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United States foreign policy in Africa, with a focus on Nigeria

by

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Abstract

The United States of America and Africa diplomatic relations, which began in the late nineteenth century as a major trading partner in Africa, which started as an economic and trade values for both parties as well as the need for a diplomatic relation and building a lasting friendship, unlike other African trading partners in Europe and presence in Africa because of its colonial ties with the continent. Nigeria is currently seen as a key player in improving relations between the United States and Africa, this is because of its large population that has contributed to its economy as the fastest growing economy in Africa, Nigeria's diplomatic relations between the United States have been a major and biggest economic and trading partner in Africa. Since the two countries diplomatic relations were established in the wake of Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigeria has played a significant role in US foreign policy in Africa. This is due to Nigeria's pivotal position and role in African politics, which has made Nigeria one of the US's most important diplomatic relations. This is also given that Nigeria is a large trading and economic partner for the United States in Africa with enormous economic potential for the United States to keep a presence in the continent. This paper discusses American foreign policy in relation to maintaining diplomatic and economic connections with the nation. The research concludes by urging closer links between the two nations because they have similar political ideologies and a sizable economy that benefits both parties.

Introduction

The relationship between Nigeria and the United States is one that has grown significantly over the years, with collaboration in various areas such as security, education, trade, and others. Nigeria, being the most populous country in Africa, has a vital role to play in shaping the direction of the continent. The United States, on the other hand, sees Nigeria as an essential partner for promoting peace, stability, and economic development in Africa. While there have been challenges in the relationship, the two countries have a long history of working together to address issues such as security threats, corruption, and human rights abuses. In this essay, we will explore the importance of the relationship between Nigeria and the United States, as well as areas where the two countries can strengthen their partnership for the benefit of both nations and the African continent.

Africa and United States Relations

Over the years, there have been many different facets and complex interactions between the US and Africa. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was one of the first direct interactions between the U.S. and the African continent. The American Colonization Society's establishment of Liberia was the first significant attempt to reunite African Americans with Africa, with much of its involvement in recent years being driven by economic and strategic interests in the continent.¹ The official U.S. engagement with Africa began with the establishment of the Bureau of African Affairs in 1958, which is grounded in four pillars of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa by strengthening democratic institutions, supporting economic growth and development, advancing peace and security, and promoting opportunity and development has continued to serve as a framework for U.S. engagement with Africa.

The growing concerns over Communist influence and the fear of Soviet and Cuban infiltration in Africa, particularly in southern Africa where apartheid practices were in effect, were also driving forces behind the U.S. foreign policy towards Africa during the Cold War. A major cause of friction in relations between the United States and Africa was the U.S.'s backing for South Africa's apartheid system, which put the country at odds with numerous African nations and their citizens who were fighting for equality and civil rights.² However, as the geopolitical environment and each side's interests changed throughout time, so did relations between the United States and Africa. Considering the continent's expanding economic and geopolitical significance, the U.S. has expanded its focus on it. The U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, which took place in 2014 and brought together leaders from all over the African continent to interact with U.S. government officials, business executives, and members of civil society, is one of the major initiatives aimed at improving U.S.-Africa ties. Nevertheless, the U.S. has persisted in attempting to strengthen its relationship with Africa and create a more long-lasting connection.³ Given that the number of China on the continent of Africa has increased, this is crucial for the US in its fight against Chinese influence.

Nigeria and United States Relations

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the United States and Nigeria have had a long-standing connection. The two nations have preserved friendly diplomatic relations and have backed one another on several global issues. The United States' connection with Nigeria has been one of the most important bilateral relationships between the US and African countries. For many years, the two nations have collaborated in the fields of diplomacy, commerce, and security. The Bush administration helped to forge the inner core of the connection between the two nations by assisting the influx of intellectual and professional workers from Nigeria into the US and contributing significantly to economic relations and security between the two nations.

The first Nigerian head of state to see a US president was Tafawa Balewa, who went to see John F. Kennedy in 1961 and officially began the bilateral connection between the two

¹ George V. Allen, "United States Foreign Policy in Africa," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 306, no. 1 (1956): 117–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271625630600117>.

² J. Peter Pham, "Hans J. Morgenthau and United States Policy toward Africa," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 31, no. 4 (2009): 252–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803920903136270>.

³ Sanford R. Silverburg and Bernard Reich, *United States Foreign Policy and the Middle East/North Africa: A Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Research*, vol. 24, Book, Whole (London; New York; Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315687209>.

nations. The US considered Nigeria to be an essential part of its African policy.⁴ Today, there is a substantial trade relationship between the United States and Nigeria, with both nations exchanging a variety of goods and services. With a more than \$10 billion trade volume in 2020, the US will overtake China as Nigeria's second-largest trading partner. Petroleum goods are the main topic of commerce between the two nations, with Nigeria being one of Africa's top oil producers.

With various US businesses present in Nigeria, the US has also made a major investment there. Coca-Cola, Microsoft, and General Electric are a few examples of this. In terms of foreign direct investment, the US ranks among the top three countries in Nigeria. The two nations' commercial ties have, however, had some difficulties, with Nigeria's corporate operations being hampered by problems with infrastructure, security, and corruption. It has been crucial for the battle against terrorism that Nigeria and the US have strong security cooperation.⁵ Nigeria has been engaged in combat with the terrorist organization known as Boko Haram, which has been terrorizing the nation's northern region. The US has assisted Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram with military and intelligence assistance.

New Alliances with China

With a significant and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship with the Republic of China, relations with the United States and Nigeria are on the verge of collapse. China's developing diplomatic and economic ties with Nigeria serve as proof of the country's growing influence in the world. Unlike the US, which has traditionally been Nigeria's partner, China has been able to significantly impact Nigeria's economy, especially in the field of infrastructure development.⁶ Infrastructure development is one area where China's impact in Nigeria has been particularly noticeable. China has supported and built a number of significant infrastructure projects in Nigeria over the past ten years, including the Zungeru hydroelectric power plant, the Lagos-Ibadan railway, and the Abuja-Kaduna railway.⁷ These projects have been crucial in addressing Nigeria's infrastructure deficit and improving connectivity within the country. In contrast, the US has been less involved in infrastructure development in Nigeria, focusing instead on security cooperation and providing technical assistance in areas such as health and education.

High-level visits between China and Nigeria have been occurring routinely as a result of both nations' strong engagement in fostering diplomatic ties. In 2021, Nigeria and China commemorated 50 years of diplomatic ties, and both nations have been committed to advancing their collaboration. In an effort to strengthen the relations between the two nations, China has also begun providing scholarships for Nigerian students to study in China. The major foreign investor in Nigeria's economy during the past ten years has been China, which has made investments in a variety of industries, including oil and gas, agriculture, telecommunications, and transportation. China was Nigeria's biggest commercial partner in 2020, contributing about 22%

⁴ Olayiwola Abegunrin, *Nigeria, Africa, and the United States: Challenges of Governance, Development, and Security*, Book, Whole (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), <https://go.exlibris.link/Jn9T1f3K>.

⁵ Abegunrin.

⁶ Godiya Pius Atsiya and Marietu Tenuche, "Nigeria-China Economic Relations and Development in Africa, 2006-2016," *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 2 (2019): 101–21, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2019/v6n2a5>.

⁷ Atsiya and Tenuche.

of all imports to the nation.⁸ Due to its new foreign policy strategy, which differs from the US, China's influence on the African continent is increasing daily. Future growth in Africa is anticipated to be defined by favorable demographics, technical advancement, and urbanization, all of which the Chinese government has been able to magnify for improved cooperation between Nigeria and China.

The Influence of Nigeria in Africa

Nigeria, as a nation in West Africa, has a huge impact on the entire continent. Nigeria is the most populated nation in Africa and the seventh-most populous nation in the world, with a total population of over 200 million. Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa as well as an influential African Union member.⁹ being the most populous, militarily most powerful, and economically most powerful nation in Africa. Because of its enormous and abundant natural riches, Nigeria is known as the giant of Africa. By demonstrating its might in the continent, Nigeria has amassed a significant amount of influence in the continent.¹⁰ Africa as a whole and west Africa, in particular, have benefited much from Nigeria's contribution to maintaining peace and security.

Nigeria was the driving force behind the creation of ECOMOG and contributed significantly to the return of stability and peace in several countries, including Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nigerian troops comprised more than 70% of the commandants in ECOMOG.¹¹ the country's leadership in Africa, in order to end the problem in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and other nations as crises rose in the area as a result of the coup d'état, Nigeria sent 4,908 troops in February 1995 out of 8,430 men grouped into ten battalions.

Nigeria was a major force in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, which was a policy of racial segregation and discrimination that the country's government imposed from 1948 until the early 1990s. Nigeria was one of the leading sponsors of anti-apartheid movements during this time. Nigeria was one of the main proponents of the establishment of a democratic, multiracial South Africa during this time, as well as the end of apartheid, among the international world.¹² Nigeria actively backed the African National Congress (ANC), the primary liberation organization in South Africa, which helped in the fight against apartheid.

Moreover, despite the numerous difficulties it encountered, the ANC received financial and material support from the Nigerian government, enabling it to carry on its fight against apartheid. Additionally, Nigeria supported other anti-apartheid organizations in the area, including the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).¹³ When Nigeria was one of the first nations to implement economic penalties against South Africa, its role in the fight against apartheid was further solidified. Nigeria suspended all

⁸ Ian Taylor, "China's Foreign Policy towards Africa in the 1990s," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 443–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X98002857>.

⁹ Kelechi Johnmary Ani and Lere Amusan, "ECOWAS, Peace and Conflict Management in West Africa," *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 1/2 (2016): 19–32.

¹⁰ Ani and Amusan.

¹¹ Abubakar Mohammed Sambo, Muhammad Fuad Othman, and Rusdi Omar, "Liberia's Post-1990 Ecomog Incursion: An Assessment of Anglophone – Francophone Dichotomy," *Journal of International Studies (Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia)* 13, no. Journal Article (2017): 47–65, <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2017.13.4>.

¹² Sambo, Othman, and Omar.

¹³ Ani and Amusan, "ECOWAS, Peace and Conflict Management in West Africa."

imports of South African products and recalled its ambassador from South Africa in 1985 as a show of opposition to the apartheid government. Through increased international pressure and more isolation of the South African government, apartheid was eventually abolished.

Nigeria's Influence in the African Union

Since the founding of the African Union (AU) in 2002, Nigeria has had a tremendous impact on the continent. The 55-member AU is a continental organization whose mission is to advance social, political, and economic unity throughout Africa. Nigeria has been a founding member of the AU and has been instrumental in establishing the organization's aims and policies. Nigeria has had an impact on the AU through its support of its programs and policies.¹⁴ Nigeria has been a vocal supporter of the African Union's Agenda 2063, a long-term development strategy for the continent with the objectives of fostering economic growth, reducing poverty, and enhancing social development. Nigeria's influence on the AU is a result of its leadership position within it. Nigeria has served in a number of important roles in the AU, notably as its chairman in 2004 and 2014.¹⁵ Nigeria took the lead in promoting greater economic integration among African countries, fostering security and peace, and advancing African rights on a global scale while it held the chairperson. Nigeria has also been crucial in helping the AU with finances and logistics. The African Union's Peace and Security Fund, which provides funding for peacekeeping missions and projects aimed at preventing conflicts throughout the continent, has received a sizable contribution from Nigeria. Aside from hosting the AU's Standby Force training facility in Abuja, Nigeria has also assisted AU missions with logistical support.

Chinese Growing Influence in Africa

China's influence in Africa has risen rapidly in recent years and is now approaching American levels on a daily basis. China's growing interest in Africa is motivated by both its need for natural resources and its desire to strengthen its global political and economic power. Compared to the United States of America, which invested \$55 billion in Africa, China has emerged as the continent's greatest commercial partner, with trade between the two countries reaching about \$200 billion in 2019.¹⁶ With Chinese businesses constructing infrastructure including roads, trains, and ports, China's investment in Africa has increased dramatically as its partnership with Africa grows rapidly. China has also promoted the interests of African nations through its diplomatic clout in the continent. This has meant defending African nations on the global stage, such as by vetoing UN resolutions that condemn African nations. In order to help African leaders, solidify their authority, African countries have backed China's vetoing for human rights abuses in China. China has also backed them and given them financial backing. As an illustration, China has contributed financially to Zimbabwe, a nation that has experienced economic hardship and international sanctions.¹⁷ In 2017, China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, which is regarded as a significant development in China's military participation

¹⁴ Ani and Amusan.

¹⁵ Ani and Amusan.

¹⁶ Taylor, "China's Foreign Policy towards Africa in the 1990s."

¹⁷ Dominic Maphaka and Kgothatso B. Shai, "South Africa in China's Foreign Policy towards Africa: An Afrocentric Analysis," *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2021): 187–201, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2021/v8n3a9>.

in Africa. Sudan, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe are among the African nations for which China has offered military weaponry and training.

The Impact of Nigeria and Relations

The relationship between Nigeria and the United States is crucial for the stability and advancement of the African continent as well as for the two individual nations. Nigeria has established itself as a powerful and prominent voice in African politics, and the United States may benefit from the alliance and further its objectives on the continent.¹⁸ Many nations are concerned about the growing influence of China in Africa, and the United States needs a powerful ally like Nigeria to offset this impact. Nigeria is an appealing partner for the United States since it is the most populous nation in Africa and has a strong economy. Together, the two nations can advance security, prosperity, and good governance in the area.

There are other areas where the cooperation between Nigeria and the United States can be strengthened, in addition to offering security, education, and trade. For instance, more cooperation is required in the fields of technology, infrastructure, and energy.¹⁹ The United States may use its knowledge in these fields to aid Nigeria's growth and open doors for American companies there. And finally, fostering stability, economic growth, and peace in Africa requires a better relationship between Nigeria and the United States. There is possibility for even more cooperation between the two nations in the years to come. The two nations have a long history of cooperating on a variety of topics.

Conclusion

The relationship between Nigeria and the United States is multifaceted, with collaboration in various areas such as security, education, trade, and others. Nigeria's influence and leadership in Africa make it an important partner for the United States, particularly as the U.S. seeks to counteract the growing influence of China on the continent. A strong partnership between the two countries can help to promote good governance, economic development, and security in the region. While there are challenges to be addressed, such as human rights abuses and corruption, the two countries have a long history of working together to address these issues and strengthen their partnership. As such, it is important for both countries to continue to invest in this relationship and work together to achieve a brighter and more hopeful future for the United States, Nigeria, and the African continent.

¹⁸ Atsiya and Tenuche, "Nigeria-China Economic Relations and Development in Africa, 2006-2016."

¹⁹ Allen, "United States Foreign Policy in Africa."

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