address the problem comprehensively and inclusively. This reluctance may have been motivated by a desire to avoid creating a platform for any ethnic group to unilaterally declare its secession from the federation, which would have far-reaching consequences for the country's stability and territorial integrity (Onuora & Akhaine, 2001).

Whereas Nigeria has historically adopted a foreign policy approach that prioritizes the everyday needs and concerns of its citizens, the notion of assuming a paternalistic role, akin to a 'Father Christmas', in its relations with other African nations while its own citizen struggle with poverty and hunger, undermines its credibility as a leader and giant on the African continent. Consequently, Nigeria's foreign policy must be recalibrated to prioritize the country's own interests and gains; the nation must derive strength, rather than weakness, from its engagements with the external world. This requires a paradigm shift towards a more self-assured and assertive foreign policy posture, one that advances Nigeria's development objectives and enhances its global standing, rather than merely seeking to play a benevolent role in regional affairs.

This ostensibly symbiotic relationship has been subjected to intense scrutiny and vehement criticism by a segment of Nigerians, who passionately argue that the Nigeria-U.S. relationship has been decidedly imbalanced and replete with imperialistic undertones. These critics draw stark contrasts between Nigeria's overly acquiescent and subservient relationship with the West and its more assertive, Africa-centric foreign policy posture during the period spanning 1975 to 1983 (Larry, 2021). They lament the precipitous decline of anti-imperialist sentiment within the politics of Nigeria as well as the civil society, which contended that Nigeria has effectively devolved into the chief client state of a global dictatorship, characterized by a pervasive and insidious form of neo-colonialism. This critique underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics at play in the Nigeria-U.S. relationship, one that acknowledges the historical and ongoing legacies of imperialism and their impact on Nigeria's sovereignty and agency.

### **2.3. Dissecting the U.S. Support for Democratisation Process in Nigeria**

In a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship, U.S. consumers have a significant reliance on Nigerian oil, while Nigeria, in turn, has access to the vast and lucrative U.S. market for the sale of its crude oil and other exports, thereby fostering a deepening economic interdependence between the two nations. Furthermore, U.S. policy-

makers have long recognized the strategic importance of maintaining a robust diplomatic foothold in one of Africa's many influential and pivotal countries, Nigeria, which serves as a critical gateway to the continent. Conversely, Nigeria has a pressing need for robust and steady relations with the United States to enhance its global image and reputation, particularly in the aftermath of its transition to democratic governance in 1999, marked by the adoption of a new constitution. These ties have likely provided vital assistance in the pursuit of Nigeria's national interests, as exemplified by the U.S. government's enthusiastic support for Nigeria's democratic transition, demonstrated by the dispatch of a high-level delegation to the inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. Moreover, a few months thereafter, President Bill Clinton undertook a historic visit to Africa, which culminated in the first-ever meeting, at the cabinet level, between American and African representatives from across the continent, a landmark event that underscored the significance of U.S.-Nigeria relations (Onuora & Akhaine, 2001: 5).

The policies of President Clinton's administration towards Nigeria were distinguished by an unprecedented level of active engagement, marked by a multifaceted approach that encompassed a wide range of initiatives. These included the unveiling of innovative debt relief programs, substantial financial contributions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and a strategic reclassification of the epidemic as a pressing security challenge. Additionally, the passage of the landmark Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) opened up markets in America to a wider array of goods manufactured in Nigerian, as well as those from other African countries, thereby fostering increased economic cooperation and exchange (President William J., August 26, 2000). Furthermore, the formation of a high-profile 'Month of Africa' at the United Nations Security Council underscored the significance of African issues on the global agenda. The profile of American support for Nigeria's democratization process was comprehensive and multifaceted, encompassing an exchange of visits by the presidents and diplomats of both nations, the lifting of sanctions imposed on Nigerian officials during the Abacha regime, the resumption of flight operations to Lagos airport, electoral support, certification of Nigeria as a drug-free state, military training and arms supply agreements, defense cooperation pacts, and collaborative efforts to eradicate the AIDS scourge. Other key areas of cooperation included debt rescheduling, birth control and family planning initiatives, and a range of other development programs, all of which contributed to a robust and dynamic partnership between the two (Olagunji, 2008).

It is crucial to acknowledge that during the period spanning October 1998 to September 1999, Nigeria received substantial assistance from the United States, totaling twenty-seven million, five hundred thousand United States Dollars. This significant support was extended amidst a complex and challenging backdrop, as the outset of democratic rule in 1999 was marred by an intimidatingly negative image within the international community. Nigeria had been ostracized by the Commonwealth, subjected to relentless pressure from the United Nations, and perceived as a pariah nation by the global community, due to the egregious human rights abuses and authoritarianism that characterized the Abacha regime (Baume & Rubin, 2014: 35). Furthermore, the European Union had also designated Nigeria as a pariah country, exacerbating its diplomatic isolation. In this context, it was imperative for the newly elected leadership, emerging from years of military dictatorship, to undertake concerted efforts to rectify this negative global perception and restore Nigeria's tarnished image. Consequently, even prior to his inauguration as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in May 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo embarked on an extensive shuttle diplomacy tour, traversing Europe, America, Asia, and African states, with the primary objective of rehabilitating Nigeria's reputation and garnering respect and confidence from the global community (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication>, 2021).

Upon its inauguration, the Obasanjo government achieved a significant breakthrough in shedding Nigeria's tarnished image, thereby presenting the United States with a propitious opportunity to foster investments and

development through targeted diplomatic initiatives. Such initiatives would have been instrumental in encouraging the United States to seek and secure Nigeria's cooperation in the global fight against international drug trafficking, as well as mitigating the prevalence of Nigerian business scams that targeted American citizens. Through the strengthening of political relations, the United States was able to promote a multitude of shared national interests, including a steadfast commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, citizen participation in the electoral process, a free and independent press, and increased governmental accountability and transparency. These shared interests formed the bedrock of a robust partnership between the two nations, facilitating a convergence of values and goals. Nevertheless, despite this progress, several contentious issues persisted in Nigeria-US relations, often giving rise to misunderstandings and tensions, which fortunately appeared to have been resolved during this period, paving the way for a more harmonious and cooperative relationship ([https:// www.Researchgate.net/publication...2021](https://www.Researchgate.net/publication...2021)).

The first notable issue was the concerted effort to combat the illicit drug trade, which had been a longstanding concern in Nigeria. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) intensified its campaign against illegal narcotics and their barons, leading to a significant reduction in large-scale smuggling of narcotics within the country's air and sea ports. This progress was acknowledged by the U.S. ([https:// www.Researchgate.net/publication...2021](https://www.Researchgate.net/publication...2021)) Drug Enforcement Agency, which subsequently removed Nigeria from the list of countries known to smuggle drugs into the United States. This achievement was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Nigerian government and the U.S. Enforcement Agency, which worked together to implement the National Drug Control Master Plan (NDCMP) from 1999-2003 (Dike, 2020:164-165). This comprehensive initiative was a testament to the federal government's commitment to providing the necessary resources and logistics for sustaining and implementing effective drug control activities. The NDCMP served as a national roadmap, aimed at minimizing the harm caused by drug trafficking and drug use in Nigeria, and addressing the complex issues of drug production, cultivation, and abuse. This strategic initiative was instrumental in prompting the U.S. to decertify Nigeria as a drug-free transit country, marking a significant milestone in the country's efforts to combat the illicit drug trade (Tansey, 2021).

Concomitant with the enhancement of political relations, Nigeria's elevated political standing also facilitated the establishment of military-focused ingenuities, thereby creating a conducive environment for cooperation. The United States, seizing this opportunity, sought to bolster the economic stability, security, and overall well-being of the Nigerian populace by fortifying independent institutions, enhancing transparency and accountability, and professionalizing the security forces. The United States' assistance to Nigeria was multifaceted, aimed at reinforcing local and national systems, ensuring institutional capability in the provision of essential health and education services, and support for the improvement of productivity in agriculture, rural job expansion, as well as the increased supply of clean energy. This comprehensive approach was designed to have a far-reaching impact on Nigeria's development trajectory, addressing critical sectors that underpin the country's stability, prosperity, and growth. By strengthening these foundations, the United States aimed to create a more resilient and self-sustaining Nigerian society, capable of addressing its complex challenges and realizing its full potential (Dike, 2020:164-165).

#### 2.4. US Role in Nigeria's Regional Stability and Counter-terrorism Efforts

Throughout the years, Nigeria has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to promoting peace and stability across the African continent, and the United States reciprocated by providing the targeted security assistance to Nigeria which was aimed at augmenting its mediation competencies. In recognition of the strategic location of Nigeria laterally on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, a critical hub for maritime trade and commerce, the United States has engaged in collaborative efforts with Nigeria through numerous regional fora and naval security wits,

(<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). These initiatives are particularly significant given the Gulf of Guinea's notoriety as a hotspot for armed robbery and marine piracy, with Nigeria's waters being designated as the most dangerous in the world. Furthermore, Nigeria has been identified as a key trans-shipment hub for the traffic of narcotics, with several Nigerian criminal organizations implicated in this illicit trade. In response to these security challenges, the U.S. Navy has intensified its operations in the Gulf of Guinea, culminating in the launch of the African Partnership Station (APS) in 2007. The APS has encouraged a range of joint actions between Nigeria and U.S., Nigerian, European, and other regional navies, aimed at enhancing maritime security and cooperation in the region (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014).

Due to the fragile situation in the Gulf of Guinea, caused mainly by corruption which is pervasive in Nigeria's maritime security sector, there is considerable international support in the form of equipment and capacity building, all of which were executed through the United States' African Command (AFRICOM) (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). These programmes assist the Nigerian Navy in countering such problems as smuggling, piracy and oil theft (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). Two key AFRICOM programmes, involved in Nigerian maritime security, are the APS and Africa Maritime Law Enforcement partnership (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). In May 2013, for instance, the then Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Dele Ezeoba, informed Nigerians that the U.S had given Nigeria two additional warships to mark the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nigerian Navy. The names of the ships he gave include; the US Navy Survey Ship MCDONELL and US Coast Guard Cutter GALLATIN. The US navy ship McDonnell is a 64-meter 2054 tons oceanographic survey ship, while the US Gallatin is a 115 meter, 3250 ton ship (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014).

As of 2014, the U.S as part of its capacity-building support for the Nigerian Navy had transferred some ships to the Nigerian Navy which included, THUNDER, OBULA, NWAMBA, KYANWA and OLOGBO (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). The contributions of these ships to the security of Nigeria remain immense especially the maritime environment and the Gulf of Guinea. Under the African Partnership Station, the Nigerian Navy has held several amphibious and special forces operations in the Gulf of Guinea to protect the maritime environment. On October 18, 2013, there was a joint military exercise code-named Exercises AFRICAN WIND and which involved elements of the Nigerian armed forces, the United States, Britain, the Netherlands and Spain (Aubrey, 2019). The joint military training with special forces and amphibious forces, which lasted for three weeks, irrefutably emphasized and further enhanced the capacity of the Nigerian military in its war against pirates, terrorists, illegal bunkers and insurgents; active within Nigeria's maritime domain and was staged under the auspices of the African Partnership Station (APS).

Participating troops were drawn from the Western Naval Command, 81 Division of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy's Special Boat Service and Hydrographic Survey Unit, the Nigerian Air-force Special Operations Group, the 81 Air Maritime Group and the Nigerian Navy Air Arm (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). The scope of the training exercise covered included amphibious raids, maritime counter-terrorism, vessel boarding, stop and search in an opposed environment and hydrographic survey (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). The primary objective of the exercises was the enhancement of the Nigerian Armed forces' ability to plan, and exercise joint operations in the maritime environment. 150 of the participating troops were drawn from units of the Nigerian Armed forces while 739 came from foreign Special Forces (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014). The exercises in Lagos took place from October 15 to October 18, 2013 at Ibeshe beach and the Navy Ordinance Depot (NOD) waterfront. The Calabar exercises held from October 21 to October 24, 2013 at Tinapa and Muddy beach. Other exercises took place in Calabar included Riverine and jungle operations carried out by a joint force selected from the U.S. UK and the Netherland marines (<http://glitzmagg.com/?=3960>, 2014).

However, bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation was said to have aggravated in the consequences of the attempted 2009 bombing of a U.S. airliner by a Nigerian citizen (Pflaumer, 2019), which was controlled during the administration of President Jonathan. This was as a result of growing threat of terrorism under Jonathan's

leadership, as well as the failure to effectively address and prevent such hostilities emanating from terrorism. To further show US growing concern over protection of democracy in Nigeria, she condemned the abduction of schoolgirls by the terrorist group Boko-Haram in 2014, which further highlighted President Jonathan's inability to protect its citizen and maintain security stability. These issues raised doubts about Jonathan's ability to effectively govern and protect the Nigerian people, leading to the lack of support from the US for his re-election. Despite the U.S. apprehension due to the increasing tide of the Boko Haram threats, the Nigerian government had coordinated, with the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the International Civil Aviation Organisation, to reinforce its security arrangements. Cooperation with the Department of Defence has also expanded since 2009. Nigeria participated in the State Department's Trans-Sahara Counter-terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a U.S. inter-agency effort targeted at increasing efforts against terrorism and its coordination (Dickson, 2013: 200-213).

Further to the above, the U.S. military support for regional determination against Boko Haram insurgents in the West Africa was directed principally through the engagement of Nigeria with her neighbours: Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Support was also focused on the region's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). In this context, the U.S. officials, and stressed the relevance of the two-pronged relationship and the seriousness of security threats possibly stemming from Nigeria were disturbed about abuses by security workers as well as government's limited efforts towards addressing apparent impunity in the armed forces. For instance, the Obama Administration in this direction was said to have raised worries which climaxed in the decision to stop the sale of the U.S.-manufactured Cobra helicopters by Israel to Nigeria in 2014. With improvement by the Nigerian government to address the perceived human rights abuses by the armed forces however, the Obama administration went ahead with policies of selling of military hardware to assist in the government efforts to combat the Boko-Haram insurgency (Dickson, 2013: 200-213).

### 3. SUMMARY

The analysis of the evolution of diplomatic ties between Nigeria and the United States foreign policy from 1960 to 2014 revealed a complex and dynamic relationship which was characterized by shifting priorities and interests on both sides. The period as mentioned in early chapters was marked by significant political, economic, and social changes in both nations. The analysis was structured around key themes:

Historically, the relationship began shortly after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. From the above exposition, the initial U.S. interest was focused on supporting Nigeria's development and stabilizing the new nation during its early years. But, unfortunately, there were growing aspects of charges in political dynamics, which included the military coups in Nigeria between the period of 1970s and 1980s. This changing dynamics and political instability strained U.S.-Nigerian relations within this period. And many a time, the U.S. government often expressed concerns about human rights abuses under various military regimes. However, the US strategic interests particularly during the Cold War, prompted a complex engagement policy, driven by the need to counter the Soviet Union in Africa. These complex engagements are mainly to secure Nigerian natural resources, particularly oil, to reduce dependence on Middle Eastern supplies. Additionally, prevent soviet expansion in West Africa, using Nigeria as a bulwark against communist influence. In terms of economic prospects and ties between the two countries, the discovery of oil in Nigeria significantly shaped bilateral relations, as the U.S. sought to secure energy supplies. Economic cooperation evolved through trade agreements and investments, particularly in the oil sector, which became central to Nigeria's economy. In humanitarian and developmental engagement, throughout the decades, the U.S. has engaged in various humanitarian efforts in Nigeria, particularly during crises like the Biafra War (1967-1970) and later during health emergencies such as the Ebola outbreak and ongoing challenges with poverty and education.

However, in counterterrorism and security cooperation, Post-9/11, the focus shifted to counterterrorism, particularly due to the rise of groups like Boko Haram. U.S. military assistance and training were provided to

strengthen Nigeria's capacity to combat terrorism. In recent development, the relationship faced challenges due to accusations of electoral fraud, corruption, and governance issues in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the U.S. continued to engage in diplomatic initiatives aimed at promoting democracy and stability.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned in previous chapters, the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the United States are characterized by periods of both cooperation and tension since Nigeria's independence. In the light of the above, the multifaceted dimensions of these diplomatic ties, specifically focused on social, political, educational, and cultural relationships. By analyzing the historical perspective of bilateral relations, this study aims to identify areas requiring improvement and provide recommendations for fostering a robust and sustainable partnership moving forward. From historical context however, the early years from 1960-1970, Nigeria independent rule from British colonialism started in 1960, marking a significant moment not only for Nigeria, but also for African nations seeking self-determination. Initially, the United States viewed Nigeria as a vital partner in Africa due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources, particularly oil.

Unfortunately, the subsequent political volatility, which included military coups as well as the civil war of 1967-1970, strained relations. To say the least, the U.S.'s response was often cautious, prioritizing stability over democratic ideals. Then, from the period Oil Boom and Cold War Dynamics from 1970-1990, Nigeria emerge as one of the largest oil producers in the world, significantly impacting U.S. interests. During the Cold War, as earlier mentioned, Nigeria was seen as a potential counter to Soviet influence in West Africa. However, the U.S. continued to grapple with Nigeria's internal issues, including corruption, human rights abuses, and the lack of democratic governance. However, the U.S. often prioritized economic interests over political reforms, leading to discontent among Nigerians.

Democratization efforts and Post-Cold War Relations (1990-2014). The transition towards democracy in the late 1990s brought renewed hope for improved relations. The U.S. supported Nigeria's return to civilian rule and encouraged democratic governance, economic reforms, and human rights protections. Nonetheless, concerns including, ongoing insecurity, corruption, and ethnic tensions persisted, complicating the relationship. The U.S. also faced scrutiny regarding its foreign policy approaches, particularly its responses to Nigeria's human rights record.

##### 4.1. Areas Needing Improvement

First and foremost, there should be need for political engagement; this means, that Nigeria should ensure a diplomatic moves to facilitate the improvement of her relations with the United States by focusing on several key areas of political engagement. For example, helping to strengthen areas of mutual interests and effective management of its democratic institutions. This will promote good governance and counter corruption. It is a well-known fact that Nigeria's political landscape remains turbulent, with issues like electoral violence, corruption, and human rights abuses still prevalent as earlier stated. Therefore to strengthen these challenges, the democratic institutions in Nigeria need to be reinvigorated. Nigeria should continue to enhance the integrity of its democratic processes, including transparent elections and robust governance. To get this right, the U.S. should invest in programs that support the development of democratic institutions in Nigeria. This includes enhancing the capacity of election monitoring bodies and civil society organizations. When these strategic principles are put in place, Nigeria will not only build trust with the U.S. but also serve as a model for other nations in the region.

Nigeria should also ensure that there should be continued bilateral dialogues with the U.S. the dialogues will establish regular high-level meetings between Nigerian and U.S. leaders to discuss mutual concerns and opportunities. These dialogues can foster understanding and create platforms for addressing issues such as security, trade, and climate change. In the area of strengthening security cooperation, Nigeria should engage the U.S. in joint efforts to combat terrorism and insecurity in the region, particularly in the areas of capacity-building

initiatives and intelligence sharing. While engaging in joint efforts to improve its security, efforts should also be focused on addressing conflict driving factors and providing life-saving support for those impacted by activities of terrorism. The United States needs to engage in conflict resolution in Nigeria more than ever before. The U.S. could play a more active role in mediating conflicts, particularly in regions experiencing ethnic or religious violence. The U.S. should also assist in battling collaboratively with Nigeria to eradicate Banditry and Terrorism in the country.

Efforts should also be made to help the regional organizations like ECOWAS in conflict resolution. Collaboration with Nigeria and ECOWAS will be essential while facilitating fight against trans-border crimes within the region. Current economic cooperation between Nigerian and the United States is primarily based on oil imports, and this therefore, has limited diversification and growth opportunities for both economies in other economic sectors. Unfortunately, dependence on oil has made Nigeria vulnerable to global market fluctuations. Diversification of trade should be prioritized. The U.S. should encourage Nigerian in diversification into other sectors, such as agriculture, technology, and services. Bilateral trade agreements aimed at reducing tariffs and enhancing access to U.S. markets can promote this diversification. Investment in infrastructure should also be considered, companies should be incentivized to invest in Nigerian infrastructure projects. Such investments could lead to job creation and economic growth, enhancing the overall bilateral relationship.

Additionally, in economic partnerships, Nigeria should actively seek to diversify its economy and engage the U.S. through trade agreements, investments, and technology transfers. In another development, social and cultural ties with Nigeria need to be reviewed. While there are numerous cultural exchanges and initiatives, misunderstandings and stereotypes persist. The relationship often lacks depth in terms of people-to-people connections. Therefore, enhanced educational exchange programs should be encouraged. Expanding scholarship opportunities and academic partnerships can deepen mutual understanding. Programs like the Fulbright Program should be promoted for greater Nigerian participation. Cultural diplomacy initiatives should also be encouraged. The U.S. should promote cultural exchange programs that celebrate Nigerian heritage while also showcasing American culture.

Supporting Nigerian artists, filmmakers, and musicians can foster a better understanding of each nation's cultural landscapes. In the area of Security issues in Nigeria as mentioned above, terrorism and other security challenges, including Boko Haram insurgency, and other organized crime, have direct implications for U.S. interests in the region. Joint security training programs should be made to be paramount. Establishing training programs for Nigerian military and law enforcement agencies can enhance Nigeria's capacity to address security challenges. This should be complemented by respect for human rights. Secondly, intelligence-sharing agreements can also help to strengthen intelligence. These sharing mechanisms can improve the effectiveness of both countries in combating terrorism and trans-border crimes, fostering a safer environment for citizens and facilitating foreign investment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

While there have been periods of cooperation and partnership, there have also been times of tension and disagreement. Moving forward, both countries will need to navigate these challenges and work towards building a more constructive and mutually beneficial relationship. This will require open and honest communication, a willingness to address differences and disagreements, and a commitment to finding common ground on key issues. Despite the obstacles that have arisen in the past, the potential for a strong and enduring partnership between Nigeria and the United States remains. By recognizing their shared interests and working together to address their differences, both countries can build a relationship that promotes stability, prosperity, and peace in Africa and beyond.

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