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## NIGERIA'S DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF ZIMBABWE: AN APPRAISAL

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### Abstract

One crucial issue that occupied Nigeria's diplomatic agenda immediately after independence in 1960 was the struggle for the total decolonization of Africa. This was a natural assimilation of the Pan-Africanist ideal, which among other things, aimed at the total emancipation of Africa. Nigeria particularly considered the struggle for the decolonization of Zimbabwe as an important preoccupation. This paper, therefore, appraises Nigeria's diplomatic efforts toward the decolonization of Zimbabwe. Adopting the historical/descriptive method of enquiry, the study note as follows: First, that Nigeria generously assisted the decolonization process financially, militarily in addition to consistent high powered diplomatic shuttles across the globe to drum support for the decolonization movement. Second, the Obasanjo's Military regime took a radical step by nationalizing the assets of the British Petroleum in Nigeria in order to discourage the British government from supporting the intransigence of Ian Smith. Third, Nigeria's burning passion for the Zimbabwean question continued till 1980, when independence was granted. The paper concludes that as Nigeria has express her interest in the UN Security Council seat, it would be expected that Africa nations including Zimbabwe that overwhelmingly benefited from Nigeria's Afro-centric posture would rise to the occasion by supporting her in this respect, for one good turn deserves another.

(Keywords: Nigeria, decolonization, Zimbabwe, Africa, Diplomacy)

## **Introduction**

Unarguably, Zimbabwe is a rich country endowed with valuable mineral resources, agricultural land and ideal climatic conditions. This had attracted Cecil Rhodes's British South African Company to prospect for minerals in the land of Ndebele (Matabele). Consequently, Rhodes's company had received a Royal Charter in 1889 "to promote, under the supervision of the High Commissioner for South Africa, trade, commerce, civilization and government". The Royal Charter's major thrust was the granting of mineral concessions, and by extension encouraged white adventurers to pour into Ndebeland, grabbing as much of the territory as they possibly could while the African population provided cheap labour for their farms and mines. Initial African resistance was crushed by British military superiority (Ojigbo, 1982). However, under the minority-racist rule which emerged after a series of historical political and social experimentations between 1895 and 1923, land alienation continued unabated. (Nwachukwu, 1991). For example, the 1931 Land Act excluded Africans from ownership of land in the rich and fertile High Veld. Apart from land alienation, Africans were also stripped of political right by the European imperialists.

In 1953, in the face of African opposition, Britain consolidated the two colonies of Rhodesia with Nyasaland (now Malawi) in the ill-fated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Growing African nationalism and general dissentment persuaded Britain to dissolve the Union in 1963, and formed three colonies, namely, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia. As colonial rule was ending throughout the continent - majority governments assumed control in the then neighbouring Northern Rhodesia and in Nyasaland; the white-minority Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from United Kingdom on the 11th of November 1965. The United Kingdom deemed this an act of rebellion, but refused to use force to re-establish control in the Rhodesia. In 1970, white-minority government declared itself a "Republic" (Ojigbo, 1982).

Meanwhile, as the population of the Africans kept increasing as against whites, the minority white continued to subject the majority African to servitude in their own land. The Rhodesian African came together through a national union (Ojigbo, 1982). This nationalistic feeling ignited in the 1930s and culminated in a Civil War pivoted by Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe African Peoples Union and Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National

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Union and other nationalists. Through diplomatic intervention of Nigeria, the various nationalistic groups coalesced into the Patriotic Front. Although the fierce struggle for liberation was supported by the OAU and many African countries particularly the Frontline States which Nigeria was an honorary member, Nigerian government, particularly, the Murtala/Obasanjo regimes evidently played sustainable diplomatic role that resulted in the historic independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 (Uwechue, 1991).

This paper is divided into six sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two discusses the evolution of nationalistic movements, section three deals with the role of Nigeria in the liberation struggle, section four discusses Anglo-American Peace Proposals, section five examines the Lancaster House Agreement, while section six is the conclusion.

### **The Evolution of the Decolonization Movements in Zimbabwe**

The genesis of the contemporary movements for freedom in Zimbabwe was in 1934, when the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress was formed under the leadership of Rev. Douglas Samkange. Essentially a pressure group which tried to persuade the government to adopt reforms, the congress was later led by Aaron Jacha. Its efforts, however, were met with little response by the government of the day; hence, it was virtually inactive until it was resuscitated in the early 1950s. At the close of the 1940s, a new and militant proletarian movement, the African Voice Association, emerged. It was spearheaded by Benjamin B. Burombo, said to be the father of modern nationalism in Zimbabwe. In 1948, Burombo organized a very successful strike for higher wages of municipal workers throughout the country and paralysed activities in Bulawayo and Salisbury (now Harare) for some days (Uwechue. 1991). This made a significant impression and added value to their struggle in the face of white domination.

The following year, the African Voice turned its attention to the plight of the rural population, leading black opposition against the government's land policies. The government had embarked on a scheme which included the forcible removal of the peasants from their homes and land, and the destocking of their cattle. Burombo organized resistance against the Land Husbandry Bill in 1951 which eroded the rights of the African peasants. Also the issue of the proposed federation was opposed by the Africans under the auspices of All African Convention. The Convention sent delegates to the first Federal Conference in London in April, 1952 to press

for colonial reforms. However, in spite of the combined African opposition in the three countries (Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi) the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was established on the 4th of September 1953.

According to Uwechue (1991), in 1955, a fresh momentum was added to the resistance movement with the formation of the City Youth League, led by James Chikerema, George Nyandoro and Edson Sithole. In 1957, the City Youth League and the old Congress, coalesced into the African National Congress (ANC), and Joshua Nkomo was elected the president of the new organization. The ANC rapidly gathered mass support in the country and continue with the liberation struggle. The central thrust of its force was aimed at articulating the major grievances of land, wages and racial discrimination. The non-violent character notwithstanding, the ANC was suppressed by the government of Edgar Whitehead after the declaration of a state of emergency on the 26th of February 1959. The organization was proscribed and many of its leaders were arrested and detained by the colonial establishment. Attendant on the proscription of the ANC was the introduction of a battery of draconian legislation by the settler-racist regime. Almost simultaneously, the regime enacted six laws designed to further suppress black political activities. These laws became part of the permanent arsenal that successive minority regimes ruthlessly deployed to suppress liberation movements.

Indeed, after the suppression of the ANC, a new movement, the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed in 1960. It was temporarily led by Michael Mawema. At the inaugural congress of the movement which was organized in October 1960, under the chairmanship of Mr. Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo was elected the president. The NDP adopted a more militant approach than its predecessor; it demanded radical constitutional change for the realization of a just and democratic Zimbabwe. In 1960, the movement led to the famous Salisbury "march of 7,000" in protest against the arrest of three NDP leaders. The march soon took the form of an effective strike involving of more than 40,000 NDP supporters.

In December 1961, a successor party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), was launched. Its leadership consisted of people who had been on the National Executive Committee of the NDP. ZAPU adopted the political strategy of the NDP, but its method was divergent to include sabotage and violence, designed to bring about majority rule. ZAPU was however banned by the government in September 1962, due to its organized and

intensive resistance against the settler minority government. Its entire leadership, as well as its activists throughout the country, were arrested and restricted to their home areas for three months. The caging of the African activists gave room to the emergence of racist and extremely right-wing Rhodesian Front, which was formed in March 1962 to gain power. Meanwhile, in 1963, latent differences among the leadership of ZAPU crystallized and culminated in the split of the organization. Out ZAPU emerged the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Ndabaningi Sithole, its executive members included Leopold Takawira and Robert Mugabe while the People's Caretaker Council (PCC) was led Joshua Nkomo. Due to intense struggle against the oppressive minority regime, the government adopted severe forms of oppression against the leadership of the liberation groups. They were arrested and incarcerated in the remote parts of the country. In August 1964, the Smith government declared a state of emergency and banned ZANU and PCC, However, the two parties re-established temporary operational headquarters in Zambia and Tanzania, the PCC renamed itself Zimbabwean African Peoples Union (ZAPU) (Uwechue, 1991).

#### **Nigeria's Role in the Zimbabwean Decolonization Process**

The immediate post-independence conservative, pro-British texture of Nigeria's foreign policy reflected the idiosyncratic preferences of Balewa. His abhorrence of radical ideologies manifested in the lukewarm attitudes towards the Soviet Union and its satellite states, this attitude manifested in his refusal to support liberation movements, especially those that engaged in armed struggles for independence, such as the Front for the National Liberation of Algeria which was excluded from the 1962, Lagos conference preparatory to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). However, Balewa was passionate about Africa and African issues to which he gave significant support (Fawole, 2003). Once Balewa was swept out of power as the Prime Minister in January 1966, the lukewarm attitude to the issue of decolonization changed (Akpan, 2000). Nigeria's African diplomacy from the 1970s benefited tremendously from the change of total worldview that was occasioned by the experiences of the civil war. Even though Africa had always remained the central focus of its external relations right from independence, the civil war provided a renewed emphasis on continental affairs. The twin evils of settler-colonialism and racism, which curiously converged in Southern Africa, were the first issues to receive attention. The war provided opportunity for South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal to help the dismemberment of Nigeria. These three

racist countries supported Biafra and provided covert military assistance to the secessionist war effort. This experience made the review of Nigeria's policies toward these countries and their obnoxious policies a compulsory option after the war. Nigeria consequently worked to accelerate the collapse of settler colonialism and apartheid. General Yakubu Gowon at the 1971, OAU Summit, exhorted African leaders to step up their efforts and hasten the liberation of the remaining colonies. Indeed, Nigeria eventually abandoned the previous traditional lukewarm attitude to armed struggle for liberation and embraced all liberation movements regardless of their ideological orientations. The election of Gowon as the OAU Chairman in 1973, further gave Nigeria the vantage position from which it coordinated the African resistance to colonialism (Fawole, 2003).

However, Gowon was still perceived as being too moderate and gradualist, preferring the collective approach rather than seizing the initiative which the size, wealth from the oil boom of the 1970s and influence of Nigeria provided. The overthrow of Gowon's nine years military regime on the 29th of July 1975 brought into power a more dynamic and radically inclined military ruler in the person of General Murtala Mohammed. Although Mohammed was in the saddle for only six months before he was assassinated (Fawole, 2003). His predecessor, General Obasanjo ably pivoted the Zimbabwean liberation agenda up to 1st of October 1979, when he handed over power to a civilian administration headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. At the beginning of 1976, the leadership crisis within the ANC under whose umbrella both ZANU and ZAPU then operated generated concern among African leaders who were anxious to ensure a united front in the liberation struggle. This unfortunate situation caused the four presidents who then constituted the leadership of the Frontline States – Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Samora Machel of Mozambique, Seretse Khama of Botswana and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia to meet in Lusaka, Zambia to resolve the leadership crisis within the ANC. In order for Nigeria to have a clearer picture of this confused situation and to find ways through which its assistance could be more effectively channeled to the fighting forces, Obasanjo detailed Joseph Garba, Nigeria's External Affairs Commissioner to embark on a diplomatic shuttle of the Frontline States. Nigeria intervention ensured that the liberation struggle was not derailed. Nigeria immediately made a donation of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars as direct aid to the freedom fighters through the Mozambique's government (Garba, 1991).



In addition to providing aid to the freedom fighters through OAU Liberation Committee, Nigeria gave direct bilateral and financial aid, especially to ZANU and ZAPU. The details of the bilateral aid were not published for security reasons, but according to Abegurin (1992), beginning from 1976, Nigeria was giving about 5 million Dollars annually to all the liberation groups in Southern Africa. In addition to the 5 million Dollars per year, from 1977, until early 1979, the Nigerian government also provided Zimbabwean freedom fighters with small arms, ammunition, and the services of two C-130 Hercules military transport planes and one Boeing 707 civilian aircraft. Also in 1976, through Nigeria diplomatic effort the Patriotic Front emerged as a united front to prosecute the liberation struggles; the Federal Government of Nigeria became the first to publicly recognize this new accord. Both Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe were invited to Nigeria for a meeting. The purpose of the meeting was for them to acquaint the federal government of the kind of equipment they would need to intensify the armed struggle. Meanwhile Nigeria strengthened efforts both within and outside Africa to get diplomatic and material support for the newly united front. Meetings were held with British, American officials, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrew Gromyko and Pierre Trudeau of Canada to solicit support for the Patriotic Front (Nwachukwu, 1991).

One immediate action following Angolan independence was Mozambique's closure of her border with Rhodesia in March 1976. The decision was to aid the implementation of the UN and OAU sanctions against Ian Smith's illegal regime. However, the implications of Mozambique's action were many. By banning any communication with the territory controlled by the racist Rhodesian regimes, President Samora closed the two rail links and one road link between Rhodesia and Mozambique's ports of Beira and Maputo, and the air link between Rhodesia's capital, Salisbury (Harare), and Mozambique's port-city of Beira. The closure of the border had profound economic consequences for Rhodesia because about 80 per cent of Rhodesia's exports and imports passed through Mozambique ports. The closure of the border thus, cut off two important lifelines. The sanctions against Rhodesia also had crippling economic effect on Mozambique, which suffered serious economic and crop failure in between 1975 and 1976, because the Rhodesian grain supplies which helped to alleviate the food crisis and freight dues from Rhodesia imports and exports were cut off by the closure of the borders. The Nigerian

federal government, true to its spirit of sacrifice and dynamic foreign policy, determine to liberate all of Africa intervened diplomatically and announced its decision to assist Mozambique to overcome the economic challenge. Consequently, Nigeria granted Mozambique an assistance of 1 million Naira in April 1976 to for the economic recovery programme (Ojigbo, 1979).

Beginning from 1977, even as more financial and material assistance were being channeled to the Patriotic Front by Nigeria, the government intensified her diplomatic campaign within and outside Africa to drum support for the fighting forces. At the UN, Nigeria sought every opportunity to raise the issue of Zimbabwean independence at the General Assembly and the Security Council. At the London meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of State and Government, 1977, Nigeria succeeded in making Zimbabwe the dominant issue. All these diplomatic initiatives helped to facilitate the liberation process of Zimbabwe (Garba, 1991).

It should be noted that in January 1977, the United States inaugurated a new President in the person of Jimmy Carter of the Democratic Party. One of the earliest foreign policy efforts of the Carter's administration was to work for the repeal of the Byrd Amendment (which since 1971 had allowed the US to violate UN sanctions against Rhodesia by importing chromite). Carter himself, his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance and his much publicised Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, generated hope in the problem of Africa. For the first time, the US official contacts with African governments became routine. Andrew Young in particular, attended virtually every important conference in Africa. It became obvious that the pressure from America was succeeding in moving the recalcitrant British government toward meaningful consultations and concrete proposals. Nigeria and some other African countries seized the opportunity to diplomatically on the US to support African stance on Zimbabwe (Garba, 1991).

Garba (1991) recalls that in 1973, with the Arab oil embargo, Nigeria emerged as the second largest supplier of crude oil to the United States America after Canada. So important was Nigerian crude oil to the United States that by 1980, trade deficits with Nigeria had reached eleven billion Dollars, second only to that with Japan. Yet in spite of the growing economic relations, US-Nigerian relations were to be plunged into disarray over Angolan crisis in 1975. Nigeria's recognition of the *Movimento Popular des Africanos de Angola* (MPLA) government and its full scale diplomatic campaign for support for Angola within and outside Africa led to a very

serious disagreement between the two governments. However, the realities of bilateral economic relations outweighed political and diplomatic disagreements. American technology had a role to play in Nigeria's policies of rapid economic development. There was therefore, a mutual interest in developing strong bilateral economic cooperation.

In March 1978, President Carter paid a four-day official visit to Nigeria, reciprocating Obasanjo's visit to the US, six months earlier. It was the first state visit by an American President to sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria took the unprecedented step of inviting the Foreign Ministers of the Frontline States for a two day diplomatic "brain storming" session on the Zimbabwean question with Cyrus Vance and some key Nigerian leaders. The outcome of the "diplomatic brain storming" was a unanimous agreement on the need for fresh impetus in the stalled Anglo-American proposals. Vance was mandated to inform the British Foreign Secretary, David Owen, of the decision (Nwachukwu, 1991).

### **The Anglo-American Peace Proposals**

Nigeria believed that the combination of moral, diplomatic and military factors would bring the white-minority regimes to their knees. Nigeria also believed that these pressures had to be unceasingly applied until the minority regime was toppled. In keeping with the Lusaka Manifesto of 1969, and the Dar es Salam Declaration of 1975, Nigeria subscribed to the Anglo-American initiatives on Zimbabwe. The proposal jointly made by Britain and the United States of America for peace in Zimbabwe was made public in August 1977. In a speech before the U.N. General Assembly in October 1978, Obasanjo pointed out that Nigeria, after careful and exhaustive consideration of the proposals, believed that the proposals should be given a chance, despite their having certain mostly ambiguous defects and weaknesses. It was the opinion of the Nigerian authorities that in working out the detailed implementation of these proposals, those factors and weaknesses had to be removed. For this reason, the Nigerian government supported the UN Security Council authorizing the Secretary-General to appoint a representative in Rhodesia, as required by the Anglo-American Proposals for a settlement (Abegurin, 1992).

The Nigerian government actively continued in this diplomatic effort to bring about change in Zimbabwe by supporting the Anglo-American Proposals was bogged down in 1978 with Ian Smith's creation of an internal

settlement in the country. Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa's election as Prime Minister of the so-called Zimbabwe-Rhodesia caused despair in the Frontline States, as it did in most of Africa. Nigeria characterized this development as a "white plot". Such was the situation in Zimbabwe when the Commonwealth Conference opened in Lusaka, Zambia in August 1979. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher's, the British Prime Minister's declaration the month before in Australia that she intended to recognize the Muzorewa's government was responsible for the combative mood that prevailed for the couple of days at the conference. The Nigerian government then took a bold step to demonstrate its displeasure (Abegurin, 1992).

Although Britain and the United States have never severed their ties with Rhodesia, their relations with its white minority regimes have resulted in periods of tension with African states, especially Nigeria. The Nigerian government took such tension seriously. Indeed, Smith's white minority regime, recognizing its inability to hold out much longer against the nationalists' guerilla onslaughts, reached a dubious internal agreement with a few African leaders in a desperate effort to preserve white domination designed in the garb of majority rule. Moreover, the internal settlement and the "dubious" election that followed, which resulted in Muzorewa becoming the Prime Minister of the newly named Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, were adjudged unacceptable for the following reasons.

First, the constitutional arrangement still preserved the racist structures of control that the white minority had employed to frustrate the aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. Second, it still gave whites a disproportionate number of parliamentary seats, which allowed them to block any legislation that they considered undesirable to white interest. Third, the governmental arrangement also provided that the headship of the security forces - both the military and the police - should be white, the fourth, the civil service and the judiciary was to remain in white hands. The government was a majority government only in name and appearance, because the arrangement preserved all the paraphernalia of white-supremacist control and the marginalization of the African majority in the country. Of great concern to the Nigerian government was that the Muzorewa-Smith arrangement was solidly backed and financed by apartheid South Africa. This South African backing alone was more than sufficient to provoke Nigerian opposition to the arrangement and encourage active efforts to frustrate it (Abegurin, 1992).

According to Abegurin (1992) it is possible that Nigeria would have maintained her usual perfunctory posturing on Zimbabwe if the internal settlement had not made and, more significantly, if the conservative government of Prime Minister Thatcher had not indicated that it might lift the economic sanctions against Rhodesia and recognize the Muzorewa-Smith regime. As noted earlier, the Thatcher government had made it clear that it might recognize the internal settlement if the Zimbabwean-Rhodesia elections satisfied British conditions. The promise appeared in the 1978 election manifesto of the Conservative Party, which was led by Thatcher. It was expected that Britain would not proceed with the Thatcher's election-campaign promise in the face of mounting international opinion against the internal settlement.

Throughout the crisis, the Nigerian government had warned Britain of the inadvisability of lifting economic sanctions, which had been imposed by Britain and the international community in 1966 and re-imposed in 1968. The government stressed that recognizing the Muzorewa-Smith arrangement would be a slap in the face of Africans who had borne the brunt of the struggle for justice and equality for many years. To emphasize Nigeria's strong opposition to any lifting of the sanctions, the Federal Military Government decided to use economic measures to persuade Britain. To this end the Obasanjo administration announced that Nigeria would henceforth discriminate against all British firms in the award of multimillion dollar government contracts until the stand of the British government on the Zimbabwean issue became clear (Abegurin, 1992). Consequently, all British companies were notified that they had been dropped from the contenders for the awarding of a government contract for construction of 130 million Pounds seaport at Onne, Rivers State, until Britain clarified her position on Zimbabwe. Nigeria was also angered by the fact that Britain was allowing North Sea oil to be sold to apartheid South Africa and South Africa's enjoyment of British oil supplies and backing of the internal arrangement in Zimbabwe was not in the interest of Africa (Ojigbo, 1979).

On the 31st of July 1979, the Nigerian government announced the drastic decision to take over all the assets of the British Petroleum Company (BP) in Nigeria with effect from 1st of August 1979. It added that the government would pay compensation for BP's assets. The statement added that "this was a reaction to the British government's permission to BP to start

exporting North Sea and non-embargoed oil to South Africa; that the whole arrangement was a "mere subterfuge to make Nigerian oil available to the apartheid regime in Pretoria". Because of that Nigeria noted that "the most effective way to stop Nigerian oil reaching the enemies of Africans in South Africa was to cut BP off from Nigeria's crude oil supply" (Aluko, 1981).

The decision to nationalize BP was greeted with dismay and furry in Britain, it rapidly provoked acerbic arguments between the two countries and soon became the biggest single setback to smooth Anglo-Nigerian relations since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in January 1970. Mrs Thatcher denounced the action as "sudden and arbitrary". Lord Carrington condemned it and added that the seizure had badly strained (Anglo-Nigerian) relations; that Lagos would "regret the timing of the decision" that it was unhelpful and would be "counterproductive". Many British newspapers and magazines condemned the nationalization. A British newspaper, *The Guardian* described it as "crude bullying". Indeed, the newspapers looked with nostalgia to the nineteenth century when such "humiliation" of Britain would have been met by gunboat diplomacy. *The Economist* in an editorial entitled "Nigeria growls" criticized the takeover saying in the end it would not achieve its primary objectives (Aluko, 1981).

In addition to the nationalization of BP, the Nigerian government diversified its currency holdings (200 million Pounds) in British banks from Pounds to other currencies to offset any British retaliation. The effect of these actions in Britain was quite significant. The nationalization of British Petroleum meant the loss of the company of its share of 300,000 barrels per day of Nigerian crude oil at a time when OPEC spot price of crude oil was high. It also meant the loss of considerable revenue to Britain. These actions were in addition to the nationalization in 1978 of the British-owned Barclays Bank for operating in South Africa (Abegurin, 1992).

On the Nigerian side there were sharp reactions. In Lusaka, General Adefope, Nigeria's Commissioner of External Affairs replied to Lord Carrington in a restrained but firm way. He defended his government's decision on BP. According to him a tanker on charter by BP to ship crude oil to South Africa had been caught red-handed a situation that made the Nigerian government measures against BP appropriate and within the rules of international law. He further threatened that if the demand for the Zimbabwean liberation was not met Nigeria may have to reconsider its

membership of the Commonwealth (Aluko, 1981). Not only did the action mean a severe blow to a major source of British revenue, it also meant that Rhodesia was denied a major source which had supplied her oil, even through the indirect and circuitous route through Britain and South Africa. This two-pronged effect of Nigeria's action was perhaps the most important economic factor in halting the intransigence of the minority regime in Rhodesia. This has forced Britain to listen to the dissent from Lagos against her handling of the Rhodesian problem. The same British government which had indirectly encouraged Salisbury in its obstinacy now applied its own pressure to persuade the racists to a negotiated settlement (Ojigbo, 1979).

Ojigbo (1979) observes that the politics of oil might had earlier won United States to the Nigerian side. The Middle East War of 1973 and the subsequent oil embargo by the Arab nations highlighted not only the economic strength of Nigeria but also her potential political power as well. Luckily, the increase in world prices for crude oil occurred at about the same time when Nigeria emerged as a major source of oil. The oil embargo made Nigeria the largest supplier to the United States. The need to retain Nigerian supply meant that the United States also had respect the opinion of Nigeria in dealing with African affairs. Besides, Nigeria's role in Angola against the U.S. support under former President Gerald Ford, for the enemy had shown the new boldness of smaller countries. The nationalization of BP reinforced this respect for Nigeria's might.

Since the unilateral declaration of independence by Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front government in November 1965, the question of restoring legality and establishing black majority rule in the country had been the concern of the UN and the major powers, especially the super-powers. Beginning from 1968, several resolutions had been passed by the Security Council imposing economic sanctions on the rebel regime and calling for the setting up of black majority rule there on the principle of self-determination and universal suffrage. Indeed, in a sharp reaction against what it described as the "scam election" in Zimbabwe in April 1979, the Nigerian government referred to the Security Council resolutions 435 and 439 of 1978 rejecting the "internal settlement" in Salisbury and laying down conditions for achieving peace, black majority rule and independence in Zimbabwe. The Security Council approved a three-point resolution sponsored by the non-aligned nations which called for the continued application of economic sanctions against the Salisbury regime and its continued diplomatic isolation despite

the disputed elections that brought Bishop Muzorewa to office as the first black Prime Minister in Zimbabwe (Aluko, 1981).

### **The Lancaster House Agreement and Zimbabwean Independence (10th September - 21st December, 1979)**

It is important to note that Nigeria's foreign policy, although strongly Pan-African, also reveals that the government was constantly aware of the interest of her people. To achieve the goal of freedom for Africans, Nigeria employed the multilateral diplomacy and international coalition in seeking support on issues affecting the destiny of Africa and support to liberate Zimbabwe. This is the reason that led to Nigeria's conditional acceptance of the Anglo-American Plan for Rhodesia. The major factor leading to the success of the Lancaster House agreement was the acceptance by Robert Mugabe to a cease-fire with his nearly 16,000 strong ZANLA army. Indeed Shagari's government ability to bring diplomatic pressure on Mugabe to participate in the negotiations paved way for the success story. He assured the nationalist forces that Nigeria would ensure that they were not cheated of their ultimate goal - majority rule for an independent Zimbabwe. In persuading Mugabe to accept the terms of the cease-fire, Shagari emphasized the need for sacrifice on all sides in order to achieve the objective of majority rule (Ojigbo, 1979).

According to Ojigbo (1982) during the Lancaster House Conference of 10th September 21st December, 1979, which finally paved the way for Zimbabwean independence in April 1980, the Nigerian government of President Shehu Shagari sent a special envoy, Alhaji Maitama Sule, to head an observer delegation to the conference. Unfortunately, the British assurance to facilitate the implementation of the critical decisions at the conference was short-lived because the British Governor in Rhodesia during the transition period, allowed South African troops to remain on the Zimbabwean side of Beit Bridge, a bridge between Rhodesia and South Africa. Indeed, this action created doubts in the minds of the Africans about the commitment of Britain to the decolonization process.

Lord Soames also contemplated using South African armoured cars in the distribution of election materials, in addition, there were also instances when the Rhodesian armed forces General Walls, deployed the 11,000 Rhodesian security forces and Muzorewa's 26,000 so called "auxiliary" forces to contain the nationalist forces. Nigeria reacted swiftly and warned Britain and South Africa of the potential should the Lancaster House



Ceasefire agreement' be sabotaged. In realization of Nigeria's uncompromising position on the peaceful transition, Britain retreated and instructed South Africa to do likewise (Abegurin, 1992).

As a further demonstration of Nigeria's commitment to the liberation of Zimbabwe, Shagari sent a Nigerian observer team to monitor the March 1980, elections in Zimbabwe. Nigeria's three-team delegation, led by Sam Ikoku, joined the Commonwealth team that supervised the elections (Abegurin, 1992). With 20 out of the 100 seats reserved for the white minority population, three African groups contested the elections for the remaining 80 seats. These were Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and Bishop Abel Muzorewa's United African national Council (UANC). Mugabe won a landslide victory of 57 seats. Nkomo won 20 while Muzorewa won a pittance of 3 seats. Robert Mugabe became the first legitimate Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, forming a coalition government with Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU. The victory of Mugabe was a triumph of Africa. Shagari in his congratulatory message described it as:

A victory for Africa and the Third World against the evil forces of racism, colonialism and imperialism....It also constitutes an impetus for the total liberation of Africa (Ojigbo, 1979: 550)

During the Zimbabwean independence celebrations on the 18th of April 1980, Shagari's civilian government pledged 15 million Dollars grant to Zimbabwe. According to Shagari, the amount was to help the newly independent country to establish an institution for manpower training. This programme would include the training of Zimbabweans at home and in Nigeria. Part of the 15 million Dollars grant was spent by the Mugabe government to acquire the assets of white-controlled Rhodesian newspapers from their South African owners. Besides the grant, Nigeria also signed a number of economic and educational agreements with Zimbabwe (Ojigbo, 1982).

Also during Zimbabwe's first independence anniversary celebrations in 1981, Nigeria donated another 10 million Dollars to the government of Zimbabwe for staff development programmes. As part of the manpower training programme, Zimbabwean students, senior civil servants and

military officers were trained in Nigerian universities and military institutions. For instance, many Zimbabwean army officers were trained at the Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna, while some senior civil servants received training at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria in Badagry, Lagos State. The training of Zimbabwean students, civil servants and military personnel was part of Nigeria's mission to build continental bond of friendship and brotherhood (Abegurin, 1992).

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's position in the world system cannot be ignored. Nigeria's role particularly in Africa was confirmed in 1981, by Andrew Young, who boldly asserted that "Nigeria is in some important respects Africa's most powerful nation". Nigeria had, of course, always been *primus inter pares* in post-colonial Africa, but international recognition of her potential increased dramatically along with her oil boom in the 1970s. All these were indications that Nigeria was "expected to assume a decisive role in African politics. As rightly asserted by Joseph Garba, "our foreign policy is a combination of our permanent national interests and her interest in Africa". This statement was made to show that Africa has become the centre point of Nigerian foreign policy. That Nigeria should assume the role of a leader was quite rational, given the size, the human potential and the natural resources of the country. Moreover, the Nigerian leaders particularly beginning from the Mohammed's era exhibited tremendous commitment to the liberation of Africans from the claws of the white supremacist rulers in Zimbabwe (Abegunrin, 1992).

Nigeria effectively demonstrated her Afro-centric posture by rendering unwavering diplomatic support to the Zimbabwe. The nationalization of the British assets, Nigeria's former colonial master to fast track the Zimbabwean liberation process was the hallmark of the entire diplomatic engagement. Mrs. Thatcher (the Iron lady) departed radically from the hard and tricky position of her government. For the first time, she admitted that the internal settlement constitution under which Muzorewa had assumed power was defective in many respects. She further stated that Britain accepted its constitutional responsibility as the only authority able to grant Rhodesia legal independence. The final outcome was the Lancaster House Conference of 1979, which produced two wings of the Patriotic Front-ZANU and ZAPU. Nigeria provided the groups with substantial financial support to successfully contest the pre-independence elections of March 1980. This encouraged the Zimbabwean leader, Robert Mugabe to commend Nigeria's role in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, and also to

reveal that Nigeria had spent 8 Million Dollars training freedom fighters during the Zimbabwean's war of independence.

However, from available evidence, the massive support did not translate to any meaningful gain for Nigeria apart from the verbal acknowledgement of the support rendered by the leaders of Zimbabwe. Not even a street or an institution was named after any Nigerian leader who pivoted the struggle. For instance, during the second independence anniversary celebration in 1982, Mugabe's government changed the name of the capital from Salisbury to Harare. The government also renamed the main street in the capital, Jameson Avenue, in honour of Samora Machel, then President of Mozambique. ([em.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Zimbabwe](http://em.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Zimbabwe), Accessed, 20/10/16). The most disturbing aspect is that in recent times, the leadership of Zimbabwe has shown contempt to Nigeria and has deliberately failed to accord Nigeria its due place as a benefactor of Zimbabwe. There is need for both countries to strengthen their bilateral relations and collaborate particularly in the area of agriculture and regional trade. Based on Nigeria's huge diplomatic assistance to Zimbabwe in aid of her decolonization process, Zimbabwe ought to reciprocate Nigeria's gesture by rendering support for Nigeria's bid to secure a permanent seat at the UN in spite of the aspiration of South Africa's attempt to outwit Nigeria in the race.

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