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Preface

Nigeria's relationship with the United States is important for a number of reasons. First, it is the relationship between two countries that have sought to play important roles within different but deeply related geographical spheres: the United States in the world and Nigeria in Africa. The desire of each to harness its resources in the pursuit of its objectives has inevitably introduced twists and turns in the relationship, especially as each nation's goals are, in some ways, not mutually exclusive. Second, it is the relationship between the two of the countries with the largest populations of blacks in the world. Consequently, how both countries relate is of considerable interest to blacks all over the world. Indeed, until the independence of South Africa, the relationship between the United States and Nigeria was used by many people as the yardstick for American attitudes toward the entire African continent. Third, from the Nigerian perspective, the relationship with the United States is arguably the most important in terms of complexity and extent, especially as the United States is Nigeria's most important trading partner. Even Nigeria's relationship with Britain, though historically longer and with many other links and institutions to further entrench it, still comes after the relationship the African country has with the United States.

A detailed study of the relationship between the two countries not long after the celebration of Nigeria's fiftieth independence anniversary has additional importance. Both nations are at decisive phases of their history, with the United States having its first African-American President while Nigeria consolidates its democracy with its first civilian-to-civilian leadership transition. Numerous recent developments suggest that the relationship between the two countries will continue to assume greater importance for quite some time to come. For example, the United States indicated in 2000 that up to 25% of its oil supply would be coming from the Gulf of Guinea by the year 2015.¹ This is a region where Nigeria plays a particularly strategic role.

The relationship between Nigeria and the United States reaches far beyond economic concerns. As Nigeria celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2010, citizens of the country had contributed significantly to the socio-economic life of the United States, in enterprises ranging from business, sports and academics, to medicine, banking and entrepreneurship. Indeed, not even in Britain are there more Nigerians making significant contributions to their adopted country as in the United States.

Finally, shortly before Nigeria's fiftieth independence anniversary, the relationship between the two countries passed through perhaps its most important test with the December 2009 attempt by a Nigerian, Umar Mutallab², to bomb an American Airline. This development, which was widely condemned by the government of Nigeria and its citizens, especially those in the United States, brought home to the nations the need to stem the flow of religious radicalisation in Nigeria. But while this and previous hiccups in the relationship created their own challenges, they have also led to a deepening and

¹ See, Abiodun Alao: *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: The Tragedy of Endowment*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007

² Indictment in *USA v Abdulmutallab*, Case: 2: 10-cr-20005, retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/Abdulmutallab_Indictment.pdf on 09/04/2011

strengthening of ties between the two countries. This calls for a detailed analysis of the relationship between Nigeria and the United States between 1960 and 2010.

This book is a step in this direction. We hope to discuss the links between the two countries, focussing on how the relationship has been able to withstand political and diplomatic vicissitudes. The objectives of this book are three-fold: first to document some of the key ramifications of American-Nigerian relations over five decades, highlighting the ups and downs of the relationship and their consequences; second to assess the impact of the “past” on the “present” and the “future” of Nigerian-America relations. This is particularly important because a complex tapestry of dreams and desires seem to govern the political, economic and security relations between the two countries. Third, the book provides a detailed study that can assist the process of policy formations in both Nigeria and the United States. In a broader sense, as Nigeria begins its second 50 years of independent existence, there is a need to begin the process of documenting, in a detailed manner, its relationship with key countries. Such a detailed study will assist the foreign policy formulation of the country.

The methodology adopted in this book is to identify all the key aspects of the relationship between the two countries and provide a detailed analysis of the key issues that have impacted their social, economic, political, diplomatic and military relations. Although the focus is mainly on Nigeria and the United States, the book also touches on situations in others countries that inevitably became intertwined with American/Nigerian relations, especially the situation in South Africa during the era of apartheid and minority rule as well as in Liberia, during the country’s bitter civil conflict. On the whole, it is our conviction that while fifty years may be a short time in a relationship that has every prospect of perpetual survival, it is almost certainly enough for some form of stock-taking, even if preliminary.

It is also appropriate at this juncture to acknowledge the assistance of those who have been instrumental in getting this book out. We want to thank Nigeria’s Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Adebowale Adefuye for commissioning this project. Apart from commissioning the work, Ambassador Adefuye also assisted by providing us with the materials from the embassy. We are also grateful to the staff of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the assistance they offered. Finally, we thank all our contributors for heeding our call and for accommodating our invitation amidst their respective tight schedules.

Shola Omoregie and Abiodun Alao