

**NIGERIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, 1960—1983**

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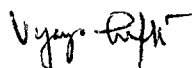
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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the dissertation entitled  
"Nigeria's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1960-1983"  
submitted by Mr. Manoj Kumar in partial fulfilment for  
the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy has  
not been previously submitted for any other degree of  
this or any other University. To the best of our  
knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend this dissertation to be placed  
before the examiners for evaluation.

  
(VIJAY GUPTA)  
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Dedicated  
To  
The Freedom Fighters  
Of  
South Africa And Namibia

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## PREFACE

The present work is an attempt to examine Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union from 1960 to 1983. The study is based on a discussion of the various trends in chronological order regarding foreign policy options of the Nigerian freedom fighters during the days of national struggle for independence. Efforts have been made to trace the origin and growth of Nigeria's foreign policy options with regard to the anti-imperialist forces especially the Soviet Union, in historical perspective. How far the continuity in Nigeria's foreign policy options vis-a-vis the Soviet Union has influenced the shaping of relations between the two countries in the post-independence era, what were the reactions and responses of the two countries towards developing friendly relations; answers to such questions have also been attempted.

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy upto and around the period of independence. Besides it, constitutional development of Nigeria since independence, the Soviet and Nigerian attitude and stand on the question of the Ibo's demand for the right to self-determination as well as Nigeria's relations with the great powers, have also been discussed in order to give

a broad perspective to the study.

The second chapter deals with the Nigerian efforts and the Soviet response towards developing relations with each other as well as the nature and extent of relationship between the two countries during Sir Abubakar's regime (1960-66).

The third chapter analyses the background of the civil war 1967-70, and the role of the Soviet Union.

The fourth chapter deals with Nigeria-Soviet relations during 1970-79 which coincides with the post-war regimes of General Gowon, General Murtala Muhammed and Obusegun Obasanjo.

In the fifth chapter, critical analysis has been made of Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union during the rule of Shehu Shagari's civilian government (1979-83), when the issues such as the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and Moscow Olympic games' boycott dominated the international political scene.

The sixth and the last chapter deals with a comparative study of Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union under the different Nigerian regimes, and finally arrives at some major conclusions.

In the present study of the Nigerian relations under the different successive regimes with the Soviet

Union various issues have been analysed objectively taking into consideration numerous view-points. Utmost care has been taken to maintain academic objectivity in evaluating and analysing the issues. Collecting material for this dissertation was not an easy task. Though books on Nigeria are in abundance, the same cannot be said about the books regarding Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union. The study is based mainly on secondary sources because very limited materials from primary sources are available. Secondary sources include, apart from books, clippings of both Indian and foreign newspapers, magazines and journals.


It is only befitting that I should express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Vijay Gupta, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement that enabled me to complete the work. To the staff members of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, ICWA Library, Delhi University Library, Parliament Library, AICC Library, Nehru Memorial Library, Ministry of External Affairs Library, USSR Cultural and Information Centre and Nigerian High Commission, I owe a debt of gratitude.

I am also grateful to Mr. Rabindra, Mr. Anil, Mr. Surya Narayan and Mr. Sanjay Kathiha for their help and cooperation in completing this work.



And finally, I would like to thank my wife Mrs. Kiran and brother Jay Krishna for their troubles and tribulations during my research work.

Any shortcomings which may have been there inspite of my best efforts are entirely mine.

  
(MANOJ KUMAR) 6-9-88

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will deal with Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union. The period of study will be from 1960 to 1983. In order to analyse and study the origin and growth of Nigeria's relations with the socialist countries, we have to go into the details of the Nigerian freedom struggle during which Nigerian nationalists came in contact with the Socialists and Marxists. Until 1962, i.e. two years after independence Nigeria had no official relations with the socialist countries and was represented diplomatically by Britain. This was the continuation of the pre-colonial policy since the Britishers were determining the foreign relations of Nigeria keeping their own economic and strategic interests in view. This was also the period when the attitude of the colonialists was hostile towards the Soviet Union. They were totally against the Nigerians involvement in establishing any contact with the Soviet Union and seeking any help from her for their national liberation movement. They suspected that the Soviet Union was providing help to anti-colonialist forces who were struggling for the Nigerian independence. Colonial government imposed ban on (any) travelling by the Nigerian citizens to the Soviet Union and denied passports to them. Those suspected of relations with the communists outside Nigeria and of being active in communist activities were

harassed, tortured and dismissed from jobs. Import of any literature produced by organizations suspected of having links with the communists was banned.<sup>1</sup> Through these bans the government saw to it that the opportunities for direct contacts for the Nigerians with the Soviet Union were extremely limited. Despite these bans the nationalists succeeded in establishing contacts with the Soviet Union through various channels. The prominent channels were West African students abroad,<sup>2</sup>

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1. There were several occasions when nationalists were tortured since 1930s. In 1933, Wallace Johnson was deported and Negro Worker (Paris) was banned. In 1939, Red Army Club members were tortured. In 1949-50 Zikists were tortured. This became more intense after July 1954 when the Nigerian government issued important order prohibiting import of communist literature from abroad, including various trade union publications. A few months later the federal and regional governments went further and (following the example of the Gold Coast) barred 'active communists' from all key departments in public service - administration, education, labour, police, communications and the like. This was done as a counterstep to the infiltration of communism into countries 'on the threshold of self-government! The Times (London), 14 October 1954, quoted in John Gunther, Inside Africa (London, 1955), p. 756.

2. West African students were going to Britain and America in search of education and employment. After first world war they became politically conscious and started anti-colonial and anti-racial activities. In 1924 they formed in London the Nigerian Progress Union which in 1925 was replaced by the West African Students Union (W.A.S.U.). In America also West African students formed African Students Association of the United States and Canada in 1941.

freedom fighters and trade unionists on the West African coast. The persons who came under the influence of socialist ideas forged unity with other anti-colonial forces and fought against the British colonialists.

The British were forced to grant independence to Nigeria in October 1960. But while doing so they handed it over to those elements who were ideologically anti-socialist and biased against the Soviet Union.

#### THE NIGERIAN PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN RELATIONS DURING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Among the Nigerians there were lots of differences on the question of formulation of the foreign policy. While some favoured continuation of the closer relationship with the former colonial powers, the others wanted contacts to be established with the socialist countries. There were some political parties and organizations who proposed equidistance theory for relations between the socialists and the western powers. Some called it a policy of non-alignment or neutrality.

The first group of those who were in favour of continuing relations with the western powers was led by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group. In matters of foreign policy they openly proclaimed their intention of adopting West-oriented postures. During the freedom struggle they came out openly in favour of continuing

close association with Britain and other Western powers. They even denounced neutralism and called it immoral. The stand of favouring western powers in their foreign policy orientation is clear from the statement of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Action Group. He said,

"Neutrality as a basis of foreign policy of certain nations, is no more and no less than the projection, conscious or unconscious, of the deep-seated prejudices which those nations have had towards some of the countries of the Western democracies". (3)

Awolowo preached that "in our foreign policy we should take an honest and firm stand and it should not be neutral". He warned that, to woo both East and West for financial and technical assistance, is a tactics "both disreputable and dangemous", and "acts of double-dealing -- whether diplomatic or otherwise -- never pay in the end".<sup>4</sup>

Similar stand was also taken by the NPC, later an ally of the Action Group, during the national movement. The NPC's manifesto stated that its foreign policy would be based upon principles as well as national interest and, therefore, neutralism must be rooted out. "It is to

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3 Obafemi Awolowo, Awo: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Cambridge, 1961), p. 310.

4 Ibid., p. 311.

those countries whose policies are animated by the same beliefs as her own that Nigeria must look for real friendship and support", said the NPC, "for this reason, over and above, her membership in the Commonwealth, Nigeria must maintain the closest relationship with the United Kingdom".<sup>5</sup>

Thus, it is clear that these parties were opposed to neutrality and from their attacks on Marxists/socialists/communists<sup>6</sup>, one can conclude that they opposed relationship with the socialist countries.

The second group consisted of radical political organisations and groups like Leftist Group of West African Students Union (WASU), Red Army Club, Northern Elements Progressive Association (NEPA), Zikist Movement (later renamed as Freedom Movement), Nigerian Labour Party, and some other small radical groups as well as leftist trade unions like Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and

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5 NPC, "Election Manifesto", see in Frederick A.O. Schwarz Jr., Nigeria: The Tribes, the Nation, or the Race - The Politics of Independence (Mass., 1965), p. 105.

6 Awolowo said, There are two distinct ideological camps in the world today; the Western democracies and the communist bloc. For reasons which I will presently give, my preference is unhesitatingly and unequivocally for the Western democracies ... If you did (criticisms) likewise behind the iron curtain you would not live to fight another day. Obafemi Awolowo, op. cit., p. 309.

the Zikists. These organizations took the following position on the issue of foreign relations:

- that anti-colonial forces including socialist countries should be regarded as the friends of Nigerian Freedom Movement;
- their support should be sought for the liberation of Nigeria from the British colonial rule;
- in case Britain was delaying the grant of independence, the Nigerians should launch an armed struggle.

The WASU members active in Britain declared their objective "to promote goodwill and understanding between Africans and other races".<sup>7</sup> They developed contacts with the communist and pro-communist frontline organizations, which were opposed to colonial rule and helping the nationalist forces in liberating their motherland, such as the Communist International, the International Union of Students in Prague, the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Budespest (Budapest) The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the Profitem, League

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7 WASU Manifesto, in Lodipo Solanke, United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations (London, 1927). See in, James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958), p. 204.

against Imperialism and the Colonial Bureau of the Fabian Society in London, the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism, the Negro Labour Victory Committee, the Council on African Affairs (New York) and other leftist organizations. Through these anti-colonialist organizations the West African students developed relations with the Soviet Union and some of them also undertook visits to Moscow in connection with political activities. The left-oriented student activists always favoured developing closer relations with the anti-imperialist forces and the socialist countries.

Similarly, the Red Army Club, showed its inclination towards closer relationship with the Soviet Union. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Red Army of the Soviet Union it sent a cable to the Soviet leaders hoping closer relationship between the youth of Nigeria and the USSR.<sup>8</sup>

A noticeable growth of radical elements took place in <sup>the</sup> Nigerian politics during 1940s. A number of organizations and groups were formed by them. This coincided with the victory of the Soviet Union over fascism. In 1944 a political party called "National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons" (NCNC) was formed to fight for self rule. A section of this party organised itself as NEFA in 1945 and demanded from the NCNA leadership to develop close links

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<sup>8</sup> Daily Service (Lagos), 1 March, 1943. See in James S. Coleman, op. cit., p. 249.



with the Soviet Union. It sought help from all anti-colonial forces to liberate Nigeria through an armed struggle from the grip of alien rule. In 1946, another radical group in NCNC emerged as its youth wing in the name of 'Zikist Movement'. They openly sought the support of <sup>The</sup> Soviet Union and gave a call for revolution. Some of the Zikists openly favoured revolutionary path to liberate Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> When the influence of radicals increased in NCNC after joining of the Nigerian Trade Union Congress and expanding of the Zikist movement, the NCNC leadership showed its reluctance on the issue of developing relations with the Soviet Union and anti-colonial forces. It opposed the radicals' demands for revolution and closer relations with the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China with a view to overthrow colonial rule through violent means.

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9 In February 1949, the leader of the Zikist Movement H.R. Abdallah published in West African Pilot an appeal under the title "The Age of Positive Action", where he wrote among other things: "I hate Union Jack with all my heart because it divides the people wherever it goes .... It is a symbol of exploitation, ... brutality .... We have passed the age of petition ... the age of resolution ... the age of diplomacy .... This is the age of action - plain blunt and positive action". Endre' Sik, The History of Black Africa, vol. 3, (Budapest: 1974), p. 200. Another Zikist argued, "If we tell the Governor to come down, he will not, we must drag him down and take over". West African Pilot (Lagos), See in James S Coleman, op. cit., p. 298.

The colonialists were totally against the radicals' pro-socialist postures and imposed ban on the Zikist movement, and dealt severely with it. Even then the Zikists revived their movement in 1950 in the name of "Freedom Movement" - and again took the same line on relations with the socialist countries, but it favoured non-violent path.<sup>10</sup>

The third group of political parties and organisations were in favour of developing a neutral foreign relations with either communist countries or western countries. This group was represented by NCNC, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), United Independence Party and other like-minded organizations. These organizations were not opposed to Nigeria's relations with the western countries. They rather favoured the status quo. In this group there were minor differences on the question of neutrality. The NCNC and its ally, NEPU, though opposed to communism as a way of life, saw an advantage in increasing contact with the communist bloc. In their programme they did not emphasize neutrality - but favoured independent non-alignment to ensure that Nigeria does not

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10 It aimed at the destruction of all forms of imperialism and the establishment of a free Socialist Republic of Nigeria fighting in and out of Parliament employing non-violent revolutionary tactics. James S. Coleman, op. cit., pp. 301-302.

follow any nation or group of nations blindly.<sup>11</sup>

The NCNC deplored the parties and groups that favoured closer alliance with the western powers. Attacking the Action Group, the NCNC leader Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe said that 'the policy of favouring west can violate the integrity of the nation'.<sup>12</sup>

#### Agreement on Fundamental Issues

While these differences existed on the question of friendship with the Soviet Union and western powers, there was an agreement among the nationalists on the two fundamental issues, i.e., opposition to colonialism and racism and unity of the Africans in the context of Pan-Africanism.

#### Objective Conditions

At the time of Nigerian independence all the above mentioned fundamental issues were dominating the world scene. Not only anti-colonialist struggle was going on in various countries but the struggles against racial domination of the Whites over the Blacks, particularly

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11 NCNC - NEPU, "Joint Election Manifesto", Daily Times (Lagos), October 5, 6, 7 and 9, 1959 - Foreign Policy on October 8 at p. 10; "The policy paper of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons", "Foreign Policy", Daily Times, October 23, 1959, pp. 9, 10, 11, See in Frederick A.O. Schwarz, op. cit., pp. 105-106, 256-257.

12 Daily Times (advertisement), 10 December 1959, p. 7. See in Frederick A.O. Schwarz, *ibid.*, p. 106.

in the white settlement colonies of Africa, were also becoming increasingly intense.

Simultaneously the demand for unity of African races and various ethnic groups at the domestic and continental (Africa) level was being pressed. Colonialists were interested to practice the 'divide and rule' policy in all colonies with an intention to delay the process of decolonisation. Even in Nigeria the British colonialists were not only active in dividing the various tribes and ethnic groups with a view to further delay the granting of independence but also in plundering of natural resources. The Africans all over the continent had realized the importance of their unity and given to it a practical political and ideological shape through Pan-Africanism in their struggle against colonialism and racialism.

Hence, on the questions of racism, colonialism and the unity of Africa, there was a wider agreement among the above referred groups of the Nigerians. This agreement continued even after the independence and the Nigerian leadership adopted a foreign policy which took into account the above mentioned fundamental principles.

## NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY OPTIONS ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

In Nigeria the issue of foreign relations particularly with the socialist countries around the time of independence was a matter of disagreement among the political leaders. This was due to the fact that there were differing forces which were instrumental in the formulation of the Nigerian foreign policy. They differed on the question of the character and nature of anti-colonialist struggle and friendship with the anti-colonial forces, particularly the socialist countries. This was because of the deep impact of western ideas in the formulation of policy towards the Soviet Union. Changes in these policies started emerging with the growth of the non-aligned movement and Pan-Africanism.

All these had tremendous influence on the Nigerian foreign policy formulation. At the same time there were several domestic pressures and compulsions which were taken into consideration to determine the priorities in foreign relations. Leftist forces in the country started demanding a neutral foreign policy and raised their voice for developing relations with the socialist countries. Nigeria's external economic relations, which were confined to the European Economic Community and other western markets, needed some new markets for its diversification

and development. The falling prices of Nigerian exports and the growing inflationary pressure made this necessity more intense. Nigeria, therefore, reconsidered her stand on the question of developing relations with the socialist countries, particularly with the Soviet Union. It was thought that a new political economic and cultural relations should be established with the latter. However, it was stated by the Prime Minister Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa that Nigeria would continue to follow the path of non-alignment. Speaking this he said to the Nigerian House of Representatives on the eve of independence,

"... we should not blindly follow the lead of any one; so far as is possible, the policy on each occasion will be selected with a proper independent objectivity in Nigeria's national interest: we consider it wrong for the Federal Government to associate itself as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs". (13)

A similar statement was made by Balewa in a Press Conference on 23 September 1960 in Lagos in which he said, "Nigeria wanted to pursue a neutral and flexible foreign policy between East and West, to have a free hand to follow an external policy advantageous to Nigeria".<sup>14</sup>

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13 Nigeria, House of Representatives Debates, henceforth HRD, 20 August 1960, col. 2670. See in Douglas G. Anglin, "Nigeria: Political Non-alignment and Economic Alignment", Journal of Modern African Studies (London), vol. 2, no. 2, 1964, p. 247.

14 André Sik, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

Another significant pronouncement about the foreign policy was made by Balewa in the UN General Assembly on the occasion of Nigeria's admission into U.N. He said:

... firstly, it is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all nations and to participate actively in the work of the United Nations Organization. Secondly, Nigeria, a large and populous country of over 35 millions, has absolutely no territorial or expansionist intentions. Thirdly, we shall not forget our old friends, and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Commonwealth. But nevertheless we do not intend to ally ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the Power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the United Nations is founded. Fourthly, Nigeria hopes to work with other African states for the progress of Africa and to assist in bringing all African territories to a state of responsible independence. (15)

Balewa's above pronouncements were of great significance in so far as it outlined the basic principles on which Nigeria's foreign policy was to rest in the years to come. These principles of Nigeria's foreign policy were further elaborated and extended by Balewa and found their outlet in the shape of various speeches and pronouncements. By piecing together these pronouncements of Balewa and of other leaders, we can form a fairly good idea about the main features of Nigeria's foreign policy.

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15 United Nations General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, 893rd Plenary Meeting, col. 173, 7 October 1960.

### Basic Principles of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Following became the basics of the declared foreign policy of Nigeria -

- Belief in the sovereignty and independence of all countries, large or small;
- Commitment to the cause of African liberation and progress, i.e., anti-colonialism, anti-racism and anti-neo-colonialism;
- Commitment to non-alignment;
- Faith in the United Nations and other international organizations to which it belongs;
- Intimate relations with the Commonwealth.

While declared policy preached non-alignment, Nigeria entered into a defence agreement with Britain. The agreement was known as the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement.<sup>16</sup>

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16 This agreement was signed by the Nigerian Prime Minister Sir Abubakar and all three region's Premiers with the British Government in 1958. The main provisions of the draft agreement and the initialling of the document by the Nigerian leaders were kept secret until early 1960 when it was disclosed by the Zikists and later by Awolowo himself. It was concluded by the Britishers to keep Nigeria under western military bloc and to safeguard their geo-political and economic interests in Nigeria. Although Nigerian Defence Minister Alhaji Muhammadu Ribadu viewed it as a "reaffirmation of the friendly and cordial ties which already exist and are known to exist between Nigeria and the United Kingdom" /sic/. HRD, 1 November, 1960, p. 60. See in Gordon J. Idang, "The Politics of Nigerian Foreign Policy: The Ratification and Renunciation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement", African Studies Review (Michigan, USA), vol. 13, no. 2, September 1970, p. 233.



The Defence Agreement was a direct negation of the policy of neutrality and as such the compromise with the sovereignty of Nigeria. The Nigerian foreign policy became an appendage to the British interests, and thereby dependent on the outside sources, because of its domestic compulsions. The Nigerian foreign policy, particularly its relations with the Soviet Union, had roots in anti-Sovietism and Pro-Westernism.

The wave of anti-colonialism and anti-racism as well as the deteriorating condition of the Nigerian economy were some of the bases on which a strong superstructure of Nigeria-Soviet relations could have found their way easily. But the domestic problems of a nascent nation, which was still reeling under the fear of colonial destabilization of its unity and integrity, compelled Nigeria to adopt a non-aligned foreign policy and at the same time to enter into a defence agreement with Britain. This was a deviation from the stated foreign policy ideals.

#### FOREIGN POLICY IMMEDIATELY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Though Nigeria adopted the basic principles of her foreign policy in terms of non-alignment and promised to treat all the countries equally irrespective of their ideologies, in practice these principles did not correspond

to the reality with regard to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Nigeria was initially reluctant in establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviets and even refused to accept low-interest economic aid from them. The argument put forward was that Nigeria had to work with the old friends.

The Nigerian perception of the Soviet Union was far from flattering at the time of independence. Initially Nigeria was reluctant to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the Soviet Union. This was due to the fact that in the pre-independence period a section of the Nigerian leadership which later came into power was highly suspicious of the Soviet intentions. All evidences indicate that some Nigerian leaders, like some of their counterparts in other developing countries, had a 'fear of communism and communist infiltration and subversion'.<sup>17</sup> In the beginning, therefore, they were wary about establishing relations with the Soviet Union. Senior government ministers/officials made no effort to conceal this fact.

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17 Even after the independence some leaders were propagating that the Nigerian government was going to be overthrown by the Communists. For instance, in July 1961 E.G. Okotie - Eboh, the Finance Minister pointed to plans for the assassination of the Nigerian leaders as a prelude to a Communist take over by 1964. It is notable that he gave no proof of this move. HRD, 23 November 1960, col. 165 and 18 April 1961, col. 663. Olatunde J.B. Ojo, "Nigeria-Soviet Relations: Retrospect and Prospect", African Studies Review, vol. 19, no. 3, 1976, p. 61.

This is reflected in the statement of the Prime Minister Balewa itself, who said,

"I and my colleagues were determined that, while we are responsible for the government of the federation of Nigeria and for the welfare of its people we shall use every means in our power to prevent the infiltration of communism and communist ideas into Nigeria".(18)

This fear and distrust stemmed from Nigeria's insecurity born out of institutional and military weaknesses. These were compounded by western tutelage and propaganda. It was felt that Nigeria's liberal democratic ideology as well as its political independence might be endangered because of her relations with the Soviets. The Soviet Union was portrayed as a country in the grip of dictatorship contemptuous of all human freedoms and opposed to any form of religion. The Nigerians were made to believe that since the Soviet presence in Lagos would be harmful to the national interest, the only feasible alternative was to draw close to the West and scorn any approach from Moscow.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Sam Epelle, ed., Nigeria Speaks: Speeches of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Lagos, 1964), p. 10.

19 Oya Ogunbadejo, "Ideology and Pragmatism: The Soviet Role in Nigeria, 1960-1977", Orbis (Pennsylvania), vol. 21, no. 4, Winter 1978, p. 806.

So, the Nigerian leadership was hesitant in taking steps towards the development of relations with the Soviet Union and turned down the Soviet diplomatic as well as economic offers. This morbid perception of Nigeria against the Soviet Union changed within a short span of time and then Nigeria began to take positive steps towards the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union on its part was aware of Nigeria's close links with the west, particularly with the Commonwealth and Britain. Nigeria had defence agreement with Britain. This linked her with the western military camp. The Soviet Union did not make any overtures to win over Nigeria due to the latter's western linkages. This situation continued to be so till 1962 when, in a new reassessment, the Soviet Union accepted Nigeria as genuinely "seeking independent development and non-aligned foreign policy". These changes were influenced by several factors viz., the recommendations of All Nigeria People's Conference,<sup>20</sup> the establishment of diplomatic relations

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<sup>20</sup> It was convened in April 1961 to discuss among other things the foreign policy of Nigeria. It highlighted the weaknesses of the Nigerian foreign policy. It found discrimination against the Soviet Union in the government's stated non-aligned foreign policy. It recommended to the Nigerian government to remove ban from Soviet Embassy officials in Lagos and restrictions on passports to the Soviet Union, to invite Khrushchev to Nigeria as well as to develop friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

with the Soviet Union, the abrogation of the defence agreement with Britain, etc.<sup>21</sup>

#### POST INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENT

Nigeria attained independence on 1 October 1960 and remained a federation composed of three regions namely, North, West and East, and the federal territory of Lagos. As formed by the British colonialists the northern region, in terms of area and population (Table 1) was larger than the total of all other regions. The northern region, therefore, was in a dominating position in the federal set up of the country. This dominating character of the federation by one region was a threat to and violation of the basic principles of the federation.<sup>22</sup> This became the most important factor responsible for the constitutional breakdown within six years after independence - when the first civilian government led by the Prime Minister Balewa (who was from the Northern region) was overthrown in a coup d' etat and the military came into power. The new military junta led by Major-General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi (an Ibo from the Eastern region)

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21 It was abrogated in January 1962 by the Nigerian government.

22 According to K.C. Wheare it is undesirable that one or two units (in a federation) should be so powerful that they can overrule the others and bend the will of the federal government to itself .... There must be some sort of reasonable balance which will ensure that all the units can maintain their independence within the sphere allotted to them and that no one can dominate the others. K.C. Wheare, Federal Government (London, 1959), p. 52.

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Table 1

Population of Nigeria by Region, 1960

Region	Area in sq. miles	Population	Percentage of national population
North	2,81,782	1,91,00,000	56%
East	29,484	80,00,000	23%
West	45,798	70,00,000	20%
Federal Territory of Lagos	27	3,50,000	0.9%
		27,000 (non-African)	0.1%
Total	3,58,091	3,34,77,100	100.0%



TH-2787

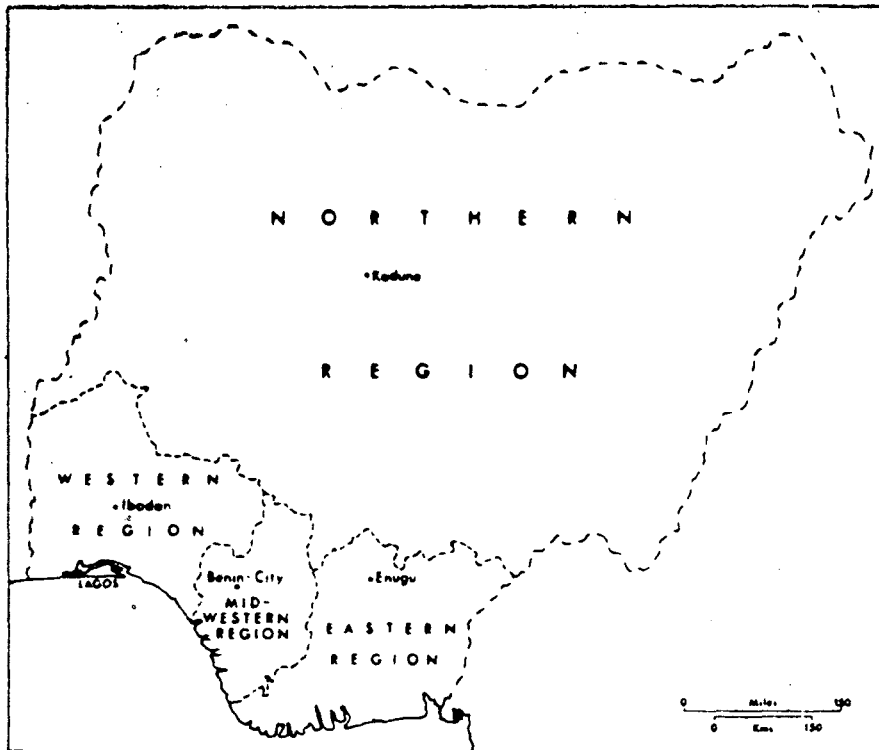
Source: Nigeria Year Book (Lagos: Times Press, 1961), p. 15.

replaced the hitherto existing federal structure by unitary system. Under a unification decree on 24 May 1966, all the four regions were abolished and replaced by a group of states.<sup>23</sup> This was strongly opposed by

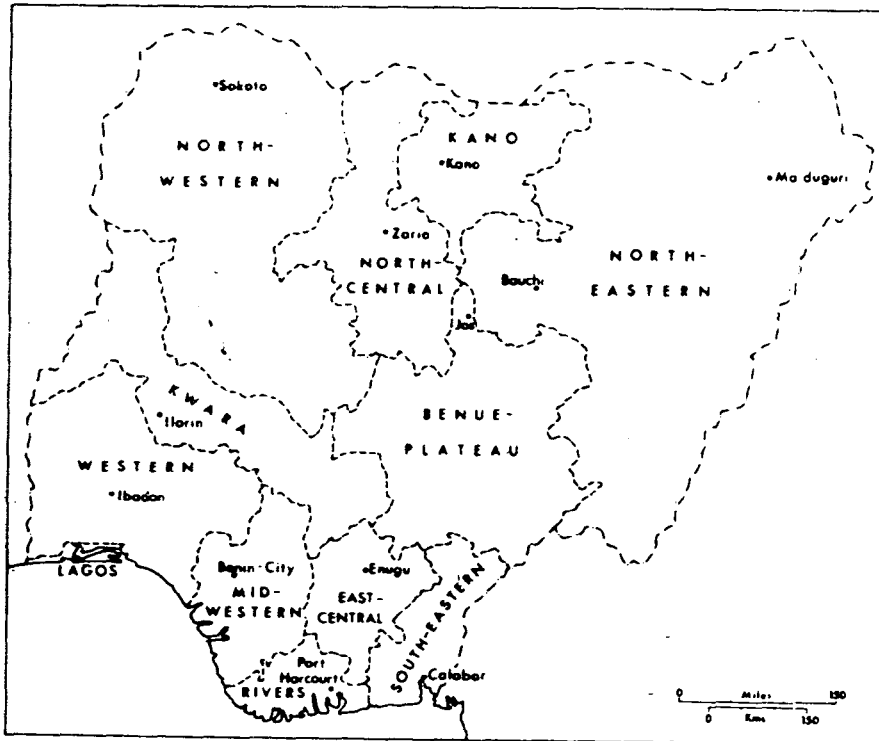
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23 Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution (suspension and modification) No. 5. Decree, May 1966, Official Gazette, No. 51, vol. 53, 24 May 1966.



Map 1. Nigeria as a federation of four Regions, 1966



Map 2. Nigeria as a federation of twelve States, 1967

Source : S.K. PANTER-BRICK, Nigerian politics and Military rule : Prelude to the civil war (London , 1971) p.x

the Northerners and caused riots in the Northern region killing thousands of people mainly Easterners.<sup>24</sup> The law and order situation became grave and ultimately General Ironsi was killed in a counter-military coup in July 1966. The new military ruler Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon, a Northerner, came into power and in September 1966 reinstated the federal system as had existed before 24 May 1966 by abrogating the unification Decree of Ironsi.<sup>25</sup>

This new move was opposed by Lt. Col. Chukwuemeke Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military Governor of the Eastern region (an Ibo) and rejected the latest constitutional change. He advocated unitary system as the best substitute to cure ethnic strife and to resolve the constitutional crisis in Nigeria. But this was not conceded by General Gowon. Indeed, he tried to resolve the constitutional deadlock and had a meeting with the leaders of Eastern

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24 There are different figures about the number of people (mostly Easterners) killed in the riot. Colin Legum wrote 55,000 (see in Colin Legum, "The Tragedy in Nigeria", Africa Report (New York), vol. II, no. 8, November 1966, p. 24), while British Government gave the figure of 7,000 in 1969, Biafran leaders during the war said more than fifty thousands were killed.

25 Federal Government of Nigeria, Decree, No. 59, Supplement to official Gazette Extraordinary no. 85, vol. 53, 1st September, 1966, Lagos.



region at Aburi.<sup>26</sup> This resulted into an agreement to solve the constitutional crisis, but it proved fruitless. This was because General Gowon later refused to accept the Declaration made at Aburi. The Ibo leaders of the Eastern region regarded it a betrayal and an insult. When their efforts for a unitary set up was turned down they decided to secede from the Federation of Nigeria. General Gowon was not in favour of any disintegration of the country. He tried to resolve the constitutional problem by peaceful means. In this direction, on 27 May 1967, he issued a decree which divided Nigeria into twelve states.<sup>27</sup>

Curiously Eastern region rejected the creation of the new Decree, when in the past this was always the most vocal demand of the Easterners. By that time, they

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- 26 Aburi, a place in Ghana, was chosen as the venue of talks by the military Governor of the Eastern region and Federal Government to discuss the constitutional crisis. The meeting was held in January 1967 and the two groups agreed to form a new constitution. The agreement had envisaged a loose federation bordering on a confederation as an interim arrangement for Nigeria. The military Government later backed away from this apparently on second thoughts.
- 27 Federal Republic of Nigeria, The Constitution (Repeal and Restoration) Decree 1967, No. 13, supplement to official Gazette Extraordinary No. 37, vol. 54, May 27, 1967; under this decree out of twelve states, six were proposed in the Northern region and three in the Eastern region; western region and mid-western region remain untouched; the colony province of western region and Lagos was to be made a new Lagos State.

had begun to think in terms of self-determination of the Ibos to get rid of Northern hegemony and their ensuing atrocities on the Ibos. Unilaterally<sup>28</sup> on 30 May 1967 Lt. Col. Ojukwu announced, after a meeting with the Ibo Consultative Committee at Enugu, the secession of Ibo-dominated Eastern region from rest of Nigeria and formed a new nation named as the 'Republic of Biafra'.

To deal with the secessionist move of the Eastern region Federal Military Government (FMG) sent troops to the Eastern region. Subsequently, a civil war broke out in Nigeria which ended in January 1970.

During the course of civil war a new twelve state structure for Nigeria was proposed by the F.M.G. to replace the four regions, and in April 1968 it came into existence. After the war it was accepted by the Eastern region also. In the coming years this new constitutional arrangement continued to exist. In March 1976 the FMG under Murtala Muhammed redivided some States and created seven more States within the constitutional framework. This nineteen State structure is still continuing.

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28 On 27 May 1967 Eastern Region's Assembly unanimously passed a resolution which empowered Col. Ojukwu to declare Biafra as a sovereign Republic at an early practicable date.

**NIGERIA** : as a federation of nineteen States, 1987



Source : Countries of The World and their leaders yearbook 1987  
V.2. Gale Research Co. U.S.A. p.914

## RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION AND BIAFRA QUESTION

During the Nigerian civil war the question of national self-determination of Biafra became a debatable point. While Tanzania and some of the western powers recognized the problem as that of self-determination, the Soviet Union did not. Instead, the Soviet Union supported a united Nigeria. In fact, the western press and the Biafra supporters condemned this move of the Soviet Union as against the Lenin's conception of the nationality's right to self-determination.

The Soviet stand on this very issue was clear from the very beginning. Soviet ideologues analysed the Biafra problem in the light of Lenin's ideas based on class. Kudryavtsev, a Soviet writer, writing in an article in Izvestia, a Soviet government paper, entitled "Test of Africa's Maturity"<sup>29</sup> used the class-criterion to explain why Biafra could not be considered for the right to self-determination. He referred Lenin as saying, "the principle of self-determination of nations to the point of secession is not absolute, and it is wrong to consider that it is to be applied in any circumstances. No, it is subject to the tasks of class-struggle and social liberation".

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29 Izvestia (Moscow), 11 October 1968, see in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 814.

This statement was quoted to the effect that each case must be considered in the light of 'social development as a whole', and that for the benefit of the workers one must strive 'to form as large a state as possible' in the interest of 'merging' its nations. Kudryavtsev further said that Biafra was not going to be a genuine independent state, because it was not to follow the non-capitalist path of development. Instead the advocates of the Biafran independence expressed the will to drag Biafra on to the path of capitalist development.<sup>30</sup>

Keeping in view the above arguments it can be clearly said that Biafra secession was not a move to be justified on the basis of the Lenin's concept of national self-determination.

On the question of self-determination the FMG took a firm stand. The FMG defended the unity based on the Nigerian Federation. It rejected the demand of Col. Ojukwu, the Governor of the Eastern region to consider the Ibo dominated Eastern region as a separate nationality and accept it as an independent Republic. The FMG was of the opinion that right to self-determination for the Ibo people would be considered within the federal structure which should give guarantee of a united Nigeria. The

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30 Ibid.

Federal Government adhered to this stand till the end of war and ultimately protagonists of the Ibo cause also accepted it as the only solution to the nationality question.

#### NIGERIA AND THE GREAT POWERS

Nigeria after achieving independence in 1960 declared non-alignment as the basic principle of her foreign relations. The Balewa government made several efforts to develop friendship and cooperation with all the countries irrespective of their ideologies and political systems. This stated policy was given practical shape immediately after independence at least with regard to the great powers like the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union, China and others. But the nature and extent of relations differed with them in the coming years. That was evident due to clashes over national interests. In this context, Nigeria's relations with some of the major powers will be analysed to provide background to the present study.

##### Britain

Being a colony of the Great Britain for several decades, Nigeria was closely associated with the former in all spheres. She had inherited the colonial legacy as

developed by the Britishers to serve their vested economic and geo-political interests. The country was economically dependent on Britain and was associated through the latter under a defence agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) powers. The Nigerian leadership was pro-British in orientation and was serving the interests of Britain by maintaining relations of dependence. This continued till the first military coup of January 1966 when the Balewa government was overthrown and the military took over power.

Under the military rule Nigeria tried to reduce her dependency on Britain by diversifying her economic and political relations with the Socialist and Third World countries. Nigeria's relations with Britain got a serious setback in 1967 when Britain imposed restrictions on arms supply to Nigeria at the most critical hour. In this situation the head of the State General Gowon severely condemned the British stand and began to rethink over the relations between the two countries. Efforts were made to break relations of dependency by moving towards the Soviet Union. During the war when the Soviet Union came out openly with moral, material and military support in favour of the FMG to protect unity and integrity of the country, Britain viewed Nigeria going closer towards the Soviet Union and showed its long-term negative effects on her relations with Nigeria. In this situation the

British government reconsidered its earlier limitation on arms supply to save her face and unilaterally offered arms to Nigeria. The British Prime Minister Harold Wilson visited Nigeria in March 1969 with a view to demonstrate solidarity and support to the FMG and to restore cordiality with Nigeria by openly supporting the federal cause.

The Nigerian relations after the war again became cordial with Britain and it remained so over the years. In 1973 General Gowon visited Britain which further strengthened the bonds of friendship between the two countries. Over the issues of decolonization of Rhodesia and racial discrimination in South Africa, the Nigerian stand differed from that of the British. After the overthrow of General Gowon under the successive military and civilian leaders the Nigerian relations remained cordial with Britain and had no bilateral disputes. In 1981 President Shehu Shagari also visited Britain and relations became more friendly. On the whole, the general trend in Nigeria's ties with Britain showed that both had maintained closer economic and political relations and had differences over the issue of decolonization and racial discrimination. These differences had little adverse impact on their bilateral economic, trade and cultural relations.



United States of America

At the time of independence, Nigeria's relations with the United States were marked by cordiality and cooperation. The Balewa government provided more opportunities for the Americans to develop economic and political ties. The US aid and investment was playing major role in the Nigerian economy. On the global issues the Nigerian leadership also cooperated with the United States. The Balewa government supported American bombing in Vietnam and sided with the American government on the issue of Congo (Zaire). It granted America led NATO powers an exclusive concession for the use of a secret Radio frequency in certain parts of Nigeria. In early 1962 Nigeria extended her support to the Americans on their nuclear testing. On most of the Cold War issues it sided with the Americans and voted at the United Nations in favour of the western stand. This cordiality did not continue for long. After the change of the Balewa government in a coup in January 1966, the new military rulers tried to reduce the Nigerian dependence on America and opposed <sup>the</sup> United States vigorously for its stand on Southern African liberation and racial problem.

The Nigerian relations with the United States suffered in 1967 when on the issue of the Nigerian civil

war the latter refused to supply arms to the federal government and adopted a dubious neutrality by supporting on the one hand, Nigeria's unity and integrity and sovereignty, and by providing, on the other hand, all sorts of moral, material and military help to the Biafran secessionists with an intention to divide Nigeria. During the war period the Nigerian government accused the United States of indulging in double-dealing and interfering in the internal affairs of Nigeria.

In the post-war years Nigeria's relations with the United States again became cordial. But on the issues concerning Angola, Shaba (Zaire) crisis, South Africa, Namibia, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and the Middle East, both had serious differences. After the reinstatement of the civilian government in 1979 the Nigerian relations with the United States remained cordial. President Shehu Shagari visited the United States in October 1979 and economically Nigeria moved closer to the US, while on global issues the two countries had hostile relations. On the issue of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and consequently the US call for a boycott of Moscow Olympics in 1980, Nigeria condemned the United States for mixing politics with sports. The Nigerian leadership took a non-aligned stand on these issues and questioned the ethics of the American stand in regard to its role in South Africa, Angola and the Middle East.

It is notable that the two countries had no differences on any bilateral issue and maintained cordial relations in the economic field while differed on global issues.

### France

Nigeria had marginal relations with France in the early days of independence. Initially, the Balewa government was in favour of developing cordial relations with France and made efforts to promote trade and cultural ties. But on the issue of French nuclear testing in the Sahara, Nigeria became hostile towards France and ultimately broke off her diplomatic ties with the latter in 1961.

Relations between the two countries remained strained for a long time. Only after 1965, efforts were made from the Nigerian side towards normalization of relations with France. But no success was achieved in this direction till the Balewa government was in power.

Under the military government the Nigerian relations continued to deteriorate following the French support to Biafra secessionists which was intended to divide Nigeria. The Nigerian relations with France, therefore, became very hostile and continued to be so even after the civil war was over. This was because of the fact that for several years neither the Nigerian government nor the French government took any serious step towards restoration

of normal relations with each other. Only after 1975 relations between the two countries improved considerably and continued to be so under the civilian government (in Nigeria) and thereafter.

The Nigerian relations with other powers like West Germany, China and others had been good and the successive Nigerian leaderships had always tried to maintain mutually profitable economic, political and cultural relations with them.

From the foregoing discussion it appears that for some time both before and after the independence, Nigeria's attitude towards the Soviet Union was unfriendly or rather hostile due to anti-Soviet propaganda which created suspicion and fear of communist/socialist infiltration and destabilization of the Nigerian government. Nigeria continued to adopt a lukewarm attitude towards the Soviet Union while proclaiming itself to be non-aligned. However, change in Nigeria's policies started occurring in the first three years after independence and it eventually developed political and economic relations with the Soviet Union. The factors responsible for the Nigerian initiative to develop relations with the Soviet Union will be analysed in the coming chapters.

## Chapter II

### NIGERIAN INDEPENDENCE (FIRST REPUBLIC) AND RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, 1960 - 1966

Despite the suspicion of possible destabilization and infiltration spread by the Nigerian leadership in order to avoid closer relationship with the Soviet Union, the Nigerian government had to change its policies regarding the establishment of economic and political relations with the Soviets. In order to understand these changes it is necessary to examine the causes of these changes. According to Olatunde J.B. Ojo there were three main factors which became instrumental for Nigeria in developing relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

The first and foremost was economic factor which included the compelling need to conserve foreign exchange<sup>2</sup>, expand public sector of the economy and industrialize rapidly without being overly dependant on the Western powers. It was felt by some of the political leaders and economists that as an alternative to the European Economic Community which had begun to restrict Nigerian exports, the socialist bloc

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1 Olatunde Ojo, op. cit., p. 45.

2 That was because of the fact that the balance of payment position had continuously been running into deficit and the export prices of the Nigerian agricultural products had been declining since 1955.

would offer a stable and expanding market. It was for this reason that Nigeria could belong neither to the West nor to the East since as the Prime Minister Balewa put it, a commitment "to only one group" would result in a loss of "whatever good may come from the other group (and) that will not be to the advantage of our country."<sup>3</sup>

The second factor was pressure from the people who wanted friendship with the Soviet Union. They saw that Balewa was not interested to break relations of dependency with Britain and other Western countries and to develop contacts with the Soviet Union. This conviction became more firm after the August 1960 session of the Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Balewa's leadership was criticized for his biased attitude against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. This was a contradictory stand and a deviation from the earlier stated non-aligned foreign policy. The Action Group and some of the members of the NCNC and the NPC criticized the government for this and branded the Balewa leadership as conservative and pro-Western in outlook. Under the mounting pressure from public Balewa was left with no other options except to change his policy with two perspectives - one to minimise his criticism as

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3 HRD, 24 November 1960, p. 196. See in Olatunde Ojo, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

4 The Prime Minister Balewa delivered a 335 word speech in the Parliament in which he said nothing about East-West relations, thus giving the critics opportunity to speculate about the foreign policy, *ibid.*, pp. 45, 61.

being pro-West and pro-British and the other to remove the stigma that his policy was anti-Soviet. These charges were realized by Balewa and he took initiative to prove the critics' charge wrong and prejudiced by taking steps to develop relations with the Soviet Union.

The third compulsion for Nigeria was the growing relations of the Soviet Union with her neighbours. By 1960 Ghana and Guinea were taking active interest in trade and commerce with the Soviet Union and on political issues like decolonization, unity of Africans and anti-racism, the Soviet Union was in agreement with them. On these issues Nigeria had also a policy similar to that of Ghana, Guinea and the Soviet Union. The Nigerian leadership, therefore, did not want to remain isolated from the rest of the anti-colonial and anti-racist movement. So in principle, relationship with the Soviet Union, a country which was regarded as a friend of all the subjugated nations and of the oppressed mankind all over the world, was expedient to fight against the inhuman system.

All these objective factors were responsible for the Nigerians' overtures towards the Soviet Union immediately after independence and her leadership took steps to develop closer relations with the Soviet people.

The first step towards this direction was taken by Prime Minister Balewa when he invited the Soviet government to take part in Nigeria's Independence Day Celebrations. This invitation was accepted by the Soviet leadership and a delegation led by the Deputy Foreign Minister Y.A. Malik visited Lagos on this occasion. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sent his congratulatory message<sup>5</sup> to the Nigerian people stating the official recognition of Nigeria as an independent nation and hailed the independence as a sign of the inevitable collapse of the "shameful colonial system".<sup>6</sup> The message also proposed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

At this time Balewa discussed the question of trade and economic assistance with the Soviet delegation. The Soviet delegation responded positively to the Nigerian request and expressed its interest in trade and providing credits but at the same time raised the question of diplomatic relations as if it were a quid pro quo. Balewa, however wanted purely economic and not political relations with the Soviet Union. He expressed his regrets for not being able to exchange ambassadors with the Soviet Union

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5 The text of the message was published in Pravda (Moscow) on 1 October 1960 but remained unmentioned in the Nigeria Press for two weeks.

6 Helmut Sonnenfeldt, "Nigeria as Seen from Moscow", Africa Report, vol. 6, no. 1, January 1961, p. 9.



and many other countries at that time due to the unavailability of external affairs officers<sup>7</sup> and paucity of foreign exchange. Balewa further stated, 'since his policy is first come first served, every country has to take her place in the queue'.<sup>8</sup> The Soviet delegation was also told to apply for opening an embassy in Lagos and to take their position in queue. At that time Malik, the leader of the Soviet delegation, requested Balewa to consider Khrushchev's letter of congratulations as a formal application for opening a Soviet embassy in Lagos. This was not considered sufficient by Balewa.

The question of diplomatic relations was again raised on the occasion of <sup>the</sup> Nigerian admission to the United Nations at New York by the Soviet President Khrushchev himself with the Nigerian Prime Minister Balewa.

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7 It was because, the training of <sup>the</sup> Nigerian external affairs officers in accordance with a 1956 British plan had not envisaged diplomatic relations with the Soviet bloc. In the case of the Soviet Union, as the Nigerian Foreign Minister later said, "I know that the House would not like us to open an embassy where the whole staff would have to be foreigners, for we have not got a Russian interpreter. Therefore, for us to rush into Russia without first preparing the ground would be to commit political and diplomatic suicide". HRD, 20 November 1961, p. 144. See in Olatunde Ojo, op. cit., p. 61.

8 HRD, 23 November 1961, pp. 198, 317. See in *ibid.*, p. 45.

But no success was achieved in this regard due to Balewa's rigid and unfavourable stand.

Even though the Soviet government took positive step and had favourable attitude to the Nigerian action, on 11 November 1960 a brief notice in the Moscow Press reported that Foreign Minister Gromyko had sent a letter (no date was mentioned) to the Nigerian government "making an official proposal to consider the question of the establishment of a Soviet embassy in Lagos". Gromyko offered a reciprocal opening of a Nigerian embassy in Moscow also.<sup>9</sup>

Even after the formal request was made by the Soviet government, the Nigerian government was not very sincere in establishing diplomatic relations with the former. It led to the criticism of the Balewa leadership by the opposition in Parliament and general public.<sup>10</sup> They began to question the government's stated non-aligned foreign policy. This uncertainty was over on 3 April 1961 when the government made an announcement in Parliament that Nigeria and the Soviet Union had agreed to exchange

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9 Helmut Sonnenfeldt, op. cit., p. 10.

10 Even the ruling party's Deputy Chief Whip Mallam Aminu Kano charged, "there are thousands of Americans flooding into Nigeria, but that Russians have difficulty in getting in". West African Pilot, 30 March 1962. See in Claude S. Phillips, The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy (Evanston, 1964), p. 101.

diplomatic missions at ambassadorial level<sup>11</sup> and in May 1961 Soviet embassy was opened in Lagos. This led to the opening of diplomatic channel with the Soviet Union.

It is notable that Nigerian government's attitude towards the Soviet embassy was discriminatory. The number of Soviet diplomats as well as the number of diplomatic car plates was restricted to the limit of ten in each category, while no limits were placed on the diplomatic staff of the British High Commission and American embassy in Lagos.

This discriminatory attitude of the Balewa government against the Soviet embassy was strongly condemned by the Nigeria-Soviet Friendship Society and it called for the establishment of a Nigerian embassy in Moscow.<sup>12</sup>

Even after the opening of Soviet embassy in Lagos the Nigerian Government did not show any urgency in establishing

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12 Daily Express (Lagos), 12 March 1962. In an instructive article leader of the Society Mr. O.K. Ememe said, "in the fight to gain economic independence from an organised and armed international monopoly interests, we cannot use the example of American States since we have no radical affinity with the Western Europeans from whom we must win this freedom", but from the Soviets whose experiences are similar to our own we must draw our percepts. West African Pilot, 19 March 1962, see in Claude S. Phillips, op. cit., p. 67.

11 Keesings Contemporary Archives (U.K.), vol. 13, 1-8 April 1961, p. 18019.

its embassy in Moscow. The reason for this, as given by Balewa, was lack of practical experience in dealing with the socialist countries. When he was charged with being slow in establishing diplomatic relations with the socialist countries, he said -

I hope that (the) House will appreciate that some of these countries that are opening (embassies) are completely new to us but others we have been in association with for a very long time. (13)

Government's stand was criticised by several political parties and organisations. The Action Group and some members of the NCNC blamed Balewa for his reluctant and rigid attitude. Major opposition to the government's — Soviet policy came from the All Nigeria People's Conference of April 1961 which openly demanded the establishment of Nigerian embassy in Moscow and forbade the government to stop discrimination against the Soviet embassy in Lagos.

The Balewa government under the pressure from different comers conceded to the popular demand and the Foreign Minister Jaja Wachu Ku announced on 14 April 1962 in the House of Representatives that Nigeria would open her embassy in Moscow that year<sup>14</sup> but it became possible

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13 HRD, March-April Session 1961, p. 171. See in Claude S. Phillips, op. cit., p. 103.

14 Africa Diary (New Delhi), vol. 2, 1962, p. 523.

only in 1963.

In the meantime two important steps were taken by the Nigerian government to promote goodwill and mutual understanding with the Soviet Union. The first step was lifting of the ban on the imports of pro-Communist literature in November 1961 which the colonial government imposed in 1954. Announcing this in the Parliament Prime Minister Balewa said, "Nigeria's independence had changed the conditions of the ban ... and I hope and believe that the Nigerian people have the maturity and self-confidence not to be misled by literature of this sort ...." But he warned stating that we would not hesitate to reimpose ban " ... if we find that our faith has been misplaced or that this sort of literature directly threatens the security of the State or the sovereignty of our country ...."<sup>15</sup>

It is notable that even after the relaxation of the laws in 1961, the Nigerian government continued to refuse to allow some communist publications to enter into the country.<sup>16</sup>

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15 West Africa (London), No. 2322, 2 December 1961, p. 1339.

16 Nigerian Morning Post (Lagos), 16 October 1965, see in Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series, henceforth ARB (Pol.) (U.K.), vol. 2, no. 10, 16 November 1965, p. 391.

The second step was the liberalization of passport regulations. In March 1962, the passport office was transferred from the police to the civil service under the direct control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result of this move Foreign Minister Wachuku announced in the Parliament, "it is now the policy of the Ministry ... that all passports issued to adults should have an endorsement that will be valid for all parts of the world".<sup>17</sup> Therefore the limitations which had been imposed earlier by the colonialists were removed and the road to the Soviet Union was opened for the Nigerians.

All the above steps i.e. opening of embassies in each others' capital, removal of ban on communist literature and endorsement of passport for all the countries including the Soviet Union prepared a solid ground for the beginning of Nigeria-Soviet relations.

During the Balewa regime economic relations began to develop, although diplomatic relations between the two countries remained cool. In fact before the January 1966 coup d'etat, the most senior Soviet personality who came to visit Nigeria was Deputy Foreign Minister Malik in October 1960. Besides it, few exchanges at political level took place between the two countries.

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17 HRD, 12 April 1962, p. 10 and April 14, 1962, p. 28. Claude S. Phillips, op. cit., p. 103.

In November 1963 a Nigerian Parliamentary delegation visited the Soviet Union and in turn a nine-man delegation of Supreme Soviet came to Nigeria in January 1964. Again in April 1965 a three-man Soviet delegation of the Soviet-Nigerian Friendship Society led by Mr. N.I. Nasrullayev, a member of the Supreme Soviet, visited Nigeria to find the ways and means of improving relationship between Nigeria and the Soviet Union at social and cultural level. After that in July 1965, Sir Francis Ibiam, Governor of the Eastern region and President of the World Council of Churches, also visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Soviet orthodox church.

These visits could not be regarded as signs of good relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union because no new ways and means of increasing cooperation in social, cultural and economic fields were found as expected initially. The factor responsible for this was the lack of political will of the Nigerian leadership which in reality did not have any interest in the Soviet Union. This was more evident in cases involving Soviet scholarships offers and degree recognition.

During the six years rule of Balewa scholarships awarded by the Soviet Union were not taken fully by the government. Balewa government was highly suspicious of Soviet scholarships and had prejudices against any education

in the Soviet Union. Some members of Parliament also feared that the Nigerian students in the Soviet Union were studying subversion. So a number of obstacles ranging from immigration procedure to non-recognition of Soviet degrees were there in the path of the students going to join Soviet institutes.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand for the students going to ~~the~~ Western countries there was no suspicion, restriction and discrimination. During the period 1961-65 the Soviet Union offered 136 scholarships for the Nigerians but in the first three years very few were taken up. This could be substantiated by a Nigerian government figure of 1963. Data supplied by D.C. Ogwu, Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Ministry of Education, showed that between 1961 and 1963, 700 applicants competed for forty-five Soviet scholarships. Only seventeen qualified for awards, of whom eleven accepted offers, two declined, one took another scholarship, and three failed to show up. Thus, of the fortyfive scholarships given to Nigeria by the Soviet government in 1963 only eleven were taken up by the former.<sup>19</sup> But in the years 1964 and 1965 all the fortyfive and fortysix scholarships

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18 In September 1963, nineteen Moscow bound students were stopped by the Nigerian authorities from travelling on flimsy grounds. Their passports and air travel tickets were impounded by the police. West African Pilot, 3 September 1963, see in Africa Diary, vol. 3, no. 38, 14-20 September 1963, p. 1342.

19 Ibid., vol. 3, no. 16, 13-19 April, 1963, p. 1103.



offered were taken up by the Nigerian government.<sup>20</sup>

In the field of medical and health services, the Nigerian government sought grant of technical assistance from the Soviet Union. In October 1963 the Nigerian Federal Minister of Health Dr. M.A. Majekodunmi paid an eighteen days visit to the Soviet Union to discuss Soviet assistance in medical services. During his visit the Soviet government offered Nigeria technical and financial assistance for the establishment of two hospitals in Nigeria and the exchange of medical personnel between the two countries.

The visit of the Nigerian Minister was followed by the visit of the Director of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences in Turkmenistan to Nigeria in March 1965. The Director held talks with the Nigerian doctors and scientists in preparation for the Soviet-Nigerian collaboration.

Subsequently, a team of sixteen Soviet scientists led by Professor B.A. Lapin visited Nigeria in December 1965 and stationed at the University of Ibadan to study human virus diseases in collaboration with the Nigerian medical authorities.

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20 ARB (Pol.), vol. 1, no. 9, October 1984, p. 158.

21 Africa Diary, vol. 3, no. 46, 9-15 November 1963, p. 1438.

All these visits paved the path for the arrival in May 1966 of a team of four Soviet experts to draft plans for a £ 7.5 million medical centre for the Eastern region. The Soviet Union agreed to provide latest medical instruments and technicians for these hospitals.

In other fields like agriculture, geology and meteorology several teams of the Soviet scientists, technicians and experts came to conduct survey work during the Balewa regime but no agreement was signed between the two countries for long-term cooperation.

From the above study of the Nigerian relations with the Soviet Union during the six years of Balewa regime, it can be said that in the beginning there existed hardly any such relationship and only later on it developed, though very slowly. Even then it remained confined to a very limited area. The attitude of the Nigerian leadership was not favourable towards seeking the Soviet assistance and cooperation and no serious efforts were made to develop cordial relations with the Soviet Union.

#### Economic Interaction

At the time of independence Nigeria had a very minimal or practically no economic relations with the Soviet Union. Before 1962, Soviet exports to Nigeria were practically nil, while Nigerian goods were sold to the Soviet Union only by way of Great Britain or Holland.

The economic relations were mainly confined to trade. In the six years preceding independence i.e. 1955-60, Nigeria had very little trade with the Soviet Union. As per the Soviet government foreign trade figures, the Soviet Union exported its goods to Nigeria only in the year 1955 and 1960 which valued less than 50,000 rubles. No export took place in rest of the years. On the other hand, till 1956 no Nigerian goods were imported by the Soviet Union. From 1957 onwards, the Soviet Union imported Nigerian goods to the tune of 0.2 million rubles in 1957, 0.3 million rubles in 1958, 6.6 million rubles in 1959 and 6.3 million rubles in 1960 (Table II). Subsequently the Soviet government offered to assist Nigeria in establishing a number of agricultural enterprises, buildings food factories and educational centres. But the Nigerian government was not able to take up Soviet assistance and offers. This was because the Balewa government had suspicion about the Soviet intentions. The Soviet intention was very clear. They did not want to give any loan or grant without having specific details<sup>22</sup> of developmental projects worked out by the recipient government. But Balewa was interested to take aid on Western line where

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22 The Soviet Union wanted elaborate documentation on project analysis, completion of site surveys, materials required, cost estimates and engineering and architectural designs for giving aid to any country.

Table II

Trade of USSR with Independent Countries of Sub-Saharan  
Africa, 1955-1960(Excluding Union of South Africa<sup>a</sup>)

(values in millions of roubles)

Country	1955			1956			1957		
	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total
Cameroon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	0.1
Ethiopia	0	-	-	0	0.2	0.2	0.2	2.5	2.7
Ghana	0	10.4	10.4	0	7.4	7.4	-	17.0	17.0
Guinea	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ivory Coast	-	2.3	2.3	-	1.8	1.8	-	2.2	2.2
Mali	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nigeria	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.2
Sudan	0.2	-	0.2	0.4	-	0.4	0.6	2.6	3.2
Togo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Uganda	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	0.2	12.7	12.9	0.4	9.4	9.8	0.8	24.6	25.4
Trade Balance			-12.5			-9.0			-23.8

Table II cont'd ...

Country	1958			1959			1960		
	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total
Cameroon	0	5.9	5.9	0	7.6	7.6	0	0.2	0.2
Ethiopia	0.6	0.9	1.5	0.5	0.6	1.1	0.8	0.4	1.2
Ghana	-	2.4	2.4	0	7.4	7.4	5.0	19.5	24.5
Guinea	-	-	-	0.8	0.7	1.5	5.2	2.0	7.2
Ivory Coast	-	-	-	-	6.9	6.9	-	4.9	4.9
Mali	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nigeria	-	0.3	0.3	-	6.6	6.6	0	6.3	6.3
Sudan	0.3	0	0.3	3.5	4.5	8.0	4.9	5.2	10.1
Togo	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	0
Uganda	-	-	-	-	6.3	6.3	-	4.4	4.4
Total	0.9	9.5	10.4	4.8	40.6	45.4	15.9	42.9	58.8
Trade Balance			-8.6			-35.8			-27.0

Export, Import, and Total stand for exports from the USSR; Imports to the USSR, and total value of goods exchanged; a dash indicates no trade, and a zero indicates trade of less than 50,000 rubels.

Sources: USSR, Ministry of Foreign Trade, Vneshniaia forgovlia Soiuza SSR za 1955-59 gody: Statistichaskii Sbornik (Moscow, 1961), pp. 14-15; USSR, Ministry of Foreign Trade, Vneshniaia forgovlia SSSR za 1960 god: Statisticheskii a bzov (Moscow, 1961), pp. 9-10, and USSR, Ministry of Foreign Trade, Vneshniaia forgovlia SSSR za 1961 god: Statisticheskii o bzov (Moscow, 1962), p. 11. See in Zbigniew Brezezinski, ed., Africa and the Communist World (Stanford, 1963), p. 61.

there was no limitation on the use of aid for certain specific purposes. So it did not fit in with the Soviet stand.

Nigeria's trade with the Soviet Union, till the first agreement was signed in 1963, was not based on any treaty or agreement. The need of mutual agreement was realized by some of the far-sighted and progressive Nigerians who considered it desirable to develop bilateral economic relations with the Soviet Union. Keeping in view the domestic and international constraints the Nigerian government took initiative in June 1961 by sending its first ever economic mission led by the Finance Minister E.C. Okotie-Eboh to Moscow. The mission held talks with the Soviets on the issue of technical and financial aid as well as promotion of trade. The Soviet government agreed to provide aid and assistance to Nigeria on very easy terms to establish a number of agricultural enterprises, buildings, food factories and educational centres.

#### Trade Fair

The Nigerian government took another initiative towards developing economic relations with the Soviet Union by inviting her to attend the Nigeria International Trade Fair, 1962 at Lagos. The Fair brought the Nigerian commercial firms closer to the Soviet counterparts. Earlier<sup>the</sup> Nigerian firms had no interaction with the Soviets. It

helped Soviet firms to find suitable Nigerian firms to promote bilateral trade and commerce. At that time the Soviet commercial Director found some difficulties in increasing trade and commerce with Nigeria without having a trade agreement. He said, "until we sign a trade agreement with the Nigerian government bilateral trade would not expand in Nigeria".<sup>23</sup> On the other hand the Nigerian government also realized this problem and welcomed all the countries irrespective of their ideology to trade with Nigeria. But trade agreement between Nigeria and the Soviet Union was not signed until March 1963.

#### Trade Agreement 1963

It is notable that despite the need and willingness to encourage and diversify trade relations with the Soviet Union, the Nigerian government could not sign any trade agreement for a long time due to several underlying factors.

Nigeria did not want to sign any treaty or agreement even a word or clause, which could later be interpreted to tie her to the Soviets. On the other hand the Soviet Union had no experience of trade dealing with the African countries. Simultaneously she did not have sufficient technical and capital resources to carry on a trade with

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23 West Africa, no. 2373, 24 November 1962, p. 1295.



Nigeria on the lines of the Western powers. Her practice of trade was based on bilateral agreements for supplies of commodities and payments. This practice amounted to barter trade.

After long negotiations and arguments, the Soviet government agreed to the point of view of Nigeria and accepted the kind of agreement Nigeria wanted - the conventional Western type agreement providing for a most-favoured nation treatment, listing the goods which might be traded, and permitting only cash payment i.e. in hard currency.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the trade agreement was concluded between the two countries in March 1963 at Lagos. This was followed by signing of an agreement on 24 June 1963 at Moscow.

The signing of trade agreement was marked by the statement of Dipcharima, the leader of the Nigerian delegation, "The trade agreement is of great importance to our young independent State. We wish to cooperate actively with the Soviets in all spheres because we know that relations will develop on the basis of friendship and not on the basis of exploitation".<sup>25</sup>

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24 Olatunde Ojo, op. cit., p. 48.

25 Africa Diary, vol. 3, no. 30, 20-26 July 1963, p. 1747.

After the trade agreement between the two countries several efforts were taken to increase bilateral trade. A joint Nigerian-Soviet bloc company, named WAATECO was formed in 1964 as the sole agent of the Soviet AVTO EXPORT and in June 1965 a delegation from Nigerian Produce Marketing Company, headed by its Chairman F. Awosika, also visited Moscow in the course of a sales promotion drive.

Meanwhile Nigeria adopted the planning system of the Soviet Union and hence, a six-year development plan was formulated. To seek Soviet support for this plan a high level East Nigerian Mission, led by Chief Enole, the Regional Minister of Finance, visited Moscow in August 1965. It held talks with the Soviets to promote trade, attract investment and look for technical aid for carrying out the Regions' planned development. Consequently the Soviet Union agreed to undertake feasibility studies on certain projects and to establish a third specialist hospital in the Eastern region.

The Nigerian trade agreement with the Soviet Union and series of visits exchanged between the two countries played an important role in promoting trade and giving not only sound legal basis but also practical shape to the Nigerian-Soviet economic relations. This resulted in increasing trade with the Soviet Union. Whereas no Nigerian exports to the Soviet Union were recorded in 1960, the

Soviet Union alone bought N 4.20 million worth of Nigerian goods in 1965. In 1960, Nigerian imports from the same source amounted to only N 4,000; in 1965 it was N 526,000 (Table III).

The increasing volume of trade was due in part to the trade agreement, as Alhaji Ahmad, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry readily conceded<sup>26</sup> and in part to the elimination of trade barriers systematically pursued by the Nigerian government. On 21 August 1962, the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a statement to the effect that the Federal government had been "progressively dismantling whatever barriers that existed" in the flow of trade between Nigeria and the socialist countries.<sup>27</sup>

Despite these efforts and increasing volume, however, trade with the Soviet Union during 1960 remained a meagre percentage of Nigeria's total trade. Nigerian imports from socialist countries were averaging at 2.3 per cent and exports to the same was less than one per cent. There were several reasons and factors responsible for this low volume of trade. One reason for this slow rate

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26 Africa Research Bulletin: Economic, Financial and Technical Series, Exeter, (England), henceforth ARB (Eco.), vol. 1, no. 3, April 1964, p. 84.

27 Olatunde Ojo, op. cit., p. 49.

Table III

Nigeria-Soviet Bloc Trade, 1960-1965  
(in '000)

(1N = 31.56)

Country	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
<u>Nigerian Imports from:</u>						
U.S.S.R.	4.2	n.a.	30.2	136.0	94.3	526.0
Czechoslovakia	4724.0	6392.0	5306.0	5904.0	4740.0	4322.0
East Germany	3226.0	3080.0	3136.0	2790.0	2640.0	2452.0
Poland	176.4	n.a.	1768.0	2600.0	3080.0	2646.0
Hungary	235.0	n.a.	550.0	-	1600.0	-
Romania/Bulgaria	-	-	8.6	-	540.0	-
Total	8365.6	9272.0	10898.8	11480.0	12694.0	9946.0
<u>Nigerian Exports to:</u>						
U.S.S.R.	-	-	1.8	0.6	3020.0	4200.00
Czechoslovakia	1260.0	1230.0	878.0	116.0	136.0	1940.00
West Germany	-	12.0	28.0	122.0	400.0	12.20

Table III Cont'd ...

Country	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Poland	-	-	2220.6	2023.0	4420.0	520.0
Hungary	-	-	-	-	2.0	-
Romania/Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	40.0	-
Total	1260.0	1242.0	3128.4	2266.6	7718.0	6672.2

Sources: Federal Republic of Nigeria, Annual Abstracts of Statistics, 1963-66; UN Economic Commission for Africa, Foreign Trade Statistics for Africa, Doc. E/CN.14/STAT/Series A & B. See in Olatunde J.B.Ojo, Nigeria-Soviet Relations: Retrospect and Prospect, African Studies Review, vol. XIX, no. 3, 1976, p. 46.

of development of trade, despite the existing agreements, was that Nigeria had not signed the type of agreement which Ghana and the United Arab Republic had signed, that is, agreements that stipulate quantity, volume and the value of goods to be exchanged annually.<sup>28</sup> Another reason for the insignificance of Soviet trade for the Nigerian economy had to do with demand for each other's products. The Nigerian's generally were either unfamiliar with Soviet goods or regarded them as inferior. In the Soviet Union also there was little demand for the Nigerian products. Thirdly Nigeria's traditional trading market in Western Europe continued to expand.

Thus Nigeria's trade and commerce with the Soviet Union remained marginal. At the same time the response of the Nigerian government was also not in favour of encouraging it.

In the area of technical assistance Nigeria also showed early interest in what the Soviet Union could offer.

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28 Chris Stevens, "In Search of the Economic Kingdom: The Development of Economic Relations between Ghana and the USSR", Journal of Developing Areas (USA), vol. 9, no. 1, October 1974, p. 16. The Ghana agreement had two inter-related elements: expansion in trade was brought about by "aid" financed by credits; and credits expanded because of increasing trade. Although barter made transfer of money unnecessary, the agreement was flexible enough to enable either side to accumulate N 8 million of import or export surplus. Thus with good planning, Ghana could have obtained N 8 million worth of Soviet goods at no real cost.

The trade agreement with the Soviet Union also paved the path for technical assistance. But no technical cooperation was sought till 1965 from the Soviet Union, when Nigeria came under an "agreement named, Nigeria-USSR (Technoexport) Education Agreement". It was followed by another agreement in 1966 called Technopromexport Technical Assistance Agreement.

The Nigerian government's attitude towards co-operation in technical field with the Soviet Union was far from satisfactory. While the government in principle agreed the bureaucracy was against any Soviet technical assistance. In October 1961, they went to the extent of sending twelve Soviet experts back on flimsy grounds that their papers were not in order.<sup>29</sup> From the very beginning till the end of Balewa regime the Soviet experts were seen with suspicion.

Nigeria also failed to utilize Soviet economic and technical aid. During the Balewa rule, no aid was accepted by the Nigerian government from the Soviets. Although Nigeria

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29 Africa Diary, vol. 1, no. 19, 4-10 November, 1961, p. 224. Taking responsibility for this, Alhaji Usman Sarki, Minister of Internal Affairs said, "I personally ordered that their entry should not be allowed. But I would like to explain that they were not refused entry because they are Russians. In fact many Westerners have been similarly refused entry when their papers were not in order". It is notable that no Westerners were refused entry earlier.

was in dire need of foreign capital and assistance to diversify her economy and build up infrastructure for planned development. In 1961 the Soviet Union offered N 35 million aid at 2.5 per cent in credit to Nigeria and in 1963 again N35 million was offered as credit. The Nigerian government always suspected the intention of the ~~Soviets~~ behind the aid. This was because the Nigerian government was not expecting that Soviet aid takes the form almost exclusively of credits granted for a specific purpose which was worked out with the recipient government. Nigeria for her part, could not be specific until the national six year plan had been worked out. Nigeria was suspicious of the Soviet motives for seeking such details which the former construed to be probably to delay grants of aid and not really to assist Nigeria in her development. The Balewa government's anti-Soviet aid policy was criticized by several political leaders and economists. They regarded it a backward step and openly advocated to utilize all aids coming from <sup>the</sup> socialist countries. Despite the representations by Sir Odeleye Dahunsi, Governor of the Western region and Mathew Mbu, Minister of State for Navy<sup>30</sup> for welcoming any technical aid and assistance. Nevertheless a few experts were exchanged

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30 ARB (Pol.), vol. 1, no. 10, November 1964, p. 176.



and a number of scholarships awarded. Balewa government did not consider the need to avail Soviet offers.

Thus in technical field also Nigeria developed minimal contacts with the Soviet Union and no serious efforts were made, due to suspicion of Soviet aid, to attract more cooperation from the Soviets to strengthen her economic and industrial base.

### International Issues

So far as global issues are concerned Nigeria took pro-Western stand and non-alignment was not followed truly. Indeed, on most of the cold war issues such as the Berlin crisis of 1961, the American nuclear testing of early 1962, the Congo (now Zaire) conflict (1960-1965) and the Vietnam conflict, Nigeria under Balewa had given support to the Western powers. Even while the criticism of the American bombing of Vietnam was severe in many Western European capitals in 1965, the Balewa government refused to express even regrets not to talk of anger.<sup>31</sup>

Simultaneously, socialist countries were blamed in Lagos for allegedly stirring up trouble in all the places mentioned above. It was alleged for instance,

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31 HRD, 26 April 1965, co. 1481. See in Olajide Aluko, "Nigerian Foreign Policy", in Olajide Aluko, ed., Foreign Policies of African States (London, 1977), p. 173.

that the communist powers, who were arming Vietnamese guerillas and the Congolese rebels, were the main culprits.<sup>32</sup>

Even on some other issues concerning <sup>the</sup> Soviet Union Nigeria opposed Soviet initiative as well as stand and supported <sup>the</sup> Western powers. Some of them, for instance, were Nigeria's opposition to the sponsorship in the UN of the 1970 as <sup>the</sup> date for the termination of all colonialism in Africa and the rejection of the Soviet Troika principles for United Nations administration, rebuff of Khrushchev's proposal for a summit meeting of heads of governments to discuss disarmament. There were no doubt some issues on which Nigeria either took similar stand or supported the Soviet stand. At the Geneva Disarmament talks Nigeria sided with the Soviet Union. She had played a constructive role in the talks and signed the Moscow treaty banning of nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water.<sup>33</sup>

However the issue of apartheid in South Africa and decolonization of Africa brought Nigeria closer to the Soviet position. This was the only issue on which the two countries hitherto had a common stand. Even

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32 Ibid.

33 Robert Nnoli, "Nigeria's Big Year", New Times (Moscow), no. 40, 9 October 1963, p. 11.

before independence Nigeria was opposed to apartheid and colonial subjugation. This continued in the post-independence years too. When Sharpeville massacre took place in March 1960, Nigeria came out openly for banning imports from South Africa and prohibited employment opportunities for the White South Africans in Nigeria. These stern measures were praised by the Soviet Union and <sup>the</sup> Nigerian importance in solving African problems was given due consideration in Soviet Africa policy. The Nigerian policy during Balewa rule remained opposed to the apartheid regime and always favoured the cause of the Africans, as a member of <sup>the</sup> African Liberation Committee fighting for their liberation from the White rule. On this issue at the United Nations, Nigeria tried to impress the Soviet Union (and thereby incurred Western wrath) by maintaining absolute neutrality on cold war issues of no real concern to its national interests. Of the selected cold war issues on which there were roll call votes between October 1960 and January 1966, the United States and allies voted yes on twentyfive issues while the Soviet Union and allies voted no. Nigeria abstained on all ~~the~~ twentyfive. Of the ten on which Nigeria took a stand, the breakdown in the voting indicated little particularity for either side: four yes votes were cast with the United States; four with the Soviet Union; and

two negative votes cast with the Soviet Union against the West.<sup>34</sup>

On global issues, therefore, Nigeria initially had adopted anti-Soviet and pro-Western posture but later on it began to take non-aligned stand. But in practice she preferred to cooperate with <sup>the</sup> Western countries on most cold war issues. Her relations with the Soviet Union in principle was in agreement on <sup>the</sup> South African issues, but on other issues it was not so.

Hence, we see that on the whole, relations between the two countries during the Balewa regime in political, economic and social fields were more formal. Nigeria was initially reluctant to establish even political relations with the Soviet Union due to her leadership's pro-Western bias and till 1963 relations did not exist either in political or in economic field. Although minimal trade was taking place between the two countries, no efforts were made to attract Soviet capital and technical assistance in order to diversify economic base which was in need of foreign aid and cooperation. After 1963 some initiatives were undertaken to satisfy critics and to fulfil their demand for good relations with the Soviet Union by signing trade agreement and

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34 Based on vote tallies in appendices G, H, I and J in David A. Kay, The New Nations in the United Nations, 1966-1967 (New York, 1970), see also in Olatunde Ojo, op. cit., p. 53.

sending Health Minister and other delegations to the Soviet Union to mobilise aid and assistance. Trade developed with the Soviet Union but remained at low volume.

As the Balewa government was suspicious of economic and technical aid from the Soviet Union, the question of seeking military aid from the latter did not arise. Consequently no other sector, except medical and health services where the Western powers declined to cooperate, was opened for the Soviet assistance. Thus whatever economic relations between the two countries existed during the six years of Balewa's regime were limited to trade only. Political cooperation either on bilateral or global issues was non-existent and non-aligned foreign policy was not followed sincerely.

### Chapter III

#### THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR AND THE SOVIET ROLE, 1967-1970

In January 1966, the elected government of Nigeria led by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was overthrown by a group of military officers. In the hands of military rulers the Nigerian political situation took a new turn becoming very complex. The immediate effect of military rule was the rise of secessionists in eastern region leading to civil war which began in July 1967. This sudden change in the situation made it necessary for Nigeria to look for friends who could come to its aid. The main task before the Federal Military Government of Nigeria (FMG) was to safeguard the unity and integrity of the country at a time when the traditional Western friends refused to help the central government. The military leaders came to realise that the Western powers wanted to see Nigeria as a divided and weak country so that they could continue to get country's riches and exploit its people.<sup>1</sup> The need of the neo-colonialists, write the official Lagos Sunday Post, was a weak semi-dependent Nigeria as they need an Africa

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V. Ivanov, The Federal Republic of Nigeria, International Affairs (Moscow), No. 4, April 1970, p. 121.

torn apart by internal contradictions. For, it was easier for them to impose their will upon such a Nigeria and such an Africa.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand by 1966, <sup>the</sup> Nigerian relations with the Soviet Union were very marginal and confined to minimal economic relations. In this situation there was no hope of Nigeria's coming closer to the Soviet Union. But Nigeria, after the refusal of <sup>the</sup> Western powers to supply the needed arms and military assistance, approached the Soviet Union for help. The Soviet Union readily agreed to help since it was against helping secessionist movements in any country. In Soviet opinion the causes and the nature of the civil war was secessionist. Therefore it was essential to help the Federal Government of Nigeria. Moscow argued that its decision to provide help in terms of arms and ammunitions to the FMG in its struggle against <sup>the</sup> secessionists reflected an understanding of aspirations of the African people who in the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had agreed not to alter the boundaries of the African States. That was why almost all members of the OAU were on the side of the FMG. The Soviet Union also

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2 Victor Sidenko, "The Ordeal of Nigeria: When Will the War in Nigeria End?", New Times, vol. 6, 5 February 1969, p. 19.

vigorously came out in support of the fighters for Nigeria's unity. According to the Soviets, any help to <sup>the</sup> secessionists was a help designed to split the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country and was against the African unity. The Soviet Union emphasised the need to uphold the OAU Charter for peace. The Soviet media accused the Western powers of stirring trouble and playing their neo-colonial game of destabilising and weakening the government of Nigeria. Supply of arms to <sup>the</sup> secessionists who had unilaterally declared independence calling themselves "Biafra" was condemned by the Soviet Press. The beginning of the Nigerian crisis was linked with the January 1966 coup which ended the feudal and bourgeois domination and pro-Western regime of Sir Abubakar. And then military came in power. The Soviet Union hailed the new leader General Ironsi and regarded the army as the best organized section within the political system that could implement progressive policies.<sup>3</sup> Ironsi was a man who could eventually weaken the British-Northern Nigerian alliance, Soviets nevertheless scrutinized him carefully because of his supposed ties with the United States.

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3 For example, G.I. Mirsky, "Ofitserstvo", *Klassy i Klassovaia borba v razvivaiushchikhsia Stranakh* (Moscow, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 331-32. See in *Oye Ogunbadejo*, op. cit., p. 811.



His efforts to breakdown regionalism and create a unitary state were strongly supported by the Soviet Union since the result would have been to reduce Britain's alleged machinations in the country, the Soviet analysts held the move as progressive for the Nigerian development, claiming that infringement of nationality rights under the federal structure necessitated the proclamation of a unitary system.<sup>4</sup> Despite his preference for capitalism over socialism, Ironsi was not considered a democrat. His call for non-alignment and closer relations with socialist countries was welcomed. However, Moscow expressed through media its unhappiness over increasing Western capitalist investment in Nigeria and its tight grip on the Nigerian economy.<sup>5</sup> Despite all that the process of normalization of the Nigerian relations with the Soviet Union began taking shape and

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4 In the opinion of G.B. Starushenko, for example, unitarism would lead to the formation of a strong State and the eradication of "international and national discords" (*Natsiia i gosudarstvo vosvobozhdaichikhsia stranakh* (Moscow, 1967), p. 223. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, *ibid.*

5 Radio Moscow (13 May 1966) lamented that, contrary to all expectations, "very little has changed in the country in recent months. The State machinery, though slightly reduced, is still in the hands of those who served the old regime and the foreign monopolies. What is more, the government has made it clear that it will encourage foreign capital in Nigeria. This point of the government's programme has caused approval in the West". Quoted in Mizan, May-June 1966, p. 130. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, *ibid.*

by the end of General Ironsi's regime the relations between the two countries became more relaxed.

In the meanwhile, six months after the first military coup, Nigeria underwent another change of government. This time General Gowon took over the reign of power. Since Gowon programmed to promote national unity and regional cooperation without reasserting Northern dominance, the Soviets expressed their support to him more openly than they had done to General Ironsi regime. Since he was from the Northern part, the Soviets had a fear that under him a British-Northern Nigeria coalition might again take shape and the British might regain control of the country. They also feared the suppression of the Ibos by the Northerners. Some Soviet commentators thought that Northerners might favour an Ibo secession, so that they (the Northerners) could dominate the rest of the country without having to cope with the Ibos, their principal adversaries. Whatever their misgivings might be, the Soviets in their writings and diplomatic discussions attached greater weight to the paramount theme of national unity. Fortunately for the Soviets, Gowon set aside unitary structure attempted by Ironsi and re-introduced federal structure. The Soviet Union, hailed, therefore, Gowon's reinstatement of the federal structure, under which in May 1967,

General Gowon created twelve States from the existing four regions.

At the same time the conflict which began in July 1967 between Lagos and Eastern region - featuring General Gowon and Colonel Ojukwu<sup>6</sup> as the principal leaders — culminated, first in the secession of the eastern region as Biafra, and, later in the outbreak of the hostilities between the two sides. Moscow treaded carefully and cautiously striving to keep open as many options as possible, the Soviets endorsed national unity in Nigeria but did not publicly condemn the secessionist voices of the Ibos. Carefully choosing its political stance, the Soviet Union sympathised with the plight of the Ibos and called on the FMG to take cognizance of their grievances and aspirations. But Moscow never advocated an Eastern secession and consistantly praised the efforts of Gowon's government to achieve national unity.

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6 Ojukwu was the military governor of the eastern region who had refused to take orders from Gowon when the latter emerged as head of the federal government. There were many reasons for his refusal, of course, but primarily Ojukwu felt that Gowon, was not his military senior. When Gowon assumed power at the centre, both he and Ojukwu held the same military rank, i.e. Lt. Colonel. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 811.

In the months preceding the Biafra secession, the Soviet Union and the Nigerian government negotiated agreements on air services, students-exchange and cultural exchange, as well as discussed trade and development credits. On 16 January 1967, the Permanent Secretary in the Nigerian Ministry of Finance, A.A. Atta, publicized earlier loans from the Soviet Union worth £ 15 million and indicated that Nigeria would like to take up loan offers in order to develop chemical and metallurgical industries. Though the Soviet Union had until then furnished Nigeria with neither economic, nor military assistance, Moscow responded to Atta's suggestion by sending a nine-men delegation to Nigeria to look into the prospects of iron and steel industry's development. A team of scientists and economists arrived at the end of January 1967 and stayed until March. They studiously visited all the four regions of the country and publicly discussed the prospects for Soviet assistance in the development of each region.

In a goodwill gesture towards the Ibos, the Soviet Union said that she would initiate two major projects in the East. On 18 April 1967, an agreement was signed for building a 600-bed hospital in Enugu, and on 15 May, a four-men Soviet delegation arrived there in connection with this undertaking. On 23 May,

Moscow offered to assist in a proposed expansion of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka. Thus, till 30 May 1967, the date of Ojukwu's announcement of Eastern region's secession from Nigeria as Republic of Biafra, the Soviet Union enjoyed cordial relations with the Gowon government, but did not commit itself to the side of the FMG in the event of a showdown with the East. While one ear was attuned to developments in Lagos, the other picked up secessionist rumblings from the Ibo in Enugu.

Following the announcement of the Republic of Biafra by Ojukwu, the Soviet media reported <sup>the</sup> Nigerian events quite objectively. Mention was made of the 'persecutions' to which Ibos had been subjected and sympathy was expressed for the attributes of the Ibo people, particularly their enterprise, industry and "receptivity to everything new and progressive".<sup>7</sup> Even Vladimir Kudravtsev, a prolific writer on African affairs, argued that 'tribal nationalism' could contain

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7 L. Afoniv, in *za rubezhom*, no. 16, 1967.  
See in Oye Ogunbadejo, *op. cit.*, p. 812.

a progressive element.<sup>8</sup> On the political side, the Soviet Union from the very beginning of the crisis supported the FMG. While the USA, Britain and France stood on the sidelines.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, African States abstained from involving themselves, on the grounds that the Biafra problem was an internal affair of Nigeria, but some countries few months after the breaking out of war did not adhere to this common stand.<sup>10</sup>

In order to end the Biafra secession General Gowon launched in early July 1967 a military campaign, called 'Police Action' against the Biafrans. General Gowon's military campaign was not supported by the major Western powers. The United States remained

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8 Khudryavtsev said, "The growth of tribal nationalism or consciousness is in itself a positive phenomenon, and can in no way give satisfaction to the imperialists. One must recognize that in Africa from the point of view of its progressive development, patriotism hardly suffices - all the more since at the head of some states are people nurtured in the bosom of colonial regimes and in their political schooling and opinions, inclined to collaborationism. For this reason the growth of national consciousness, though taking place within large tribes, is, however agonizing, a progressive phenomenon rather than otherwise". Zaruberzhom, no. 19, 1967, see *ibid*.

9 All these countries refused to provide any help to Nigeria and adopted the policy of "wait and see". When the FMG moved towards the Soviet Union, and the Soviet ~~Union~~ arms began to arrive in Nigeria, only then they took a clear stand about their support to the warring sides.

10 Five States<sup>1510</sup> had recognised Biafra Republic were: Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia and Haiti.

neutral<sup>11</sup>, France aided the Biafrans<sup>12</sup>, and Britain lukewarmly permitted some of its firms to supply limited arms to the FMG. Among the African States there was unanimous sentiment against choosing sides.

From the records of developments since mid 1967 it appears that the Soviet Union sided with the federal forces. From June 1967 onward a number of delegations visited Moscow to seek supply of arms. Neither the Soviet Union nor Nigeria divulged that the main purpose of the visits of the Nigerian delegations was to seek arms. For instance, the Nigerian permanent Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Edwin Ogbu went to the Soviet Union in June 1967. The stated purpose of his visit was to inspect the operations of various Nigerian embassies, including the one in Moscow, but in all probability he discussed the question of military aid with the leaders in Kremlin.

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11 Actually United States in principle was neutral. But in practice it supported Biafra through various channels guided by CIA. The Nigerian Radios broadcast several times reported about American double-dealing and exposed CIA for its involvement in helping Biafra in ensuing war.

12 France till July 1968 followed the policy of wait and see and secretly provided arms to Biafra. But on 1st August 1968 the French Foreign Minister declared open support for Biafra and said that 'the present conflict should be settled on the basis of the rights of people's to self-determination. However, France did not recognize Biafra as an independent country. After that French arms began to arrive in Biafra and several efforts were made to provide diplomatic support for it.

In late July, Ogbu again visited Moscow. This time accompanied by the Federal Commissioner of External Affairs, Dr. Okoi Arikpo, who had talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister Mr. Gromyko. The purpose of his visit, as reported on 29 and 30 July by the Enugu Radio which was in control of the secessionists, was to seek arms. On 31 July, Ogbu was joined by Chief Anthony Enahoro, Commissioner for the Ministry of Information and Labour in the FMG to put forth the federal case and request arms from the Kremlin.

On 2nd August, Enahoro was received at the Kremlin by the First Deputy Prime Minister Kiri Mazurovi in a meeting which Pravda said, was arranged at Enahoro's request.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Biafra side stated on 30 July in Enugu that Chief Enahoro was visiting Moscow to negotiate for arms after he had been "rebuffed by the Western countries" and on 11 August Radio Biafra claimed that the Federal Government had signed a secret pact with the Soviet Union for military aid including the sending of fifty Soviet military experts. The alleged

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13 Later Nigeria and the Soviet Union signed a cultural agreement previously initiated in Lagos on 28 March covering the fields of education, health services, arts, sports and radio and television programmes.



agreement was reported to have been concluded during the visit to Moscow by Chief Enahoro and Mr. Ogbu.

The Nigerian Embassy in Moscow, however, denied on 1st August, that Chief Enahoro had visited Moscow to seek Soviet arms. At the same time Lagos Radio also denied on 2nd August that the cultural agreement was a cover for an arms deal. The Western press, however, reported that following the cultural agreement the Soviet aircrafts and other military equipments began arriving in Nigeria on or about 15 August 1967.

Amid the state of confusion Lagos Radio in a broadcast on 21 August 1967 revealed that Nigeria had purchased aircraft from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. At the same time it charged the Western countries for their double-dealing and betrayal as well as questioned the ethics of their charge of purchasing arms from the communist countries. "If the rebels", the broadcast said, "have an illegal and unrestricted supply of arms from outside, and a government cannot purchase urgently needed supplies, then it means that its hands are deliberately, being tied behind its back in the face of a mad and desperate enemy".<sup>14</sup>

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14 ARB (Pol.), vol. 4, no. 8, 15 September 1967, p. 843.

Later Enahoro himself publicly admitted having Soviet jet planes and technicians. He said that the Nigerians "hold themselves completely free to use any civilized means and to employ any person in any capacity", to end the war with Biafra. Referring to the US and British refusal to supply planes and the Nigerian purchase of Soviet aircrafts he further said, "Those who come to your rescue have a claim to your friendship. Naturally, those who fail you have "less of a claim".<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Kudryavtsev, the Soviet political commentator, also gave credence to these reports and admitted that both Britain and the Soviet Union were backing Lagos, but this, he said, was based on external coincidence which did not mean that Britain and the Soviet Union wanted Nigerian unity on the same premises: "No, these premises are diametrically opposed from the class point of view" he said, "and are in essence mutually exclusive". Britain supported the unity of Nigeria, just as France, West Germany and Portugal supported the secessionists because of rivalry over oil, assets and influence in Nigeria. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, supported Nigeria in consideration of the tasks "of the African people's anti-imperialist struggle

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15 Times of India (New Delhi), 27 August 1967.

both for strengthening the independence of the liberated countries and for complete liberation of the continent from the remnants of colonialism".<sup>16</sup>

Later the Soviet government also admitted openly the support extended to the federal side. It was Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet Prime Minister, who made the Kremlin's first authoritative statement on the conflict. In a letter<sup>17</sup> to General Gowon, he spoke of how "the Soviet people fully understood the desire of the federal government to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the Nigerian State and to prevent the country from being dismembered", and how "we proceed from the fact that attempts to dismember the Federal Republic of Nigeria run counter to the national interests of the Nigerian people".<sup>18</sup>

Kosygin's letter was the first public indication that the Soviet Union had now committed itself irrevocably to the federal cause. Indeed, from November, arms

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16 "Test of Africa's Maturity", Izvestia, 11 October 1968. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 814.

17 The letter was released in Lagos on 17 October and in Moscow on 7 November 1967 and published by Daily Times and Soviet News (Moscow) on the same day respectively.

18 Africa Diary, vol. 8, no. 1, 1-6 January 1968, p. 3732.

supplies were steadily increased, and there was a constant barrage of propaganda against Biafra and its alleged backing by imperialist and neo-colonialist forces and their puppets seeking to divide Africa. This official statement of the Soviet government was widely applauded by the Nigerian people and press. It led to the growth of confidence and pro-Soviet sentiment in the federalists. On the occasion of the Fiftieth anniversary of the Socialist revolution General Gowon sent a message of congratulations to the Soviet people and expressed the hope that excellent relations would grow even stronger and deeper in the years to come.

On this occasion Wahab Goodluck, a trade unionist and Dr. Tunji Otegbeye, a socialist leader, were the Nigerian delegates. Commenting on the Biafra problem Dr. Tunji Otegbeye said "imperialist forces" wanted to split Nigeria and "divert her attention from the struggle for economic independence and democracy", but added that Biafra's secession must not be a precedent for the rest of Africa, "Secession as a solution to the national question will only cloak Africa with chaos and open the wall wider to neo-colonialism".<sup>19</sup>

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19 West Africa, No. 2637, 16 December 1967, p. 1607.

Another significant sidelight is that while the leaders of Nigeria and the Soviet Union were discussing arms deal, Biafra showed no hostility towards the Soviet Union and seemed to want aid itself. On 30 July 1967, Enugu radio in a commentary said that the Soviets had reacted to <sup>the</sup> Nigerian events with such wariness that they had not yet antagonised Biafra. Simultaneously, secessionists were also trying to get recognition for Biafra from the Soviet people on the ground that they were fighting for the cause of Ibo people's right to self-determination and independence, while maintaining close relations with the neo-colonialist forces and talking in terms of capitalist mode of development. The ethics of their demand was contrary to the basics of the Lenin's thesis on nationality question which was based on the spirit of class-struggle and social liberation. So, it was turned down by the Soviet ideologues.

These expectations of <sup>the</sup> Biafrans, therefore, ceased to exist within a very short span of time because the Soviet Union openly committed herself to the cause of the Nigerian unity and integrity and against the imperialists' intrigues to weaken and divide Africa.

Even though the Biafrans kept on trying to woo the Soviets - the latter were never vilified in the same bitter terms as the British and Americans - and

even sent a delegation to Moscow in July 1969. But the Soviet authorities declined even to see the self-invited delegation. However, the Sunday Telegraph reported that the Biafran delegation was seeking arms deal with the Soviet Union. This incident did not irritate the Nigerian leadership and had no effect on their confidence in the Soviets. Commenting on the report Chief Enahoro said, "As far as we know a number of rebels were in Moscow. But there is nothing to indicate that they went as an official delegation, were invited by the Soviet Government or had any discussions with the Soviet authorities."<sup>20</sup> This reflects the confidence of the Nigerians in the principled stand of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union's strong support for the Federal Government against Biafra was not simply based on commercial considerations as stated by the Nigerian leader General Gowon.<sup>21</sup> The FMG, it was true, had no socialist or radical or revolutionary pretensions but it was strongly supported by the African Governments which might have influenced Soviet policy. And, however, little ideological virtue the Soviets might see in

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<sup>20</sup> Sunday Telegraph (London), 10 August 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 9-16 September 1967, p. 22244.

Lagos, they were able, according to articles quoted in Mizan, the Central Asian Research Centre's Journal on Soviet Relations with Africa and Asia - to see in Enugu the serious vices of ultra-nationalism and links with the Western imperialism.<sup>22</sup> The Soviet Union firmly adhered to the position announced hitherto.

Being a principled opponent of the fragmentation of Africa and a sincere champion of its unity, the Soviet Union from the onset of the internecine civil war till its end, had adopted a firm stand in support of the efforts of the FMG to preserve Nigeria's unity and integrity. The Soviet Union extended political and moral support and every assistance whose significance could not be overestimated to the FMG in its most trying hour. Millions of Nigerians acclaimed the Soviet stand. Addressing a press conference in Moscow in February 1968, the Nigerian Ambassador to the Soviet Union said: "Nigeria is very grateful to the Soviet Union for taking a definite stand right from the beginning of the crisis in support of the Federal Government without waiting to see which side was losing or winning. This courageous and friendly attitude of the Soviet Government was of great material and moral benefit to

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22 West Africa, No. 2627, 7 October 1967, p. 1299.

the country at a most critical period".<sup>23</sup>

The relations between the two countries became more cordial after one year of the ongoing war. The Nigerian leaders were highly impressed by the Soviet Union's principled stand and support in their fight against secessionism. In this pro-Soviet cordiality the Nigerian government sent a goodwill delegation led by Okoi Arikpo, Commissioner for external affairs to the Soviet Union, in July 1968. During the talks the Soviet side said that it viewed the desire of the Nigerian Federal Government to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country with full understanding. "The Soviet Union" stated the official communique published after the talks, "reiterated that it proceeds from the fact that attempts to dismember the Federal Republic of Nigeria clash with the national interests of the Nigerian people and the interests of peace".<sup>24</sup> Proceeding from the peace-loving principles of its foreign policy, the Soviet side maintained that foreign interference in the internal affairs of the Nigerian State was impermissible. In its relations

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23 New Nigerian (Kaduna), 10 February 1968. See in E.A. Tarabrin, ed., USSR and Countries of Africa (Moscow, 1980), p. 120.

24 Pravda, 22 July 1968. See in E.A. Tarabrin, *ibid.* p. 119.



with Nigeria, the Soviet Union would continue to support Nigeria's free national development on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The Soviet Union also expressed her affirmation in Nigerian Government's willingness to combine justice with generosity and to continue negotiations to achieve a lasting settlement of the crisis in the country by peaceful means.<sup>25</sup>

It is notable in this connection that the Soviets made occasional attempts to find out a peaceful solution to the conflict. They did not press this, and it seems likely that their main motive was to demonstrate that they, like the British could not exercise political influence over the federal government.

#### Military Assistance

Apart from diplomatic and ideological support, the Soviet Union also provided arms and ammunition to the FMG. When Britain and America refused to supply strike aircraft General Gowon turned to the Soviet Union, which sent MiGs, Ilyushin-28, Anatonov transport aircrafts, and Czechoslovakian Delfin jet trainers and persuaded Egypt to provide pilots. With respect to arms supply the Soviets during the war period provided not only air

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25 ARB (Pol.), vol. 5, no. 7, 15 August 1968, p. 1127.

weapons but also motor-torpedo boats, bombs, rockets and other weapons, communication equipments and vehicles. These were compounded by the military experts, technicians and trainers. Although it is notable that in the first two years, air weapons dominated the arms supply, but by 1969 ground weapons were also added to it. These included heavy 122-mm guns, a considerable number of Kalshnikovs and 107-mm recoilless rifles. Unfortunately for the Soviets the air weapons did more harm than good to the federal cause, because they were incompetently handled by the far-from-efficient Egyptian pilots. The MiGs and Ilyushins bombed anything but the real target. This sharpened the anti-federal world opinion and, unwittingly, lent some credence to the Biafran "genocide propaganda."<sup>26</sup>

In sharp contrast to the general opinion, the Soviet ground weapons proved far more useful to the federalists while the Soviet aircraft harassed and sapped the confidence of the secessionists. Ironically, the 122-mm guns supplied in the last phase of the

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26 Allegations of "atrocious bombing" of the civilian population by <sup>the</sup> Egyptian pilots, who allegedly regarded "Biafra as a free bomb zone", were widely publicized in the Western Press. See, for instance, The Times and New York Times for the second half of February and early March 1969. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 817.

war played a crucial role in the final determination of the conflict.<sup>27</sup>

The federalists, in the early stages of war claimed to have paid "hard-cash" for all their arms including those purchased in the Soviet Union. But, by autumn 1968, Financial Times and Observer observed, "more recent deliveries have been on credit".<sup>28</sup> The exact cost of the Soviet arms supply to Nigeria is very difficult to calculate. All that one can say is "that the Soviets supplied considerable amounts of arms to Nigeria".<sup>29</sup>

In the last phase of the war the Nigerian government used more military arms supplied by the Soviet Union against the Biafrans and captured all the important strategic spots and finally closed all the doors of the Biafrans which were linking them with the outside arms suppliers. In this situation Biafrans were left with no alternative except to court Lagos and accept the federal structure as created by the FMG which

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27 For an account of their use in capturing the Owerri, Orlu and Uli air strips, see John de St. Jorre, The Nigerian Civil War (London, 1972), p. 394.

28 Financial Times (London), 21 November 1968; Observer (London), 10 November 1968.

29 Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 818.

provided right to self-determination within a united Nigeria.

The Nigerian civil war was over on 12 January 1970. When the Biafran resistance to the forces of the FMG finally collapsed following the capture of Owerri, the last major town in the rebel hands, the departure of General Ojukwu for an undisclosed destination, and the capture of Uli airport, Biafra's only link with the outside world. Soon after, General Gowon in his address to the nation expressed his regrets for "taking up arms against our brothers who were deceived and misled into armed rebellion against our fatherland".<sup>30</sup> At the same time, he expressed sincere and profound gratitude to the Government and people of the Soviet Union which had supported Nigeria in difficult times. The Nigerian Ambassador in Moscow Mr. G.T. Kurubo stated that, in the final analysis, Soviet aid was "responsible for the federal victory more than any other single thing, more than all other things put together".<sup>31</sup> The Soviet Union termed it as "the victory of the progressive force of the whole African continent over imperialism."<sup>32</sup>

30 ARB (Pol.), vol. 6, no.2 , 15 February 1970, p. 1644.

31 Africa Diary, vol. 10, no. 8, 19-25 February 1970, p. 4842.

32 V.G. Solodovnikov, ed., Africa Today (Moscow, 1969), p. 34.

As the fighting between the Biafrans and federalists prolonged the Nigerian relations with the Soviets grew deeper. The need for the Soviet military and economic aid continued to grow till January 1970 when Biafra surrendered to the federalist forces. In the meanwhile the Nigerian government began to take more interest, apart from military aid, in economic and technical development with the Soviet assistance. The Soviet Union was involved in a number of new projects for the reconstruction and diversification of war-torn economy. This continued even after the end of the war. Nigeria praised the Soviet aid and its significance for the victory over the forces of separatism and neo-colonialism.

During the war period several other efforts were made by the FMG to give due representation based on equal nation treatment to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Embassy in Lagos was allowed to expand and all other restrictions were removed on the activities of the Soviet diplomats and officials in Nigeria. Consequently, the Soviet Embassy in Lagos doubled in size and Col. Mikhail Medvedev, "an armoured warfare expert, who had served in Kiev, Peking, Cairo and Khartoum" was transferred there as military attache. The Soviet Embassy was

shifted to a newly well-facilitated building. These efforts showed the sign of growing friendly relations between the two countries.

Nigeria and the Soviet Union signed the first cultural agreement in August 1967. This led to an increase in bilateral exchanges of academicians, non-governmental delegations, cultural groups, tourists etc. In December 1968, a Soviet delegation from <sup>the</sup> Nigeria-Soviet Friendship and Cultural Association, led by Vassili Jolode Vnikov, a top Soviet academic Africanist, visited Nigeria. It was followed by another delegation of the Soviet orthodox priests. Simultaneously, Nigeria also sent her cultural group to the Soviet Union in early 1969 and later on, several other social and trade union organisations' representatives also visited the Soviet Union.

All these exchanges between the two countries opened the path of greater cultural cooperation. Admitting this, General Gowon himself stated in an interview for the Moscow Radio in July, "... our two countries exchange visits and ideas and cooperate culturally on a large scale. Soviet missions visit Nigeria. We have signed a cultural agreement and it is being actively implemented. Soviet artists recently performed in Nigeria and were very much appreciated by the Nigerian public. These cultural and other contacts

help us form a proper understanding of each other...."<sup>33</sup>

To provide a sound academic background to the promotion of economic, educational and cultural cooperation between Nigeria and the Soviet Union, a new magazine entitled "New World" was launched under the editorship of P.A. Curtis Joseph, a Lenin peace prize laureate in Lagos, on 28 October 1967. It was hoped that this magazine would help the Nigerians to understand and learn from the experience of the people of the Soviet Union in their endeavours to build up a united country.

The Federal Military Government of Nigeria had taken several steps to avail annual Soviet scholarship awards to the Nigerian citizens. Initially, as stated earlier, the Nigerian government during Balewa regime was suspicious of Soviet scholarships, but the successive Nigerian leaderships changed that prejudiced and suspicious attitude towards the Soviet scholarship offers. After 1966 all the scholarships were taken up by the government and during the war period the number of scholarships had also been increased by the Soviet government ~~over the years~~. It was reported on 1st January 1968 that a total of 145 scholarships

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33 "Yakubu Gowon on Nigeria's Policies", New Times, no. 28, 9 July 1969, p. 5.

offered for the academic session 1967-68 was a twenty-five per cent increase over the last year.<sup>34</sup> This number again increased in the coming years. In July 1969 Lagos Radio reported that the Soviet Union had offered 174 scholarships to the Nigerians for the academic year 1969-70.

On the other hand, the number of Nigerian students in the Soviet institutes had also increased over the years. In January 1968 a Lagos Radio report said that there were 600 students in the Soviet Union. By March 1969 the number of students had gone up over 800 besides those who returned home after completing their courses. Contrary to these figures Moscow Radio said in September 1969 that there were more than 2000 Nigerian students in the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup>

Over the issue of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the Nigerian government extended its moral support, with gratitude, to the Soviet stand. There had been no comment from the government sources. Only Chief Enahoro was quoted in a British newspaper as saying that the intervention was embarrassing<sup>36</sup>, while

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34 West Africa, No. 2673, 24 August 1968, p. 998.

35 Africa Contemporary Record 1970-71, p. A60.

36 West Africa, No. 2674, 31 August 1968, p. 1029.



the two Nigerian organizations made favourable statements. The Afro-Asian solidarity committee of Nigeria congratulated the leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic for their "wise request for aid from the Warsaw Pact allies at this crucial hour in the life of the people of great Republic. The immediate response of the allies to the request of the leaders of the Republic is also very reassuring of Socialist internationalism".<sup>37</sup>

The Nigerian Trade Union Congress commented that progressive mankind would remember with gratitude the swiftness and promptness with which the loyal members of the Warsaw Treaty organization had smashed the imperialist intrigue in Czechoslovakia. "There cannot be any task of annexing the territory of Czechoslovakia by fraternal socialist countries .... It would be tantamount to social indifference if the Czechoslovak people are allowed to be robbed of their gains by international imperialism".<sup>38</sup>

As for the newspapers, most of them objectively analysed the situation in Czechoslovakia which led to the invitation of Soviet troops and wrote in support

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37 ARB (Pol.), vol. 5, no. 8, 15 September 1968, p. 1160.

38 Nigerian Sunday Post (Lagos), 25 August 1968. See in ARB (Pol.), *ibid.*

of Soviet stand. Only exception was the 'New Nigerian' and the 'Nigerian Tribune' which condemned the Soviet involvement in principle.

### Economic Relations

The exigency of the civil war also brought Nigeria economically closer to the Soviet Union. In the pre-war period, as stated earlier, economic relations between the two countries were marginal and confined to trade and commerce. But, the need for Soviet arms compelled the Nigerian leadership to reconsider its hitherto policy with regard to the Soviet Union. Under the changed circumstances, the foundations for mutually beneficial and equitable co-operation between the two countries had opened the most favourable prospects for the further expansion of all-round links in the interests of the people and of world peace. Nigeria declared to accept loans from the communist countries for the first time<sup>39</sup> and showed willingness to encourage Soviet investment as well as trade and technical co-operation.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union was also interested in extending the bond of friendship and

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<sup>39</sup> Africa Diary, vol. 7, no. 9, 26 February - 4 March 1967, p. 3277.

co-operation with Nigeria in the economic development and the promotion of trade. This was expressed by the Soviet Ambassador to Nigeria, Romanov, on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. He said, "the Soviet Union will co-operate with the Federal Government to stimulate economic, trade and cultural development in an effort to raise the living standard in Nigeria".<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, Romanov offered a £ 20 m. financial credit to Nigeria on very moderate terms and conditions. The envoy told the Nigerian Federal Commissioner for trade and industry Mr. Ali Monguno, that he would initiate action on the credit as soon as the Nigerian government decided as to which projects required financing.

All these Soviet efforts were welcomed by the Nigerian people. The Federal Education Commissioner, Mr. Wariki Briggs, stated on 16 December 1967 that any assistance given to Nigeria by the Soviet people was for all Africa and "we would be grateful for the present interest of the people of the Soviet Union in Nigeria". The interests of the Soviets, he added, had placed them further ahead than any country of the

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40 ARB (Pol.), vol. 4, no. 11, 15 December 1967, p. 915.

world.<sup>41</sup> As the war entered in the second year the Nigeria-Soviet co-operation in the economic development also began increasing. Nigeria assigned the Soviet Union the survey work of iron-ore and coal deposits keeping in view the future requirements for the development of iron and steel industry. Soviet geological experts conducted the tasks within the short span of time and reported on Nigeria's mineral potentialities to the Federal Government indicating the areas best suited for industrial development. The Nigerian government expressed satisfaction over this time-bound survey and appreciated its high quality.

Nigeria-Soviet technical co-operation was given a sound legal basis on 21 November 1968 when the visiting Soviet trade delegation to Nigeria signed at the end of their visit the first-ever long-term bilateral economic and technical assistance agreement formalising the close relationship that Nigeria had been building with the Soviet Union. This agreement provided Nigeria material and technical assistance for the construction of an iron and steel complex as well as cooperation in technical know-how development and in geological survey. The construction of the

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41 Ibid., no. 12, 15 January 1968, p. 940.

steel plant by the Soviet Union reflects her great faith in the victory of the forces of unity in Nigeria which allowed her to enter into agreements for economic reconstruction of the country. By the end of the civil war the Nigerian government came closer to the Soviet Union for the rapid and planned economic development of the country.

The Soviet Union and Nigeria were willing to cooperate in the establishment of technical institutes to train the Nigerians to fulfil the growing domestic need of skilled man-power and to achieve self-reliance. For this the Soviet Association of Friendship with the People of Africa agreed to provide technical and financial assistance worth £ 1 m. to establish a polytechnic. The Vice-President of the Nigeria-Soviet Friendship Association, Mr. S. O. Martins, declared that the polytechnic would be established in the Northern States early in 1969. Simultaneously it was also stated that people from Nigeria and neighbouring countries would be trained at the institute.

#### Trade Relations

The Nigerian trade with the Soviet Union during the period, i.e. between the fall of Balewa's regime in January 1966 and the conclusion of the civil war in

January 1970, had grown manifold. While in 1966, Nigerian import from the Soviet Union was at N 0.50 m. which constituted 0.20 per cent of total import, it had gone up to N 1.60 m. in 1969 and N 3.80 m. in 1970 which constituted 0.60 per cent and 1.00 per cent respectively of the total import (Table IV).

On the other hand, Nigerian export during the same period to the Soviet Union was as follows: In 1966 export to the Soviet Union was N 0.3 m. which constituted 0.1 per cent of the total export, and N 8.2 m. in 1969 and N 8.8 m. in 1970 which accounted for 2.6 per cent and 2.0 per cent respectively of the total export (Table V).

The responsible factors for the growth of the Nigerian import from and export to the Soviet Union were many. But the most significant factor was the exigency of civil war and the betrayal of the Western countries which left Nigeria with no choice. As we saw earlier, at that time Nigeria was heavily dependent on the Western markets and had marginal relations with the Socialist countries including the Soviet Union. In this complex situation the Nigerian leaders had realised the need to break or minimise the relations of dependency on the one bloc i.e. traditional Western markets, and increase contacts with the Soviet Union in economics

Table IV

U.S.S.R. and Soviet Bloc Shares of Nigerian Imports,  
1966 - 1970

Year	Total imports (N m)	Soviet Bloc Shares		USSR Shares	
		(N m)	% of total	(N m)	% of total
1966	256.4	5.7	2.2	0.50	0.20
1967	223.6	7.8	3.5	1.10	0.50
1968	193.2	9.5	5.0	0.90	0.50
1969	248.7	9.6	3.9	1.60	0.60
1970	378.2	15.8	4.6	3.80	1.00

Source: Nigeria Trade Summary, December of relevant years.  
See in Olatunde J.B. Ojo, "Nigerian-Soviet Relations:  
Retrospect and Prospect," African Studies Review, vol. XIX,  
no. 3, 1976, p. 57.

Table V

U.S.S.R. and Soviet Bloc Shares of Nigerian  
Exports, 1966 - 1970

Year	Total Exports (N m)	Soviet block shares		USSR Shares	
		(N m)	% of total	(N m)	% of Total
1966	277.5	3.4	1.2	0.3	0.1
1967	238.1	7.5	3.1	4.0	1.7
1968	206.5	12.0	5.8	5.5	2.6
1969	319.7	12.3	3.8	8.2	2.6
1970	438.5	15.4	3.5	8.8	2.0

Source: Nigeria Trade Summary, December of relevant years. See in Olatunde ojo, ibid.



and trade with a view to diversify her economic relations. After that the two countries undertook several measures to increase investment, trade and commerce. These agreements led to the opening of the Nigerian market for the Soviet capital and goods.

In 1967, the Avtoeksport, the Soviet motor-exporting firm took an eighty per cent interest in a Nigerian Company, West African Automobile and Technical Company (WAATCO) which quickly developed a sales and service network throughout Nigeria selling Moskvitch automobiles. By early 1968 the company was already in a position to import more than 600 Moskvitches.<sup>42</sup>

During the war period, it was also noted that cocoa export to the Soviet Union showed a significant rise and it was possible that the barter trade could have been more extensive than was possibly realised at that time. John de St. Jorre<sup>43</sup> later noted that Nigeria's trade figure with regard to the Soviet Union during the civil war could be misleading. This was because the Soviets usually conduct barter deals (e.g. with Egypt

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42 Ecotass, 19 February 1968; cited in Nigerian Review, May-June 1968, p. 11. See in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 816.

43 A journalist who covered the war from both Federal and Biafran sides, though at different times, for the Observer.

and Syria) so that the value and often the qualities of their arms shipments were easily disguised.

Overall trend in Nigeria-Soviet trade relations during the period of civil war shows that it increased manifold. Nigerian export increased more than her import from the Soviet Union. Trade relations between the countries during the civil war period were thus far more developed than during the Balewa regime, and showed an upward trend.

The Soviet Union's military - economic involvement in Nigeria led to some nervous reactions in the West. The Intelligence Digest's special correspondent on African affairs expressed his nervousness by asserting that "when the Nigerian war eventually ends, which ever way it does end, the economy of the federal regime in Lagos will be largely under Russian control".<sup>44</sup> Even some of the Western Press also expressed the similar reactions over growing Soviet-Nigerian cooperation.

Despite tremendous diversification of Nigeria's relations in political and economic field with the Soviet Union due to the exigencies of civil war, Nigeria did not move away from friendship with Western countries.

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44 Intelligence Digest, February 1968. Quoted in Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p.818

She continued to copy Western structures of development. The Nigerian leaders openly expressed their preference for Western goods, education, ideas, films and friends. By early 1969, it became increasingly clear that the Soviets could not leave any lasting impact on the life of the Nigerians. However, the Soviets were very useful to Nigeria for their diplomatic backing at the United Nations and elsewhere and more important as suppliers of arms.

From the above analysis of the Soviet role in Nigeria during the civil war, it can be firmly concluded that while the forces of separatism and neo-colonialism were heading towards dividing Nigeria, the Soviet Union had played a very significant and lasting role in the Federal Military Government's success in keeping the country united. The Soviet assistance during the civil war was of great material, political and moral importance for Nigeria. This led to expanding relations between the two countries, apart from defence, in economic, political and cultural spheres. The Nigerian government began to take greater interest in attracting Soviet aid, capital investment and promotion of bilateral trade. Although in the first two years of the war military aid dominated the relations between the two countries, but after that the nature of bilateral relations shifted

more to economic and cultural spheres. The Nigerian government's attitude towards the Soviet Union became more friendly, cordial and cooperative. In this favourable climate <sup>the</sup> Nigerian leaders made several efforts to promote goodwill, friendship and mutual understanding at all levels and in various areas with the Soviet leaders. Nigeria began to give more positive stance to her foreign policy with regard to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. This changed stand in the aftermath of war became an important feature in Nigeria's foreign relations. It had deep impact on her relations with the Soviet Union. Thus the civil war opened a new era of friendship and cooperation in economic, political and cultural spheres between the two countries that became more evident in the years to come.

## Chapter IV

### NIGERIA-SOVIET RELATIONS, 1970-1979

Before the civil war there seemed no hope of a good relationship between Nigeria and the Soviet Union. But the unparalleled support provided by the Soviet Union to the Nigerian government in combating the Biafra crisis, as against the policy of abetting the secessionism by some of the Western powers and their allies, paved the way for an amicable relationship between Nigeria and the Soviet Union. Actually the Biafra war provided an opportunity to the Nigerians to recognize their friends and foes. During 1967 and 1970, it became clear that the Soviets had no intention to establish their areas of influence in Nigeria and instead wanted to help the Nigerian government in curbing secessionist movement. On the other hand, after the war the Nigerians also found it difficult to continue to pursue a pro-West policy. Evidence of this can be traced out from this excerpt of a talk on Lagos Radio on 16 March 1970, "...Nigeria would maintain the traditional friendship with the West, but wanted to make many friends among the communist and socialist countries". General Gowon himself stated, Nigeria plans to consolidate and develop its ties with those friendly countries that gave it moral and

material support in its darkest hour of trial.<sup>1</sup> Soon after the war the Nigerian government sent its first Goodwill Mission led by Mr. Kano to the Soviet Union for expressing gratitude for the help rendered to keep the country unified.<sup>2</sup> Concrete steps towards making the foundation of Nigeria-Soviet relations strong were further taken by Nigeria. A comprehensive "Cultural Agreement" between the two countries was signed. Soon after that the outgoing Soviet Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Romanov was conferred a national honour, "The Commander of the Order of Nigeria", in appreciation of his outstanding services to Nigeria for developing true friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

In the post-war years the friendship and cooperation between the two countries were given new impetus. The Nigerian government was interested in seeking cooperation with the Soviet Union on bilateral and global issues. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was also willing to cooperate with Nigeria. This became evident after the war, when Nigeria emerged as an 'oil-power' and was successful in consolidating her independence. The Soviet Union, which did not want to ignore this neo-rich friendly country, took further steps in view of the geo-political and economic

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1 Vadim Kassis and Valery Kotov, "Nigerian Horizons", New Times, no. 26, 29 June 1970, p. 31.

2 R. Alexeyev and V. Molchanov, "Nigeria-Africa's Biggest Power", New Times, no. 41, 1971, p. 26.

importance of Nigeria to maintain and develop cordial ties. Nigeria was considered as an important country in Africa by the Soviet policy makers. Although the two countries were ideologically opposed and had different political systems -- one non-party military country and the other single party socialist country -- they were not in a position due to their common interests to ignore each other.

Nigeria-Soviet relations continued to grow in the post-civil war period. The climax was reached in May 1974, when General Gowon visited the Soviet Union, the first visit by a Nigerian Head of State. This visit enabled the General to convey his country's appreciation of, "the moral, political and material support the Soviet Union provided for Nigeria in the period of the struggle to safeguard her unity and integrity".<sup>3</sup> Speaking on Nigeria-Soviet relations at an official luncheon given by the Supreme Soviet on 23 May 1974 General Gowon said -

For reasons of history and geography, our two countries and our two people had very little contact until very recently. Indeed until barely one decade and a half ago, the forces of colonialism and imperialism had kept the doors of the whole of Black Africa shut to the vast majority of mankind. Hence, meaningful contacts between our two peoples and between our two countries, began only about a decade ago, but in the short time we have travelled a long way, and our presence

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3 Nigeria-Soviet Communique, 28 May 1974. See in Nigeria: Bulletin on Foreign Affairs (Lagos), 1974, vol. 4, no. 1-4, January-December 1974, p. 88.

among you today is an eloquent testimony of the cordial, constructive and friendly relations between us. Today those relations have grown to such an extent that they embrace the areas of commercial, economic, technical and cultural cooperation. Our young peoples' training in various vocations and professions in your country's centres of higher education, while your nationals are joining hands with our own experts in Nigeria to build a better life for the masses of our people.

Our good and friendly relations between two sovereign and independent peoples can only flourish when there is genuine understanding born of frank communications, and giving and receiving on the basis of equality and mutual respect. We believe that this has been the case between your people and ourselves. We are, therefore, glad and proud to have enjoyed the true friendship of the USSR". (4)

Nigeria faced two successive coups in 1975 and 1976. But these coups left no adverse impact on the relations with the Soviet Union. The arrival of Murtala Muhammed in 1975 as the new Head of the State, and then of General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976 further improved the relations with the Soviet Union. On the crucial issues like Angola, Shaba, Southern African liberation, they followed a foreign policy which was criticized by the West but appreciated by the socialist bloc. A number of mutual visits during the 1970s paid by the leaders and the officials of

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4 Speech by His Excellency Yakubu Gowon at the official Luncheon given by the Supreme Soviet on the occasion of his State visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic on Tuesday, 21 May 1974. Ibid., pp. 73-74.



the two countries enabled them to extend the cooperation in the fields of trade, defence and culture. These relations had grown further and remained cordial till the arrival of the civilian government in October 1979.

### Cooperation in Defence Sector

Nigeria maintained closer relations with the Soviet Union for strengthening her defence. Before the civil war she practically had no military relations with the Soviet Union but the exigency of war brought her nearer to the Soviet Union. This was as stated earlier because Britain and the United States, the traditional source of arms supply, refused to supply arms to Nigeria and created a situation where no other alternative was left for Nigeria except going to the Soviet Union for arms. Even after the war Nigeria maintained cordial relations with the Soviet Union and sought Soviet assistance for building up and modernizing her defence, in particular her air force. Nigeria was provided sophisticated MiG-21 super sonic jet fighters<sup>5</sup>, MiG-21U fighter-trainers, T-55 MBTs and other weapons. Nigeria also sought military cooperation from the Soviet Union in other forms like training facilities for the Nigerians by establishing new training institutes in Nigeria, sending Soviet experts, calling the Nigerians to the Soviet Union

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5 MiG-17 was constituting the Nigerian defence since 1967.

for learning new technologies etc. It was followed by regular visits by the two countries' defence experts and officials. In 1973 an important step was taken by Nigeria in military cooperation with the Soviet Union when she invited Soviet military experts to review the areas of military cooperation between the two countries. But after the visit of General Gowon to the Soviet Union, Nigeria took more interest in getting Soviet military assistance. Upto 1979 several military experts and delegations visited the two countries. In October 1976 a Nigerian military delegation visited the Soviet Union and it was followed by a visit of the Soviet Deputy Defence Minister General Grigorye Vich Pavlorky in November 1977 to Lagos. In the meantime, Soviet assistance groups including trainers of MiG fighters had also provided training to the Nigerian defence personnel including pilots for MiGs. Soviet military aid to Nigeria in modernizing her defence constituted a large part in the total aid given to Africa. According to the 1976 report of the Defence Department USA, during last five years, Soviet military aid to Africa was \$ 2.2 billion and Nigeria received a big share of it. The report said that in the five years' period (1970-75) the Soviet Union provided fifty Soviet advisers and offered \$ 39 million military aid (while economic aid given to Nigeria was \$ 355 million).<sup>6</sup>

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6 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 30 January 1976.

On the whole Nigeria maintained closer military relations with the Soviet Union during the military rule. It is remarkable that Nigeria had not signed any military pact with the Soviet Union which could have aligned her with the latter. The Nigerian government sought military help purely on the commercial basis remaining non-aligned. Nigerian relations continued to grow despite the fact that the Nigerians were entirely not happy with the service provided by the Soviet experts particularly with regard to spare-parts for the Soviet supplied defence products. Nigerian-Soviet relations suffered a setback in 1978 when a collusion between one of the MiGs (with a Soviet instructor and Nigerian Pilot) and a civilian air craft outside Kano took place.<sup>7</sup>

### Cultural Ties

Nigeria's cultural relations with the Soviet Union were also given due attention during the military rule. Several cultural and educational agreements were signed and visits were exchanged between the two countries. The first effort was made in this regard soon after the end of the war in 1970, when Nigeria signed a cultural agreement with the Soviet Union. This agreement with the Soviet Union was further expanded in April 1974 by signing a special

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7 Financial Times, 1 October 1979.

Protocol, agreement of concrete understanding, which provided the exchange of students, professors, technologists and cultural artists. This agreement became the base for the strengthening of the Soviet-Nigeria cultural exchanges in the future.

In the field of academics and education, the two countries also developed closer relations and efforts were made to make it more sound. In 1970, Nigerian commissioner for education Mr. Wenike Briggs visited the Soviet Union and in May 1973 the Soviet Minister of higher and specialised secondary education, Mr. V.P. Elutin reciprocated. These visits paved the way for solving several problems between the two countries which included cooperation in training of students and exchange of university teachers. They also agreed to recognize the degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded by the institutes of the two countries.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet Union also showed interest in awarding scholarships to <sup>the</sup> Nigerian students for education and training in her institutes. For this, she provided a good number of scholarships, though the number of such scholarships was very low in comparison to the United States and Britain, to the Nigerian students. The number of awards was more

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<sup>8</sup> Nigeria: Bulletin on Foreign Affairs, 1974, op. cit., p. 241.

than trebled from fortyfive and fortysix in the last two years of the Balewa regime to 145 in 1970-71 and this number remained the same over the years. In terms of the total strength of the Nigerian universities, however, these figures represented less than one per cent before 1966 and between and 1.7 per cent during 1969-71.<sup>9</sup> This has further declined in the wake of growing number of university enrollments.

The aforesaid developing relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union particularly in the fields of education and training were often marred by the bureaucrats who continued to be pro-West. Refusal of passports and foreign exchange to the students leaving for higher education to the Soviet Union often caused ill-feeling and relations between the two countries became strained.

#### Relations on Global Issues

Foreign policy goals of Nigeria and the Soviet Union in respect of the question of imperialism, colonialism and racism are similar. Both the countries have recognized that the crippling problem of the world is due to imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism; and the prime objective of their foreign policy must be its entire abolition. They have stressed again and again on the need of implementation

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<sup>9</sup> Olatunde Gje, op. cit., p. 59.

of the provisions of the U.N. Declaration for granting independence to the colonial countries and nations, as well as non-interference in the internal affairs of any country. When the question of liberation of South Africa and Namibia from the Pretoria regime and that of Angola, Rhodesia, Mozambique and other subjugated territories came up, both the countries took the similar stand by raising voice in support of decolonization.

During 1970-79, the two countries cooperated diplomatically on most of the foreign policy issues. With the overthrow of Gowon in July 1975, the new Nigerian leaders - first General Murtala Muhammed, then after his assassination in the coup of February 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo - cultivated and maintained radical, if not aggressive postures on some international issues, particularly those affecting Africa. On some occasions, in fact, the Soviet and Nigerian policies have actually tallied suggesting a common stance against the West.

#### Angola (MPLA)

The Angolan issue<sup>10</sup> can provide us a good example.

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<sup>10</sup> Over the issue of Angolan independence, which was going to be declared on 25 July 1975, fighting broke out among the three major rival nationalist groups i.e., the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA). While the FNLA and UNITA were supported by the Western powers, the MPLA was supported by the socialist powers and some of the non-aligned countries. In this conflict MPLA got success and formed the government in 1976.

Both the Soviet Union and Nigeria backed the MPLA, although for different reasons.

The Nigerian stand on this issue till 25 November 1975, the day when Nigeria recognised the MPLA government of Angola, was like fence-sitting. It was because Nigeria had not favoured any particular group either MPLA or FNLA - UNITA in Angola and was expecting reconciliation between the different warring groups. But when it became clear that South Africa had entered into the conflict by teaming up with the FNLA-UNITA, Nigeria descended from her earlier posture by declaring its material<sup>11</sup> and diplomatic support to MPLA. West Africa hailed this changed stand of Nigeria as an important step towards altering the international situation in Angola "certainly for the better".<sup>12</sup> She campaigned for securing OAU support to MPLA.<sup>13</sup> This move was warmly welcomed by the Soviet Union as a positive sign

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11 The financial assistance Nigeria rendered to MPLA government included \$ 20 million as a cash grant and \$ 80 million in military and economic aid. Oye Ogunbadejo, op. cit., p. 823.

12 ARB (Pol.), vol. 12, no. 11, 15 December 1975, p. 3824.

13 Radio Nigeria said on 30 November 1975 that the Nigerian Commissioner for External Affairs appealed to all the OAU members, who had not recognized MPLA to follow the example of Nigeria and recognize the MPLA government in Angola. ARB (Pol.), vol. 12, no. 11, 15 December 1975, p. 3826.

of an independent African country's conviction against imperialist intrigues. This stand brought Nigeria and the Soviet Union still closer.<sup>14</sup>

### Shaba Crisis

In the case of Shaba (Zaire) crisis<sup>15</sup> of June 1977, however, the Nigerian and Soviet postures differed somewhat. The Soviet position on this issue was very clear from the beginning and remained the same till the end. She did not play any noticeable role in the Shaba crisis because she thought that it was an internal matter between various African countries and siding with one would influence Soviet relationship with the other. The Soviets had no definite proof of the Angolan and Zambian involvement in the secessionist move of Shaba and in the absence of a substantial proof they kept quite.

Nigeria, on the other hand, tried to play though without any marked success a mediatory role. The federal

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14 Guy Arnold, Modern Nigeria (London, 1977), p. 136.

15 It was created by the ex-gendarme Katangans who in the late 1960s migrated to Angola. They organized themselves under the leadership of General Mbumba and decided to liberate the industrially developed Shaba province of Zaire. So they attacked on it with the support of some African countries to liberate it. It was supported by some of the native secessionist elements also. Ultimately, they failed in their secessionist move.



government dispatched its Commissioner for foreign affairs, Brigadier Joseph Garba to both Zaire and Angola in several attempts to bring the two countries together and work out a peaceful solution to the crisis. It is significant that neither Nigeria nor the Soviet Union was quite prepared to maintain the momentum of the militant stance that they had earlier pursued during the Angolan conflict.

#### Southern Africa


The issue of decolonisation enjoyed militant support from Nigeria and the Soviet Union. Both the countries were committed to the transfer of power from the White minority regime to the Black majority in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. However, the Nigerians were not much closer to the Soviet point of view because they did not want to annoy the Carter regime which was claiming to find a solution to the racial problems in these three countries.

Thus during 1970-79 Nigeria came closer to the Soviet Union on most of the global issues, and there was no conflict between the two countries. Both tried to solve the outstanding problems with their own point of view but that coincided with their policies.

### Nigeria-Soviet Economic Cooperation

The civil war had brought Nigeria and the Soviet Union closer not only politically but also economically. The war time cooperation was further expanded in the post-war period by concluding a number of agreements which provided favourable conditions and better opportunities for trade and investment. This became possible due to two basic reasons - pressure from the public for closer friendship and the need to diversify economic and commercial relations with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was also interested in having a friend in West Africa. In order to deepen her relations with Nigeria she offered her economic and technical assistance on favourable conditions.



In this situation Nigeria without bothering for the Soviet ideological position moved towards the Soviet Union and took interest in the Soviet economic and technical cooperation to expand her industrial base as well as trade. The major areas of cooperation - in particular, the iron and steel project - had already been identified. Apart from this, other notable areas were oil, medical services, transport, coal etc.

### Iron and Steel

In 1970, the Nigerian government signed agreements

with the Soviet Union for aeromagnetic and ground surveys of Nigeria's potential iron and coal resources. Soon after that Soviet geological team led by V. Bileko came to Nigeria to conduct survey work of iron-ore deposits for the establishment of the iron and steel industry. The survey indicated a good prospect of iron-ore for the iron and steel industry.

After that the Nigerian government assigned contract to the Soviet Union for the preliminary study of iron and steel for opening a factory in 1972. This reflected the confidence of the Nigerian government in the Soviet technical assistance for steel industry. So, after the visit of General Gowon to the Soviet Union, the Nigerian government authorised the Nigerian Steel Development Authority to commence negotiations with the Soviet technical partners for designing the first national steel complex, with a plant capacity of one to two millions. The importance of steel industry was too great for the Nigerian economy. It was announced officially by the government on 17 May 1974 that the establishment of an iron and steel complex formed part of the 1970-74 National Development Plan.<sup>16</sup> The response of the Soviets was positive to provide assistance to Nigeria and

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<sup>16</sup> Africa Diary, vol. 14, no. 27, 2-8 July 1974, p. 7019.

agreed to help in building the Nigerian steel complex.

In the meantime, on 15 May 1975, the Soviet Ambassador to Nigeria and the Nigerian federal commissioner for industries discussed the different aspects of the proposed iron and steel project and reached on the following agreements -

That every thing possible should be done to ensure the speedy realisation of the steel project as both the Government and the people of Nigeria considered the project to be of great importance for the nation.

That full publicity should be given to Soviet scholarships so that the opportunities being offered would be taken up by the Nigerians who will eventually work in the proposed steel plant.

That work on the training centre should be speeded up as it would be necessary to train the Nigerians for the operation of the plant. (17)

In this regard, it is notable that the nature of Soviet assistance for the steel industry was not only technical but was also linked with the know-how development i.e. training facilities for the Nigerian workers. This was a positive point as compared to the Western aid, which did not give know-how. Therefore, the Nigerian policy-makers preferred to go to the Soviet Union for

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17 Survey of Nigerian Affairs, 1975 (Ibadan, 1978), p. 323.

developing their infrastructure industry. Nigeria was offered assistance for steel industry in terms of both technical expertise and training facilities and then technical know-how for establishing steel industry.

In this background Nigeria signed her first ever agreement to establish steel plant at Ajeokuta in June 1976 and the second on 18 February 1977 in Lagos for the establishment of a construction training centre for 2000 students at Ajeokuta. Despite all these agreements and negotiations between the two countries over the issue of steel plant, negotiations for a major steel complex to be built at Ajeokuta reached in final stages in early 1979, though there were still outstanding problems relating to the cost of equipment and construction. While praising the Soviet efforts, the New Nigerian<sup>18</sup>, a government-owned newspaper, asked the Soviet government to lower its quotation for the plant. It pointed out that Nigerians expect a lower price from that country because it had proved to be a friend of nations struggling to attain economic self-sufficiency.

Apart from the iron and steel industry, the Nigerian government took interest in the Soviet co-operation for the development and expansion of oil industry. To reduce

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<sup>18</sup> New Nigerian, 2nd March 1979.

the increasing dependency in oil sector on Western companies the Nigerian government took decision to develop public sector oil industry with the help of the Soviet Union. For this purpose Nigeria invited the Soviet Union first to provide training facilities for the Nigerians about oil industry and then to establish oil extraction plants as well as distribution networks.

To achieve these aims the Nigerian government signed an agreement with the Soviet Union in April 1973 to cooperate in building an oil production training centre in the Mid-East State. The Soviet Union agreed to render technical and financial assistance to Nigeria, in the creation of a National Petroleum Corporation.

The terms of the agreement required the Soviet Union to provide training facilities to the Nigerians by sending her experts and technicians as well as by training the Nigerians at Soviet oil training and production plants. The educational centre for training oil technicians in the town of Warri was also constructed with the Soviet help.

According to the Joint Communique issued at the end of General Gowon's visit to the Soviet Union Nigeria sought Soviet help in oil industry. Since then the Soviet Union was offered more assignments in oil sector. Nigeria, besides training facilities work, also assigned

the Soviet Union to carry general survey of the country's oil potentialities and awarded in 1976 a \$ 120 million contract to Tsvemepom export, a Soviet company, to construct two oil pipelines.

Besides steel and oil, the other area of economy in which Soviet technical and financial assistance was sought was transport system. A centre to serve and repair Soviet made motor vehicles had been set up in Lagos.

It is clear from the above study that in the field of technical assistance from the Soviet Union, Nigeria had maintained good relations but it was confined to steel and oil industries. The other fields were not opened to the Soviet Union. Despite all that, it can be said that little headway had been made in technical assistance from the Soviet Union during the post-civil war military rule.

### Trade

The bilateral trade between the two countries showed an upward trend during the military rule. It had been possible due to diversification of trade by signing of a number of agreements and creating favourable situations by liberalizing rules etc. The first effort towards further developing trade was made in July 1971, when the Nigerian government signed a trade agreement

with the Soviet Union. This provided for "the most favoured-nation treatment for products of both countries" transit trade, payment arrangement, setting up of a joint committee to further the expansion of mutual economic cooperation and the solving of problems arising from the implementation of the Agreement. It was also agreed that "until a re-negotiated agreement comes into force, the provisions of the 1963 Trade Agreement should continue to apply to the balanced trade between the two countries".<sup>19</sup>

In the meanwhile a government report said on 23 April 1974 that the Federal Ministry of Trade had an agreement for the purchase of 100,000 tons of cement with the Raznoexport, a Soviet company. But after the establishment of the Nigerian National Supply Company Limited its General Manager undertook a business visit to Moscow in 1973 and entered into a fresh agreement with the Raznoexport concerning the transportation of cement from the Soviet Union. The Report also said that between 1970 and 1974 the Soviet shipped about 400,000 tons of cement to the Nigerian market and only 6000 tons of these came through government channels.<sup>20</sup>

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19 African Recorder (New Delhi), vol. 10, no. 21, 13-26 October, 1971, p. 2944.

20 Government statement on the Importation of cement from the USSR by the Nigerian National Supply Company, 23 April 1974. See in Nigeria: Bulletin on Foreign Affairs, op. cit., p. 49.



The Soviet Union also took interest in popularizing her goods in the Nigerian market. For this purpose she made efforts, which centred upon trade and exhibitions principally, to increase bilateral trade with Nigeria. The Soviet Union organised two exhibitions of her own products - mainly of electrical engineering equipment at Lagos in November 1971 and another in 1974.

The increasing volume of profitable trade between the two countries attracted the businessmen from both sides to collaborate each other and visit each other's country regularly. So activities of the businessmen and trade representatives became more conspicuous and frequent during the military rule. This was also due to better facilities provided by the two countries for the exchange of commodities.

The March 1978 agreement between the two countries on the issue of establishment of trade missions in each other's capitals was also very helpful in the promotion of trade between the two countries. After the signing of this agreement it was hoped that businessmen of the two countries would get better opportunities to sell their goods and increase trade in other fields too.

With the above-mentioned efforts Nigeria's trade with the Soviet Union improved and overall economic

relations became more diversified. The Nigerian imports of Soviet goods as well as her exports to the Soviet market had increased manifold from 1970-71.

The trade diversification figure during 1972 and 1976 shows that the Soviet Union remained the largest market for Nigeria's exports to the socialist countries, accounting for more than half of the total. In 1972, it accounted for 75.3 per cent, in 1973 for 78 per cent, in 1974 for 70.9 per cent, in 1975 for 87.8 per cent, and in the first two months of 1976, for 62.8 per cent. Exports were mainly of cocoa products.

At the same time imports from the Soviet Union during the same period were much smaller than exports. These totalled ₦3.5 million in 1972 - equivalent to 15.3 per cent of total imports from the Eastern Europe. By 1975, imports from the Soviet Union had risen to 19.7 million or 21.8 per cent of the Eastern European countries share in Nigeria's total imports. (Table VI)

These trends varied in the coming years while import from the Soviet Union showed upward trends upto 1978, export declined after 1976 (Table VII).

Over all, it can be said that trade relations between the two countries showed upward trends, despite slight variations in the last few years, during the post-war military rule.

Table VI

## Nigeria-Soviet Bloc Trade, 1972-1976

Country	Non-oil Exports f.o.b. value (N'm)					Percentage of total non-oil exports					Imports c.i.f. (N'm)					Percentage of total imports				
	1972	1973	1974	1/ 1975	2/ 1976	1972	1973	1974	1/ 1975	2/ 1976	1972	1973	1974	1/ 1975	2/ 1976	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Czechoslovakia	0.9	1.4	1.2	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	6.9	8.1	10.5	22.4	3.4	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.1
Poland	0.2	0.3	12.5	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.3	2.9	0.1	1.8	6.0	12.6	12.6	14.9	4.5	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.6
U.S.S.R.	18.9	23.0	59.5	74.8	2.2	7.3	5.9	13.8	20.9	8.1	3.5	5.7	14.9	18.7	1.4	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.2
Others	5.1	3.8	10.7	9.0	0.7	2.1	1.0	2.4	2.5	2.6	6.4	7.3	13.7	29.8	10.0	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.3	1.3
TOTAL	25.1	29.5	83.9	85.2	3.5	9.9	7.6	19.4	23.8	12.9	22.8	33.7	51.7	85.8	19.3	2.6	2.3	2.0	2.3	2.5

1/ Provisional

2/ January to February 1976 only.

(Onyema Ugochukwu, *Business Times*, June 22, 1976, p.15.)

Source: Nigeria: Bulletin on Foreign Affairs, 1976,  
vol. 6, no. 6, p. 71.

Table VII

## Nigeria's Trade with the Soviet Union, 1976-1979

Year	Total Import (including others) (£m)	Import from the Soviet Union (£m)	Total Export (including others) (£m)	Exports to the Soviet Union (£m)
1976	5148.5	10.2	5742.5	22.4
1977	7089.7	16.2	7621.7	5.2
1978	8140.8	20.2	6308.5	n.a.
1979*	7130.7	15.2	10836.8	n.a.

\* Provisional

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos (all external trade statistics for the Years 1976-1979) see in the Europa Year Book, 1980, vol. 1, p. 1102; 1981, vol. 2, p. 1109 and 1983, vol. 2, p. 1198.

Finally, from the above discussion of Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union in the 1970s, it can be stated that the exigency of the civil war brought the Nigerian leadership around the Soviet Union and paved the path in the post-war years to seek more cooperation from the Soviets in political, commercial and developmental fields. The Nigerian leaders began to take more interest in diversifying the trade, building steel and oil plants, and the development of technical know-how from the Soviet Union. Though trade between the two countries showed an upward trend and was in favour of Nigeria, economic and technical assistance from the Soviets was not sought seriously for the construction of new industries other than steel and oil.

On most of the global political issues Nigerian leadership took non-aligned stand and cooperated with the Soviet Union and blamed the Western powers for their continuing support to the colonialists and racist forces. After the recognition of MPLA in Angola, Nigeria came closer to the Soviets and her foreign policy objectives and priorities also changed at least in regard to Africa. She paid more attention to the cause of liberation of South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and other territories. Under the changed situation increase in close ties with

the Soviet Union was evident due to the similarity of foreign policy objectives at least on the issue of decolonization, racism, intervention, and unity of Africa. This was vigorously pursued by the military leaders of Nigeria till the reinstatement of civilian government. Hence overall relations between the two countries in the post-war years became closer and cordial.

## Chapter V

### THE SECOND REPUBLIC AND SOVIET UNION, 1979 - 1983.

On the basis of promises made by General Obasanjo to the people for the reinstatement of civilian government, general elections were held in 1979. Soon after these elections the second civilian government<sup>1</sup> was formed under the Presidentship of Alhaji Shehu Shagari on 1 October 1979. After assuming power President Shagari declared that his country's foreign policy would give prime importance to Africa. In his address to the nation, he said -

Our foreign policy will be based of course on the interests of Nigeria and Africa and we are not going to limit our interest to the problems of Nigeria alone. Our interests extend far beyond the borders of Nigeria. We have interests in Africa, and we consider the problems of Africa as our problems. (2)

Shagari emphasized the importance of non-alignment for the Nigerian foreign policy and gave equal importance to anti-colonialism, anti-racism and anti-neocolonialism. on these issues he had no disagreements with the Soviets.

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1 The first civilian government was of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa since independence which was overthrown in a coup d'etat in January 1966.

2 Financial Times, 1 October, 1979.

He stressed the need to maintain relations with all the countries irrespective of the ideologies they followed.

During Shagari's regime relations with the Soviet Union remained cordial. On the serious issues like <sup>the</sup> Soviet involvement in Afghanistan despite the fact that <sup>the</sup> Soviet Union was severely criticized by the western powers and some of the non-aligned countries and on the question of Moscow Olympic games, 1980, which were boycotted by the West, Shagari differed with the West.

Nigerian Stand on the Afghanistan Issue  
and Relations with the Soviet Union

In Nigeria, Moslem Brotherhood Association<sup>3</sup> and the New Nigerian<sup>4</sup>, a government owned Press, took critical stand on <sup>the</sup> Soviet involvement in Afghanistan while Shagari himself remained noncommittal. Although the Nigerian representatives in the United Nations voted against the intervention as a principle, President Shagari took a non-aligned stand on this issue and asserted -

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3 Reported to be having links with Saudi Arabia.

4 The Paper reacting to the Soviet move concluded in its editorial on 5 January, 1980, "the lesson for the Third World is that any time the Super Powers are only too willing to disregard the international law respecting the sovereignty of nations in the matter whether it is capitalist or communist that is concerned the fact is that the action is immoral and illegal". ARB (Pol.), vol. 17, no. 1, 15 February 1980, p. 5557.



"We are non-aligned. We do not take sides with the United States or the Soviet Union. The concern of the Third World countries is that they should be left alone to find solutions with their own problems in their own ways". (5)

The principle of non-interference was emphasized by the Nigerian Minister of External Affairs, Professor Ishaya Audu during his meeting with the Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Snegirev on 15 February 1980 in Lagos. At the same time he condemned the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and expressed his concern over 'the use of the Third World countries by the Super Powers as their theatre for rivalry'.<sup>6</sup>

No concrete step was taken by the Nigerian government as follow-up action to its condemnatory notes, speeches and voting against the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Shagari acted very diplomatically on this issue. He could not side with the Soviets as such a move would have been unacceptable to the vast Muslim population of Nigeria. Therefore, to appease the Muslims, he criticized the Soviet involvement on the basis of principle i.e. non-intervention in any country. In order to retain friendly relations with the Soviet Union he did not take any step which could anger the

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5 Sunday Times, 27 January 1980, also in Africa Contemporary Record 1979-80, p. B601.

6 Africa Contemporary Record, 1979-80, p. B602.

Soviets. As a net result, the Nigeria-Soviet relations were not disturbed by the Soviet entry into Afghanistan.

#### No To Moscow Olympic Boycott

Nigeria refused to join the US President Jimmy Carter in the boycott of Moscow Olympics, 1980. The call for a boycott was widely debated in Nigeria. A commentary broadcast by Radio Nigeria on 21 January 1980 recalled that the West, confronted with African withdrawal from events involving South Africa, had always argued against mixing politics with sports. "It is immoral for them", the Radio said, "now to turn round to champion the boycott of the Moscow Olympics".<sup>7</sup>

U.S. President sent Mohammed Ali, former heavyweight boxing champion, to Lagos to win the support of Nigeria on the issue of Olympic boycott, because of <sup>the</sup> Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Nigeria took an aggressive posture on the question of boycott of Moscow Olympic games by the United States. Not only President Shagari refused to see Mohammed Ali, messenger of the U.S. President, but he also condemned the American support to <sup>the</sup> South African regime. He asked the U.S. President to follow a policy of principles and impose sanctions

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7 Radio Nigeria, 21 January 1980. See in ARB (Pol.), vol. 17, no. 1, 15 February 1980, p. 5559.

against the racist Pretoria regime. Shagari gave examples of various international issues where the United States made no comments - notably South African incursions into Angola, French intervention in Chad and the activities of Mr. Foccart's mysterious successor, Mr. Rene Journiac, who had died in an air crash.<sup>8</sup> However, the Chairman of the Nigerian Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Alhaji Jalo Waziri told Ali that Nigeria was friendly with both the United States and the Soviet Union, and would not join one against the other and Nigeria would go to the games.<sup>9</sup>

To counter the U.S. aggressive propaganda on Afghanistan, President Shagari threatened to impose ban on Western business interests in Nigeria that continued to collaborate with South Africa. This was warmly applauded by the Soviet Union. Shagari also warned the United States, "Nigeria would use all means at our disposal, including oil, if necessary<sup>10</sup> to put pressure on the Americans to oppose apartheid more forcefully."<sup>11</sup>

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8 David Williams, President and Power in Nigeria: The Life of Shehu Shagari (London, 1982), p. 205.

9 Africa Diary, vol. 20, no. 15, April 8-14, 1980, p. 9965.

10 New York Times, 4 October 1980.

11 <sup>the</sup> Nigeria was the second biggest exporter of oil to <sup>the</sup> United States.

Like the Soviets, on several occasions President Shagari and the Nigerian Foreign Minister and Ambassadors voiced their opposition to apartheid regime and demanded the majority rule. When the President visited the United States in October 1979, he was warmly received in Washington, but this did not stop him and his Ministers from building tentative bridges towards the Soviet Union and its East European allies. The firmly-held belief in Lagos that the Western powers were in collusion with the South Africans, was balanced by another belief which said that however clumsy the Soviets might be in the framing of their African policies, at least they and the Nigerians had similar policy objectives.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Middle East

President Shagari criticized Israel's intransigence in refusing a homeland to the Palestinians. In his UN General Assembly speech he declared, "Israel can not expect normalisation of relations with Nigeria and, indeed, Africa while she continues in defiance of world opinion, to occupy the Arab territories. The Palestinians must have their own sovereign state before a lasting peace could be achieved in the Middle

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<sup>12</sup> The Guardian (London), 5 October 1981.

East".<sup>13</sup> The Nigerian position on Palestine was highly appreciated in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union regarded Nigeria a friend and ally of the Palestinian people.

### Angola

On the issue of Angola, Nigeria had a similar policy and attitude like the Soviet Union. The Nigerian government did not share President Carter's alarm at the Cuban activities in Africa, particularly as it did not seem to be matched by the South African activities in Angola and elsewhere, or the French military intervention in Zaire and other countries. Nigeria wanted the continent free of all foreign troops. The Nigerians maintained that it was a failure of western policies that invited communist intervention in Africa.<sup>14</sup>

### World Peace

Being an active member of the non-aligned movement Nigeria contributed substantially to the strengthening of the non-alignment, African unity and world peace. She was working for the maintenance of world peace, for the continuation of detente and implementation of disarmament.

13 West Africa, 28 July, 4 August, 1980. See in Africa Contemporary Record, 1980-81, p. B578.

14 International Herald Tribune, 3 February 1980.

The Nigerian stand on this and many other pressing international problems, coincided with or was close to the Soviet position.

The peace initiatives advanced by the Soviet General Secretary Leonid Breznev at the 26th Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Congress, had been highly acclaimed in Nigeria. Sharing his impressions of the conference A. Bolaji Akinyemi, Director General of the Nigerian Institute of Foreign Affairs and leader of the Nigerian delegation said, "he and his colleagues were fully satisfied with the results of the discussions, which would unquestionably be important for the extension of understanding and cooperation between the scholars of the two countries and between their people in general. Mutual understanding, he added, was a basis of mutual trust".<sup>15</sup>

The Nigerian government urged strengthening of the positive changes in the international arena and called for steps to make detente irreversible. In the U.N. Nigeria had backed the highly important Soviet initiatives aimed at ensuring international security. The similarity of the Soviet and the Nigerian views on crucial foreign policy issues had time and

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15 New Times, no. 26, June 1981, p. 15.

again been noted at the meetings of the leaders of the two countries.

On other issues also Nigeria had similarity of views with the Soviet Union. During the Second Republic, there was hardly any issue on which the Soviet Union had significant differences with Nigeria.

#### ECONOMIC RELATIONS

During the Shagari regime, Nigeria's bilateral economic exchanges with the Soviet Union increased marginally. It is notable that during this period no new agreement for trade, commerce and technical collaboration between the two countries was signed. Although efforts were made during 1982 to increase trade links with the Soviet Union, no concrete steps were undertaken by the Nigerian government to diversify trade relations. Therefore, trade and commerce during the Shagari regime did not expand in any new field.

Even though it is remarkable that the volume of trade between the two countries showed an improvement during 1979-83. Nigeria's import from the Soviet Union in 1979 was at N 15.2 m.<sup>16</sup> It had gone up in 1980 and continued to be so till 1983 and thereafter. The trade

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16 Europa Year Book, 1983 (London, 1983), p. 1148 .

figure shows that Nigeria's import from the Soviet Union was at N 21.8 m in 1980<sup>17</sup>, at N 25.4 m in 1981, at N 38.8 m in 1983.<sup>18</sup> While the exports to the Soviet Union during the same period also increased marginally, overall trade between the two countries showed upward trends. Nigeria remained the major trading partner of the Soviet Union in the Sub-Sahara Africa and the Soviet Union also continued to be so of Nigeria among the East European countries.

#### Iron and Steel Project

In the Nigerian economy, the major project of the Soviet involvement remained iron and steel industry at Ajeokuta on which economic relations of the two countries depended heavily. Although talks for the construction of the steel plant were put down in the form of an agreement during the Obasanjo rule in early 1979 the Soviets were offered to complete the work in the five years time, the construction work did not begin as scheduled due to several reasons. Before the construction work could start the Soviets had proposed for the completion of infrastructure facilities - that was the development of the whole township where the Soviet technicians and experts as well as <sup>the</sup> Nigerian

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17 Ibid.

18 Europa Year Book 1987, p. 2077.



technicians and workers could live with necessary facilities, i.e., water supply, health care, communication and transportation network, electricity, fuel etc. The Nigerians were expected to complete the infrastructure before the beginning of the construction work on steel plant. But the development of infrastructure facilities was not completed on the scheduled time due to reasons of inefficiency on the part of the Nigerian administration and shortage of foreign exchange in the wake of glut in the oil market which reduced the foreign exchange earning of Nigeria.

Nigeria also faced with the problem of transportation since reaching Ajeokuta was difficult without a proper road and rail links. Eventually development of navigational facilities with small dockyards at the Ajeokuta and a bridge over the Niger river was also delayed. All these factors caused delay in the arrival of the machine and equipments from the Soviet Union as well as slowed down the beginning of the construction work.

Due to delay in the construction of iron and steel industry there arose some misunderstanding between Nigeria and the Soviet Union. President Shagari began to put pressure on the Soviet Union to complete the construction work during his presidential tenure.<sup>19</sup> So that he could

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<sup>19</sup> Aminu Tijjani and David Williams, ed., Shehu Shagari My Vision of Nigeria (London, 1981), p. 265.

be credited for the construction of the most significant industry - iron and steel - and could bank in his favour more votes in <sup>the</sup> coming elections. The Nigerian government began to ask for speedy implementation of the agreement regarding the steel plants and criticized (any) delay<sup>20</sup> which was also escalating cost.<sup>21</sup> In April, 1980 Steel Development Minister Mr. Paul Unongo was sent to Moscow to ask the Soviets to complete the construction work before the general elections which was to be held in 1983. On his return from the Moscow he started putting pressure on the Soviet government by propagandizing that if the Soviets would not undertake the construction work immediately the Nigerian government intended to review the contract assigned to the Soviet Union. He even denounced the performance provided by the Soviets, as quoted by The Times, as "shoddy".<sup>22</sup>

Despite all these pressures the construction work did not begin until 1980. It became a matter of serious

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20 The delay was partly due to, it was said, Soviets sending plans with instructions only in Russian. It led to some criticisms of the Soviets. David Williams, op. cit., p. 114.

21 Initially the contract given to Soviet Union for the construction of Ajaokuta Steel Plant was worth 2,000 m, but latest estimate was of 7000 m. The Times, 20 June 1980.

22 Ibid.

concern for the Nigerian leadership which was expecting, apart from achieving self-reliance in steel, more from the steel plant to save its losing popularity amid the state of growing rampant corruption in public life and burgeoning economic crisis in the wake of falling production and prices of oil.

The Nigerian leadership, therefore, was ashamed about what to do. This state of confusion created misunderstanding among some of the Nigerian leaders about the Soviet role. Consequently, the Nigerian government began to reconsider its steel development policy and when the time came to award the tenders for implementing the plans for steel industry bulk of the work was allocated to the western contractors.<sup>23</sup> This happened despite the fact that the General Manager of the steel plant was opposed to western contractors. He said that the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the whole project was positive.

The issue of speedy implementation of the construction work of the steel plant was again raised by the Nigerian Minister for Steel Development Malam Mamman Ali Makele during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1982. The Soviet officials responded positively and agreed to complete

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23 Africa Contemporary Record, 1980-81, p.A138.

the work one year before the scheduled time i.e. by 1984. It was also stated that logistical problems which the Societe General de Surveillance had with the joint inspection of the factory equipment at Ajaokuta had been resolved with the officials of the Soviet Chamber of Commerce.<sup>24</sup>

The Minister also proposed to the Soviets that the commissioning of the thermal plant should be advanced to complement the National Electrical Power Authority's power supply of the rolling mills to avoid any operational breakdown.

Stating the significance of his visit, Steel Minister Makele said, "the visit has given us the assurance that what we are getting from the Soviet Union is nothing but the best manufactured according to the modern technology and international standards."<sup>25</sup>

At the time of the inauguration of the first stage of the Ajaokuta plant in the middle of July 1983, when it was put into operation, President Shagari praised in the presence of the Soviet government's delegation led by the First Deputy Premier Ivan Arkhipov,

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24 Africa Diary, vol. 22, no. 45, November 6-12, 1982, pp. 11198-99.

25 Ibid.

the Soviet assistance rendered to Nigeria in the establishment of steel industry and expressed satisfaction over the quality of the work and rate of construction.<sup>26</sup>

After the commissioning of <sup>the</sup> first phase of the Ajaokuta steel plant, work on second plant also began and was commissioned in 1984. During this period, despite the Western media's severe attempt to spoil the Nigeria-Soviet relations, the Nigerian people began to appreciate the role of the Soviet Union as their friend, and relation between the two again became cordial.

Training of the Nigerians and  
the Soviet Cooperation

Nigeria was provided not only technical assistance to build her infrastructure industry, but also human skills to achieve self-reliance in the handling of her plants and industries. For this purpose the Soviet Union always cooperated with Nigeria. This area remained important in Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union. More than three thousand Nigerians had acquired professional qualifications in the Soviet institute's (till mid-1981). Besides it, in 1981 it was also reported that 1000 Nigerians were to be trained in

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<sup>26</sup> New Times, no. 31, July 1983, p. 8-9.

the Soviet institutes for Ajaokuta plant, while the Soviet Union would send 6000 experts to construct the blast furnace and to train the Nigerian workers.<sup>27</sup>

During his visit to the Soviet Union the Nigerian Steel Development Minister Makele suggested that if the Nigerians could come to Kramatrosky steel plant in Ukraine on three-to-six months attachments, they would not only improve their skills in design work but also develop wider steel industry skills.<sup>28</sup> For this the Soviet government's response was affirmative. The Soviet Union provided all possible assistance and facilities for the Nigerians to develop their technical skills, in the Soviet institutes. This cooperative attitude of the Soviets was praised by Makele himself. He said, only a truly friendly country can provide this sort of help and what ever we expected from the Soviet Union we have been provided.<sup>29</sup>

#### Relations in Other Areas

During the 1979-1983 period Nigeria's relations

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27 Africa Diary, vol. 21, no. 35, August 27-September 2, 1981, p. 10638; Also in Africa Contemporary Record, 1981-82, p. B515.

28 Africa Diary, vol. 22, no. 45, November 6-12, 1982, p. 11198.

29 Ibid., p. 11199.

with the Soviet Union were marginal in defence, social and cultural areas. Though several visits were exchanged by the experts and top officials of the two countries in these fields, no noticeable efforts were made either to conclude any agreement or to award assignments. Despite that in May 1981 the Nigerian Chief of General Staff Major General Yar Adva visited the Soviet Union and a delegation of the Supreme Soviet members came to Nigeria on a courtesy call in 1982. In the meanwhile the Nigerian scholars went to the Soviet Union to attend the second Soviet-Nigerian Round Table Meeting<sup>30</sup> in 1981. This meeting was regarded by Professor Anatoly Gromyko, Director of the Africa Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow, as an important step to promote Nigeria-Soviet relations. In November 1983, when the Soviet President Breznev died, Nigeria lost a true friend. In his condolence message sent to the Soviet people, President Shagari regarded him as the greatest leader of our time and praised his support to the liberation movements.

From the above study of the Nigerian relations with the Soviet Union during the Second Republic, it

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30 The first Nigerian-Soviet Round Table meeting was organised by the Nigerian Institute of Foreign Affairs in Lagos in December 1978.

can be said that relations between the two countries remained cool and confined to limited areas. The issue of <sup>the</sup> Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and <sup>the</sup> United States' pressure to boycott of Moscow Olympics did not affect the relations in any way. The stand of President Shagari was of non-alignment on these issues. Bilateral exchanges between the two countries in social, economic and other fields remained limited. Although the issue of iron and steel plant initially strained the relations between the two countries later on they became cordial. However, no new agreement was signed between the two countries and Nigeria did not involve the Soviet Union in any new project. Over all it seems that Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union during this period were cool and marginal.



## Chapter VI

### CONCLUSION

In the first five chapters we have studied Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union. In this chapter, we are going to summarize and draw conclusion regarding our opinion about the relations between the two countries.

The above study of Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union shows consistency as well as divergence. The relationship in political and economic fields shows ups and downs; in bilateral trade continuity and upward trends; over global issues initial hostility and then cordiality; and in other spheres considerable variation.

In political sphere, around independence Nigeria and the Soviet Union had practically no relations due to the anti-Soviet bias of certain forces. The demands of the leftists for the closer Nigeria-Soviet relations were rejected by the right-wing nationalists of Nigeria. They created a feeling of suspicion against the Soviet Union. It was only after 1963 that the Nigerian government under public pressure took steps towards developing political relations between the two countries. Until January 1966 the relationship was

marked by suspicion and fear. Improvement in Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union comes only after the overthrow of the rightist political forces. The military rulers were fast to grasp that the civil war which had broken out could not be fought with the help of those who never wanted to see a united Nigeria - that is former colonial powers and the USA. While civil war was challenging the unity of Nigeria, the western powers followed policy of wait and see. The military rulers naturally were compelled to approach the non-western sources that is the socialist bloc. This opened up a new chapter in Nigeria's foreign policy. The Soviets, who did not want to see a weak, divided and dependent Nigeria agreed to help with arms and ammunitions. Soviet readiness to supply arms and equipments brought the Soviet Union and Nigeria closer to each other. The policy of suspicion and fear followed by former regime and the pro-western forces disappeared. Instead there was a warm appreciation for the Soviet Union, its activities in economic and social field, its support to the liberation movements and to anti-racial and anti-neo-colonial struggle. The change

was so marked that the Nigerian government and press instead of criticising the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia favoured the Soviet stand and praised the Soviet action. The FNG's steps for closer Nigeria-Soviet relations led to the growth of cordial friendship, mutual understanding and bilateral cooperation between the two countries. This continued even after the civil war and reached its climax in 1974-75 when the Nigerian Head of the State General Gowon visited Moscow, and MPLA group was recognised in Angola.

After the change of leadership in 1975 the relations between the two countries continued to grow but the civil war spirit had started fading. However, the two countries came closer in 1980 over the issue of Afghanistan and Moscow Olympics boycott. The Nigerian government on these critical issues adopted non-aligned stand. It opposed the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in principle and at the same time condemned the United States and its allies for stirring trouble all over the world and mixing politics with sports. The Soviet Union welcomed this stand. All these led to the growth of cordiality in the relations between the two countries, which continued even after 1983.

In the economic field the relations between the two countries grew over the years. Nigeria took very little interest in attracting Soviet economic aid during 1960-66. Although trade agreements were signed and economic missions were sent to the Soviet Union, no sincere efforts were made by the Balewa government to promote greater economic cooperation.

Only after 1966, when military government took steps towards breaking relations of dependency on the West by diversifying the sources of economic aid and cooperation from the Socialist countries, economic relations with the Soviet Union were given due attention.

As the war broke out, Nigeria tried to enhance economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. During the war, the Soviet Union too responded positively to reconstruct the war-torn economy and offered more economic assistance. The major area of cooperation was iron and steel industry. In the post-war years, Nigeria also sought aid in oil and transport sectors. The economic relations were further strengthened under the Murtala regime. Since then Nigeria did not seek economic aid except in iron and steel industry from the Soviet Union. Even during the second civilian government economic relations remained confined to iron and steel project. No other sector of the economy was opened for the Soviet assistance.

In the field of trade and commerce Nigeria-Soviet relations grew over the years and always showed an upward trend. From 1960 to 1983 the Nigerian trade with the Soviet Union grew manifold but it is remarkable that it always remained in favour of Nigeria. During the Balewa regime bilateral trade improved slowly but during 1967-75 it developed rapidly and after that the pace of growth slowed down but showed upward trend till 1983 and even subsequently.

On global issues Nigeria and the Soviet Union differed in their approach and foreign policy objectives in the early years of independence. During the Balewa regime Nigeria took pro-Western stand on most of the international issues including cold war issues and extended support to the Western powers against the Soviet Union. But on the issue of colonialism and racism she lukewarmly extended her support and solidarity to the anti-colonial struggle led by the Soviet Union, with other socialist and third world countries at international fora. The Nigerian stand changed under the military rule. Since the outbreak of civil war Nigeria began to support the Soviet Union on issues of anti-colonialism and anti-racism. This was due to the lessons learnt at the time of civil war, when the neo-colonialist forces tried to weaken and divide Nigeria.

The Soviet support for safeguarding the Nigerian unity and integrity had tremendous impact on hitherto stated non-aligned foreign policy. Nigeria became more critical of colonialism, racism, and neo-colonialism. She began to oppose intrigues of imperialism in Africa and elsewhere along with the anti-imperialist forces, led by the Soviet Union and non-aligned countries. This change in Nigeria's foreign policy was in consistent with the Soviet foreign policy objective, at least on the African issues. This was more evident in the coming years on several other issues i.e. Angola, Shaha, Rhodesia, Mozambique, the Middle East, South Africa and Namibia. This policy had been bequeathed by the Shehu Shagari government and continued thereafter. Thus on foreign policy issues Nigeria and the Soviet Union came closer over the years.

In other fields i.e. defence, social and cultural on the whole the two countries had maintained congenial relations despite some differences on other issues.

From the above discussion of Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union during 1960-83, following conclusions can be drawn:

Political relations between the two countries developed slowly in the earlier phase but it became

cordial due to the exigencies of civil war, when traditional Western friends betrayed Nigeria and adopted dubious neutrality. The relations between the two countries continued to be friendly and there were no differences on any bilateral issues.

Economic relations also grew very slowly in the early years of independence, but after 1967 Nigeria took more interest in Soviet aid and cooperation, and diversified her economic relations with the Soviet Union. The areas of Soviet cooperation remained confined to iron and steel development, oil sector and transport system. No other sector of the economy was opened to the Soviet cooperation. After 1979, steel project was the only area of economic cooperation between the two countries. Thus economic cooperation remained marginal till 1983.

Trade flourished between the two countries over the years and continued to be so but it always remained in favour of Nigeria.

On global issues Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union was hostile during the Balewa regime. Later on it eased and became more cooperative, particularly since the time of civil war and continued to be so even after 1983.

In social and cultural fields, the two countries had maintained cordial relations over the years and there had not been any differences on any issues.

Over all, it can be stated that Nigeria's relations with the Soviet Union had been cordial over the years in all the spheres and both the countries had anonymity of views on most of the global issues despite having two different types of system.

It is to be seen in the coming years how far the relationship of Nigeria with the Soviet Union will be instrumental in the welfare and economic betterment of the people of Nigeria.



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