

# The State and the Military: Perspectives on Nigeria-USA Military Cooperation

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## Abstract

*The official position of USA and Nigeria in favour of military cooperation rather than a military pact does not necessarily demean its value in defence and strategic thinking. The withdrawal of military assistance to Nigeria on March 23, 2003 should be seen as a strong protest against Nigerian reservations on the US-led war on Iraq rather than a complete end to it.*

*Though military cooperation will strengthen capacity building and influence of Nigeria in military affairs, Nigeria needs to probe beyond appearances to ensure a new thinking for enriching the strategic value of military cooperation.*



## Introduction

Given the long-standing misadventure of military rule in some countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 'the State and the Military' has fallen into misuse. There are two senses in which State and Military should be understood. The first is the constitutional role of the military in a sovereign and independent State. In both constitutional and military governments, the military, *ipso facto*, remains the coercive instrument of the State for the defence of the citizens and of core values. So, in a world system that is endemic with international conflicts, the military is the only instrument of the State in contracting alliances or defence pacts. The Ministry of Defence is specially designed to oversee the use of the military to achieve all military and strategic interests and aspirations of the State.

The second view of the State and the Military is in terms of the phenomenon of military rule. It is not about the professional duty of the military as such but its style of intervention, politics, administration, transition programmes, or disengagement tactics. Others include military rule and foreign policy, accountability, human rights, economy national duty and national ethos. Granted that military rule is an aberration, one fact still stands out. The Government's decree has to harmonise with the

Constitution by providing that the Ministry of Defence oversee the development and use of military force for deterring and for managing or fighting external threats and aggressions. The military remains the defence instrument of, say, Nigeria's foreign policy.

For the most part, emphasis on military intervention and rule in civil society has obscured the more enduring professional duty of the military, whether in civil or military governments. It is this apparently hidden dimension that this paper seeks to analyse in terms of the politics and law of military cooperation for national defence and security. In strategic studies, defence and security cooperation is not designed to foil internal *coups d'etat*. It is exclusively a broad plan of joint action between a client State and the protector State on the training of military personnel, arms transfer and classified security assistance. For the protector State, military cooperation is a variant of the officially accepted means of penetration and intervention in the military regime of the client State.

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

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

These are some of the externally oriented goals of strategic military cooperation on the part of the client or weak partner.<sup>1</sup> It is also not ruled out that military cooperation may be a prelude to a military pact or a defence agreement.

The often ignored aspect of military cooperation is the possibility of intervention of the protector, the strong military partner, in the internal affairs of a client State to safeguard or install a leadership of its interest in a threatening crisis situation. By every strategic measurement, the weak partner is the disadvantaged. The protector State is strategically advantaged not only by arms supplies and other military services but also through opportunities for espionage activities.

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

- Projection of power from a position of strength
- Expansion of the sphere of military and strategic influence
- Access to the resources of the client State
- Usage of the client State as a military base to exercise influence in the sub-region or region
- Usage the client State to attract neighbouring states for expanded military cooperation
- Promotion of some classified political and economic goals

For a better appreciation, let us briefly recall the first defence pact of Nigeria.

### **The First Nigeria Defence Pact**

As soon as Nigeria attained political independence, it entered into the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact.<sup>2</sup> It was simply a defence pact between the former colonial power and the newly independent State. In Britain's thinking, Nigeria had the potential to lead Africa and be a mouthpiece of the West and Britain in Africa. For Britain, a defence pact with Nigeria was not contingent upon the fear of stronger neighbours of Nigeria. Rather, it was designed to:

- Secure British access to Nigerian resources
- Be a part of training and developing the Nigerian military force
- Strengthen its influence in the West African sub-region which has been dominated by Franco phone states with 'formalised' defence pacts with France
- Assist Nigeria to nurture and mature as an enduring democratic nation

The Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact was seen by Nigeria an image booster. Nigeria also perceived the defence pact as an additional military element to project its ambition of leadership in Africa from a position of strength rather than weakness.

As an infant nation, Nigeria was inexperienced about contradictions in the inherited, structurally-dependent political economy. The politicians and leaders were rather quite optimistic about the lifespan of Nigerian democracy. They did not perceive their weak West African neighbours as threats. There was no internalised strategic thinking that the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact could be of a value in foiling military coups.

Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the Western Region was the first to raise an obvious objection to the Anglo-Nigerian-Defence Pact. Soon after, Nigerian students rose in protest against the pact, which they perceived as a loss of national

sovereignty and indirect continuation of British imperialism. Secondly, the past was projected as an attempt to subordinate the defence and security of Nigeria to Britain.

In 1961, the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact was abrogated.<sup>3</sup> As Nowa A. Omogui observes:

Looking back, whether the Anglo-Nigerian Pact of 1960 would have changed Nigeria's political stability will never be known. But it cannot escape attention that the sympathies of the middle ranking army officers, who struck on January 15, 1966, were with the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA)—political soulmates of those who opposed the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact of 1960.<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between a protector State and a client State through a defence pact may or may not prevent a coup. It does not also necessarily imply loss of sovereignty. In military strategy, a defence pact is a positive sum game. Both states have advantages in a defence pact without prejudice to which of the two gains more.

### **Strategic Analysis of Nigeria-US Military Cooperation**

For decades, the United States has treated Africa as a basket case. Following the end of the Cold War, USA has begun to focus more sharply on the economic, strategic and military matters in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The historic visit of US President Bill Clinton to Nigeria in August 2000 had many significant dimensions. The Federal Government of Nigeria admits entering into military cooperation with USA, but not a military pact. *Since no proposal for either of them passed through the National Assembly for debate and ratification, critics maintain that it is a military pact.* And, President Olusegun Obasanjo is alleged to have signed Nigeria-US Military Cooperation with President Bill Clinton.<sup>6</sup> Part of the inspiration appears to have come from a kite flown once in the National Assembly that the nascent democracy of Nigeria should enter into a defence pact or military cooperation with a power that would defend the democracy of Nigeria in the event of a military coup. In contrast, many Nigerians, including strategists, defence intellectuals and former foreign ministers have opposed the help of any foreign power to defend Nigerian democracy. In any case defending democracy is more about good governance than anything else. In spite of the opposition against a foreign defence pact or military cooperation, the President has signed the military cooperation agreement for the following reasons:

- a) Providing training to some battalions of the Nigerian army
- b) Providing eight patrol vessels for the Nigerian army to police the oil producing areas
- c) Meeting broad objectives of protecting oil installations in the Niger Delta

- d) Training the Nigerian army for peacekeeping operations<sup>7</sup>

### **Nigeria-US Military Cooperation: More Misgivings than Promises**

Like defence pacts, military cooperation is also a crucial issue in strategic policy and its implementation must be defined and understood. The hallmark of military cooperation is national interest.<sup>8</sup> That military cooperation is not the same thing as a military pact does not make it a less serious strategic issue.

Critics are doubtful whether Nigeria is as clear as the USA on the implications of the Nigeria-US Military Cooperation Agreement. No doubt, the US has a well-developed strategic doctrine and defence policy. For its part, Nigeria has only an ill-developed strategic doctrine, defence policy, military force and security consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

In defence and strategic analysis, what Nigeria has presently is a political rather than a professional army. More so, the lack of a clear national vision puts Nigeria in a disadvantaged position in benefiting from military relations with the USA. Nigeria is the largest market for the USA in Africa. And, USA may pursue its oil and other economic interests through military cooperation. There are other disturbing issues as well. These include: -

- a) The process leading to the military cooperation
- b) Gaps in areas of military cooperation
- c) Legal aspects of the military cooperation
- d) Aspects of military training
- e) Prevention of *Coups d' Etat*

An analysis of each of these items are presented below.

#### *The Process Leading to the Nigeria-USA Military Cooperation*

Like Constitution-making, military pact or military cooperation cannot be based on personal initiatives.<sup>10</sup> It is a crucial element of national policy. It should not be an exercise in secrecy between governments. Citizens of the country have a right to know about it through their congress, parliament or national assembly.

Professor Omo Omoruyi, among others, is the most vocal critic of the 'unilateralism' of President Olusegun Obasanjo who is not known to have consulted civilian and military strategists in this regard.<sup>11</sup>

President Obasanjo has displayed some unilateralist tendency in domestic policies. These include:

- Unilateral increase in the pump price of oil

- Use of the armed forces to ‘teach’ some lessons to the people in the oil producing areas
- Benign neglect of the politicisation of religion in the core North
- Changing the 13 per cent derivation revenue which is due to the oil producing states from oil revenue<sup>12</sup>

Under these circumstances, there are many unsettled questions on the process followed in the agreed Nigeria-USA military cooperation.

#### *Gaps in Areas of Military Cooperation*

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

- Train/re-train the Nigerian military force
- Protect the nascent democracy against military incursions
- Provide patrol vessels for the Nigerian military (Navy) to police the oil producing areas
- Protect oil installations in the ‘Niger Delta’
- Train/re-train the Nigerian military for Peace Keeping Operations

However, it overlooks what a military cooperation should fulfil in the protection of the porous borders of Nigeria against frequent external threats, subversion, sabotage and aggression.<sup>13</sup> There are some questions raised here. Would the US Army be drawn gradually into the Nigerian contingent for conflict resolution in the sub-region? Would the US Army be part of the Nigerian military force to defend the claimed Nigerian territory of Bakassi against the French-Cameroonian defence pact should the need arise? How does the US intend to transform an extremely political army into an extremely professionalised Nigerian army? How does the US hope to assist Nigeria in developing a healthy, strategic-oriented defence policy? Or Nigeria’s air defence system? How would the US military act should a Niger Delta oil crisis threaten the interests of US oil multinationals?

These questions point to important gaps which are covered in the agreement.

#### *Legal Aspects of the Military Cooperation*

Military cooperation may contribute to protecting and preserving national sovereignty. It has to be a matter of legislation by the states involved and should not originate or end in the perceptions of two presidents. At the time of writing, there is no evidence that the Nigeria-US military cooperation was ever put before either the

Nigerian National Assembly or the US Congress for debate and ratification.<sup>14</sup> It is doubtful if the ministries of Defence in Nigeria and the US were similarly involved, or as it should be, the foreign affairs ministries of Nigeria and the USA.<sup>15</sup>

On its part, the US State Department is said to have briefed the House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Africa that the White House was talking to Nigeria from the point of view of a training programme and not a defence pact.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, such a cooperation should be of equal concern to the two presidents as well as the law-making bodies of the two countries.

### *Aspects of Military Training*

One aspect of the Nigeria-US military cooperation is training of the Nigerian military force. A question arises: What is wrong with the past and present training programmes of Nigeria with the United Kingdom, Israel, India, Pakistan and Canada? In arms supply, the Nigerian army depends more on China, the Middle-East, Russia and, North Korea than USA.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, USA is not quite sensitive to the fact that the Nigerian military is not as professional as the US military. No one could wish away the fact that something fundamentally negative has impacted upon the Nigerian military due to its many years of over-indulgence in civil politics. Nigeria has a highly politicised military; not a professional force any longer. If the Nigerian military is to be retrained, the implication is that the USA should develop, first, a *political programme* for purging the military of a considerable dosage of political psychology, before a *military programme* is undertaken. Caution is needed to avoid drawing the US into Nigeria's internal political affairs, or even any sub-regional affairs. Without demobilisation and depoliticisation of the Nigerian military as a conversion procedure, it is impossible for any foreign power to train an existing military that is politicised at all levels.

Another difficulty is that the USA has a standing phobia of defence or military links with countries having a high record of human rights violations and corruption. Is the US prepared to ignore high human rights issues in Nigeria?

Assume that the US training programme for Nigeria is a reality. We may then have a confusing picture. Nigeria would have two military forces; one with an American orientation and equipment; the other military with orientation and equipment from a myriad of countries.<sup>18</sup> Nigeria needs to be cautious and avoid straining its relations with UK, Russia, China, Israel and North Korea. As Professor Claude Ake would caution, there is need for Nigeria to probe beyond appearances.

### *Prevention of Coups d' Etat*

In defence and strategic studies, most military pacts are not signed specifically

for the purposes of preventing or crushing coups.<sup>19</sup> A military pact does not necessarily prevent military *coups d'etat* or internal insurrections.

Historical examples abound where *coups d'etat* took place in full view of defence pact troops. After France put down the coup attempt against Leo Mba of Gabon in 1964, it openly announced that it would, remain neutral in Francophone domestic crises except where the lives of French citizens were at risk and necessitated evacuation. Two years later, Burundi, Algeria, Congo (Zaire), Dahomey (Benin), Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), the Central African Republic and Togo, all had successful military *coups d'etat*, which derived from the internal contradictions in their political systems. The French government had full knowledge of the coups with French soldiers watching.<sup>20</sup>

There are cases where a defence pact may be structured to discourage meddling in the internal affairs of a host nation. Examples include the successful coups in Turkey in 1960 and 1980 as well as Greece in 1967 and 1973 in spite of their memberships of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). There were some cases, however, where defence pacts discouraged mutinies in the East African states of Tanganyika (Tanzania), Uganda and Kenya in 1964.

However, the danger remains that a foreign military force may be drawn into an escalated civil insurrection or war.<sup>21</sup> For example, in the case of the Nigeria-US defence cooperation agreement US troops would be involved in battling the militancy of Niger Delta Youths who are protesting against marginalisation, exclusion and neglect of the core oil producing states.

By extension, it is known over the years that Nigeria plays the Big Brother role to the West African States, particularly its immediate neighbours despite border security problems. Should the Nigerian border crisis escalate into war with, say, the Benin Republic, Chad, Niger, or Cameroon, what use would Nigeria make of US troops? If the US accepts more than military cooperation, namely a defence role in favour of Nigeria, it does so at the risk of its relations with France and, indeed, the European Union. Records abound that, if only Nigeria should stabilise its economy and polity, it has the potential to ensure independent capacity-building in retraining itself, and project power beyond national frontiers from a position of strength.

It is rather far-fetched to think USA would use its military cooperation with Nigeria for covert or overt measures against French interests in the Bakassi Peninsula. France remains of more strategic value to the USA than Nigeria. It is also to be hoped that USA would not avail the military cooperation to foil any ballot or military coup in Nigeria.

## Nigerian Security Roles without a Foreign Military Pact/Cooperation

Inspired by the perceived size, wealth, population and strategic location, Nigeria has consistently assumed a supportive, and indeed, leadership role in the areas of conflict resolution in Africa.<sup>22</sup> It must be stated clearly that Nigeria's external military ambition and commitments usually outweigh the realities of its domestic capabilities. In each of its external military engagement's, Nigeria participated so at a high cost, and from a position of weakness.<sup>23</sup> In spite of the odds being against Nigeria, has been very consistent in its efforts to support conflict resolution in Africa where the big powers dread to accept a role.

Out of a total of 51 peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the United Nations, Nigeria has been involved in 25; see Table 1 below.<sup>24</sup> Unlike a number of world powers like the USA, Britain, Japan and France, the Nigerian government was not in the habit of withdrawing contributed troops to the UN for fear of 'hot' battles and casualties.

**Table 1: UN Peacekeeping Missions that Nigeria Participated in (as of 1999)**

1	United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUG), 1960-64	14	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), 1993-1996
2	United Nations Security Force in West New Guinea (UNSF), 1962-63	15	United Nations Operations in Somalia II (UNOSOM II), 1993-96
3	United Nations India-Pakistan Observer Mission (UNIPOM), 1965-66	16	United Nations Aouzou Strip Observers Group (UNASOG), 1994
4	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), 1978	17	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), 1994
5	United Nations Civilian Police Support Group in Croatia, 1988	18	United Nations Preventive Deployment Force in Macedonia (UNPREDEP), 1995
6	United Nations Transition Observer Group, 1988-91	19	United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), 1995
7	United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia, (UNTAG), 1989-90	20	United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO), 1995-96
8	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, 1991	21	United Nations Angola Verification Mission III (UNAVEM III), 1995-97
9	United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission, 1991	22	United Nation Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP), 1996
10	United Nations Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II), 1991-95	23	United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slovenia. Boaraja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), 1996-98
11	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), 1992-93	24	United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), 1997
12	United Nations Operations in Mozambique (UNOMOZ)	25	United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone, 1999
13	United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), 1992-95		

Source: 50 years: UN Peacekeeping (1948-98). 1998. UN Department of Public Information; New York, and other sources.

Nigeria and Canada are among the most financially and militarily committed countries to UN Peace Keeping Operations.

Within the framework established by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Nigeria has the following credits:<sup>25</sup>

- Member of Ad-Hoc Committees and Good Offices of the OAU in mediation of the Algerian-Moroccan border dispute in 1963-64
- Member of the OAU Good Offices Committee, which mediated in the border dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia; and between Kenya and Somalia
- Discouraged African states in the 1970s from inviting extra-African powers to engage in purely African conflicts; (Equatorial Guinea was persuaded to withdraw its dispute with Gabon from the UN)
- Played a leading role in the Chadian-Libyan conflict in the 1970s and the early 1980s. Nigeria sponsored several conferences such as those organised in Lagos and Kano; Accords in 1979; created atmosphere for free and fair election. Nigeria led the OAU peacekeeping force in Chad under the command of Major General Geoffrey Ejiga. OAU did not send the promised money. The USA failed in its financial promise too. Nigeria had to spend up to \$80 million in the operation
- On the Angolan crisis in 1976, General Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria stood against US President Gerald Ford and swung support of the OAU for the MPLA government in Luanda; (attracted the anger of USA and South Africa)
- Waged unparalleled struggle to end colonialism and racism in Africa; earned Nigeria the status of a frontline state even without border proximity with South Africa. Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Namibia gained tremendously from Nigeria's fearless support in the liberation struggle.<sup>26</sup>
- Nigeria has extended unparalleled moral, financial and diplomatic support in Namibia's independence under SWAPO. This is listed in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Nigeria's Support to Namibia's independence under SWAPO**

Donated N 100 m (US\$ 11 m) for Namibia Solidarity Fund
Paid US\$ 4 m aid for SWAPO's electoral campaign (1989)
Contributed US\$ 1,00,000 for repatriation of Namibian refugees
Paid US\$ 162,674 to UNTAG budget
Involved in the Liberian and Sierra Leonian crises under ECOMOG

The foregoing efforts have one obvious point of significance. In spite of domestic political, economic, social and military crises successive Nigerian leaders provided high-spirited support for international conflict resolution without any foreign defence pact or support. If Nigeria had achieved all this since the 1960s through the Cold War era, why does it need a foreign military pact or cooperation with the United States of America at a time when there are no colonies and racist enclaves in Africa, and Cold War strategic rivalry is absent?

### **From Military Cooperation to Disengagement of Military Aid**

Military cooperation between Nigeria and the USA is no longer an issue of doubt or debate in academic and defence circles.<sup>27</sup> Since 2001, both the Nigerian and American governments have issued political statements admitting military cooperation but not a military pact. In spite of misgivings on due process, military cooperation has existed between the two countries.

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

The other recent event relates to the US suspension of military cooperation with Nigeria. On March 20, 2003, the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs Chief Dubeon Onyia made a public announcement which linked withdrawal of military aid as due to Nigeria's opposition to the US-led war on Iraq.<sup>28</sup> Since then, US-Nigeria military relations have created strains in both the political and the defence establishments. Overall, Nigeria means a lot to USA and the present strained relations could be temporary and military cooperation between Nigeria and USA may be expected to return to 'normalcy'.

### **Summary of Analysis**

Since independence, Nigeria's major weakness in world politics arises from her false sense of power and influence. In the process, Nigeria alienated itself from all the known dominant powers—Britain, France, Soviet Russia, China and USA. For Nigeria, one advantage of the present military link with the USA is that it boosts the country's strategic image internationally because USA is certainly the world's super power.

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

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

Should the Nigeria-US military cooperation be once more a reality, the Nigerian leadership should insist that Nigeria will not serve as just a US military base. Since Nigeria has interest in foreign military linkages, it should spread its net wider to include Russia, Britain, Japan, China, Israel and South Africa. Finally, Professor Claude Ake's statement that it is time for probing beyond appearances is worth implementing.

### **Acknowledgement**

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