

Diplomacy and Highpoints in the Historical Development of Nigeria–Saudi Arabia Affinities: A Study in Afro-Arab Relations.

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Abstract

Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are two important countries in the socio-economic and political activities in their respective regions. In Africa, Nigeria plays a key role in socio-economic, political and cultural development of the continent. This is evident by its contribution to mediations, peace keeping operations in Africa and other parts of the World. This is also demonstrated in its role of being one of the founders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) now African Union (A.U). Equally, Saudi Arabia plays important role in the politics of the Middle East, essentially, as it relate to Regional Security, Arab Nationalism and Islam. In view of this, the study examines the genesis of Nigeria-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations. The paper also explores factors that were responsible for the establishment and continuity of the relations between the two countries. Information gathered from books and some documentary sources, including official files were subjected to content analysis. The paper found out that religion (Islam) and arabization were the fundamental factors that played key role in establishing diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Equally, the paper found out that presence of Nigerian illegal immigrants in Saudi Arabia, arrest, detentions and executions of Nigerians by the Saudi Arabian authorities were the causes of diplomatic strains between the two countries. The paper recommends that even for protection of Nigeria's image, the Nigerian government should take measures to curtail the inflow of Nigerian illegal immigrants into Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Afro-Asian Relations, Arabization, Diplomatic relations, Hajj, Historical Development, Islam, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Pilgrimage and other related issues are central to Nigeria's relations with Saudi Arabia. Performing pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the pillars of Islam and obligatory upon each and every Muslim who has the means to travel for Mecca to perform it. Pilgrimage is the only occasion when hundreds of thousands of Nigerians travel out of the country. The journey involves consular services; health, security and diplomatic activities, which necessitate co-operation between the two countries. Therefore, considering the magnitude and importance of the pilgrimage, the two governments cannot stand as observers only. Pilgrimage remains the strongest religio-cultural ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Relationship between

Nigeria and kingdom of Saudi Arabia dates back to many centuries, since then it has increased tremendously until 1960, when both countries established a formal diplomatic relation. It is pertinent to point out that there is no country in the globe where Nigerians travels in thousands within stipulated period and time like that of Saudi Arabia.

In addition to socio-cultural relations, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are among the largest oil producing countries. The two countries in many respect shared many common views on both domestic and international issues, particularly on production and stability of oil market. Moreover, both are being Third World countries, with oil power, they play important roles in not only the Afro-Arab solidarity but also the Third World solidarity. Against this background the paper examines historical development of Nigeria-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations, delving on genesis of the relations as well as the impact of Islamization and Arabization on the establishment of the relations. It also stresses diplomatic visits at highest level between the two countries. The paper equally, points out some major causes of diplomatic strains between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

The Genesis of the Nigeria – Saudi Arabia relations

Generally speaking, three fundamental factors exerted a degree of influence in enhancing Afro-Arab relations. These included Islamization, Arabization and trade. Islamization simply means a process by which African people were converted to Islam. Accordingly, Islam provided an important link between Africans and Arabs. Arabization refers to acculturation process by which Africans became speakers of Arabic language as well as their integration into some aspects of Arabs' culture (Ladan, 2004, P.18). Today there are many Muslims across the globe, but majority of Muslim countries are found in Africa and Asia, the continental geographical locations of Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, respectively.

Historically, Islamization of Africa started in the early days of Islam and even before the Prophet's (SAW) migration from Mecca to Medina. The Prophet (SAW) advised some of his companions to migrate from Mecca to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in order to avoid persecution. In the year 615 A.D. the companions migrated to Abyssinia and sought refuge to Negus (Najashi), a Christian King of Abyssinia (Doi, 1984, P. 4). The essence of this emissary was first, to relieve them from the persecution of unbelievers and second, to spread the message of Islam. The companions were accommodated by the Negus, despite strong opposition by his disciples. This memorable event marks the genesis of establishing co-operations between Arab world and African countries. Moreover, the conquest of Egypt in the 640s A.D. initiated a more fundamental process of Islamization in Africa and further enhanced the process of consolidating the relations between Africa and the Arab World (Ladan, 2004, P. 17).

It is pertinent to stress that Arabs and Africans were in the same continent before the geological rapture of Africa from Arabia in which the Red Sea emerged. With the digging of the Suez Canal, this physical rapture of the two continents was completed (Bujra, 2001, P. 1). In fact, this resulted into a strong bond between Arabs and Africans over a span of time. These relations and linkages have created what Mazrui called Afrabia and communities of Afrabians.

Both Africa and the Arab world are part of the third world countries; thus, were once subjected to Europeans colonial domination. Africans and Arabs have cooperated

politically, especially with regards to the issues of decolonization of black Africans and in the long-standing Middle East conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis. These co-operations was partly enhanced and facilitated by the periodic meetings of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and through the Muslim elites meetings and interaction during annual Hajj and through some organizations such as African Union (AU), and the Arab League (AL) (Ladan, 2004, P. 19).

The Impact of Islamization/Arabization on the Emergence of Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Relations

The impact of spread of Islam, trade and the development of Arabic language is paramount in forging Afro-Arab relations. These factors are stronghold in establishing relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. The first contact between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia started during the Caliph Usman Ibn Afan (644-656) when he sent Uqbah bin Amr Al-Jahani to some parts of Africa including Gobir (which is now in Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states) (Kabara, nd, P. 102) Uqba's visit to Gobir was the first contact between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

In addition to this, historical evidence also suggests that Yandoto (now a village in Zamfara state) was once among the prominent Islamic centres in the then Islamic world. Yandoto was elevated to that position as a result of the migration of Mani Yahya bin Abdullah bin Hassan al-Mutha bin Al-Hassan, the grandson of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth caliph (R.A.). Imam Yahya migrated from Madina with some scholars and settled at Yandoto and established a dynasty at around 180 A.H. (Yahya, 2009, P. 92). Equally, it was narrated that Muhammad Bakari, a grandson of caliph Abubakar Sadiq (R.A.) also migrated from Saudi Arabia and settled in Yandoto (Al-Hassan, 1987, P. 23). In fact, Bakari was among prominent scholars of Yandoto. The migration of these erudite scholars was one of the remarkable landmarks that profoundly mirrored the age-long established religious and cultural relationship ever before the creation of modern Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

As a result of the strong contact between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, Arabic language deeply penetrated into Hausa and *fulfulde* languages. These languages, borrowed more than a fifth of their vocabularies from the Arabic language. There is also significant similarity between masculine and feminine grammatical constructions in the languages. The borrowing was necessitated by religious, cultural and economic affinity. The borrowing was so significant that Arabic alphabets; name of months and days, were directly copied from Arabic and used by Hausa/Fulani language. The borrowing further deepens in the field of poetry where all the technical terms such as metres and rhymes were directly copied from the Arabic language with no modification (Jah, nd, P. 47).

It is worthy to point out that all the three major Nigeria's ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) claimed their origin from the Middle East. Some historians traced Igbo ancestry to Hebrew and Egyptian origin (Efigbo, 1999, P. 75). Even though, there are many versions that suggest otherwise. Yoruba people also traced their origin from the Middle East and that their ancestry family settled in Ile-Ife after a journey that must have taken centuries. In the process, they left colonies where they settled on their way; one of which was 'Gobir' which is presently in Northern Nigeria (Akinjogbin, 1999, P. 121). Similarly, *Fulani*, traditionally claimed Arab ancestry Balugun, nd: P.89). In the same vein '*Gobirawa*' who were well known

people, predominantly found in Sokoto and Zamfara states, also claimed that their ancestor had lived in Arabia at a place called "Gobur" that existed between Mecca and Medina (Augi, 1979, P. 16). This tradition further shed more lights on the early contact between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

The Role of Pilgrimage (Hajj) in the Development of Nigeria – Saudi Arabia Relations

Pilgrimage was one of the indispensable factors in establishing relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. There is no scintilla of doubt that Hajj paves way for formal contact between the people of the then Northern Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. The first recorded pilgrimage from the West African Sub-region was that of Kanem, Mai Dunama bin Umme between 1098 and 1150. He performed pilgrimage twice and died while returning from the third one (Al-Naqar, 1972, P. 27). However, Mai Dunama might not be the first pilgrim of the sayfawa, since the Diwan stresses that Dunama's father, Mai Umme bin Abdul-Jalil (1058-1097) died in the land of Masar (Egypt). This prompted Barth to assert that Mai Umme might have intended or even performed a pilgrimage (Al-Naqar, 1972, P. 27).

The Sokoto caliphate, the longest-lived of the three main Jihads of the nineteenth century made contact with Saudi Arabia. A prominent teacher of the Jihad leaders, Muhammad Sambo, performed pilgrimage and returned to Agades in 1793 (Last, 1977, P. 5). Although the Sokoto Jihad triumvirate, as available records suggest, did not go on pilgrimage or have full relations with Saudi Arabia, but there was pilgrimage policy for the caliphate. It was confirmed that the caliphate at one time appointed a leader for the pilgrimage caravan. A letter to that effect was written by Muhammad Bello, titled; '*Risala li ahliil Haramayn Al-sharafayn wa ilaahlal –mashariq*'. The translation of the letter read in part:

We have sent the Hajj b. Ali b. Nuh to the sacred house of God together with our brothers who wanted to make a pilgrimage and visit Madina. We have (put) him in charge of our pilgrims, amir- hajajina, and we await his return with the help of God. We are determined if God return them to us, to go ourselves to the two Holy Harams. We also ask of the Fuqahat and nobles there those who can reach us to come to us so that we can benefit from what God had taught them (Al-Naqar, 1972, P. 142).

It is clear that the then Northern Nigeria had contact with the Middle East vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia prior to colonialism. As highlighted above, Sultan Muhammadu Bello, in addition to diplomatic contact with the people of Hijaz (Saudi Arabia) did also request for scholars from Saudi Arabia to visit the Sokoto Caliphate. This suggests that the relations between the two countries began long before the creation of modern Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations began at individual level. Ethnic Sheikhs served as diplomats of their people. There were ethnic sheikhs for Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Nupe etc. The sheikhs were very powerful in Saudi Arabia. These sheikhs were Nigerians who had permanently settled in Saudi Arabia (Gumi, 1992, P. 70). In fact, the sheikhs acted as link between pilgrims of their tribes and Saudi Arabian authorities due to the absence of organized or formal mission between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Relations during Colonial Era

The British colonial administration in Nigeria lasted for almost one century (1861-1960). The imperialist was not unaware of the potential of pilgrimage in forging global solidarity among the Muslim World. As a result of this, the colonial administration did not pay the deserved attention toward establishing relations between colonial Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. The colonialist discouraged Hajj, which is one of the fundamental areas of the relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Records available depicts that there were linkages between colonial administration and Saudi Arabia, particularly, pertaining to the arrangement of Hajj and repatriations of the Nigerians from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Nigeria. These correspondences were carried out through British legation office in Jeddah. For example in 1956, Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic relations with Britain over the crisis of Suez Canal, the colonial Nigeria used Pakistan's embassy to take care of its pilgrims.

In fact, the 1950s marked as the dawn of diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. In 1955, Northern Regional Government sponsored Sardauna and two senior officers; Muhammad Sunusi (Emir of Kano) and Ibrahim Musa Gashash to Saudi Arabia. The essence of delegation was; to examine problems of Nigerian pilgrims and to consider policies affecting them (Paden, 1986, P. 283). The appointment of the Sardauna and others was the provenance of formal diplomatic contact between Northern Regional Government and Saudi Arabia. Based on the problems witnessed by the Sardauna during his visit to Saudi Arabia, he made a recommendation to the Federal Government that; although pilgrimage is personal matter the joint cooperation of the then Northern Regional Government and Federal Government is necessary to provide safeguard for Nigerian pilgrims (Paden, 1986, P. 284). In response to this recommendation, the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Belewa appointed Usman Liman (Sarkin Musawa) as a leader of Nigerian pilgrims. At this point, the Federal Government began to show more concern on pilgrimage affairs.

In 1956, a temporary Nigerian Pilgrim Mission was first established at Jeddah, Marafa Danbaba was appointed as the pilgrim officer. This was done for the duration of the peak period of the pilgrimage session. The mission has among other functions to provide welfare to Nigerian pilgrims. It was also attached with small medical unit (Jabo, 2012, P. 88, as cited in Nigerian Citizen News Paper, January 17th 1962). In furtherance to this job, in 1957, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi was also appointed as a pilgrim officer at Jeddah (Gumi, 1992, P. 69).

Equally, in 1958, the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, appointed Nigerian Pilgrim Mission at Jeddah, essentially, to look into ways of improving Nigeria's relations with Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The establishment of the mission became necessary because Saudi Arabia broke relations with Britain due to 1956 Suez Canal invasion. As a result of this, there were no formal diplomatic ties between Britain vis-à-vis Nigeria and Saudi Arabia other than through the office of Pakistan. The mission consisted of the following members: (a) Sir, Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto – Chairman. (b) Muhamadu Sanusi (Emir of Kano) - Member. (c) Alhaji D.S. Adegbenro (Minister of Local Govt.) – Member (Paden, 1986, P. 286). Sheikh Abubakar Gumi and Ado Sanusi assisted the mission. The mission engaged into diplomatic activities at the highest level. The report of the mission provided a solid foundation for the future relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Some of the recommendations of the mission were; Nigeria's pilgrim office in Jeddah should

henceforth run as a nucleus of the future Nigerian Embassy in Saudi Arabia (Paden, 1986, P. 290).

The relations between the two countries have always been cordial. Major components of the relations over the years were Hajj and *Umrah* (lesser Hajj). Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and the Premier of Northern Region played a key role in establishing diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Prelude to the independence, Sardauna made several Hajj and non-Hajj visits to Saudi Arabia with a view to establishing relationship between the two countries.

Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Relations after Independence in 1960

Immediately after independence, Nigeria's relations with the Middle Eastern countries became a major source of intense controversy. This may not be unconnected with Nigeria's domestic heterogeneous setting. Religious dynamics exerted considerable influence on Nigeria's external relations. It further shaped the mind of the then three regional leaders. When it comes to relations with wider world, their religious inclinations guided their choice on who should be their friends and who should not. This perception made them unparallel particularly, on Nigeria's policy toward Middle East. For instance, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, perceived Israel as primarily an extension of American imperialism. As a result of this, he stressed that, "of Jordan and Israel that Jordan is my second home. To my mind it (Israel) does not exist and it will never exist... I don't know where it is" (Akinyemi, 1986, P. 122). On the other hand, the Premier of Eastern Region, Chief Michael Okpara, during his visit to Israel declared that "I myself almost an Israel; I love and admire Israel for my part. I shall always go to Israel". Equally, Premier of Western Region, Chief Akintola during his visit to Israel was quoted to have said, "you can be assured of our friendship and support at any place and we promised never to withdraw this" (Akinyemi, 1986, P.122). Immediately after the independence, religious affinity of the then regional leaders persistently shaped Nigeria's foreign policy posture particularly towards Middle East.

Suffice it to mention that after the independence in 1960, Nigeria appointed non-resident Ambassador, who was based in Sudan. This appointment marked the beginning of formal diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. At the beginning of 1962, barely fourteen months after independence, Saudi Arabian foreign office was one of the first foreign offices established by the Nigerian government. The others were; one in the United Nations, and three others in London, Washington and Bonn respectively (Philips, 1964, P. 101). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia was among the first five nations besides ten African countries, which Nigeria established diplomatic missions in the early days of independence. This demonstrated that Nigeria's relation with Saudi Arabia was as strong as Nigeria's relations with other countries even in the early days of independence. Thereafter, in 1971, the Embassy was up-graded to a Resident Ambassadorial status with the accreditation of the first Resident Ambassador at Jeddah. On the 15th January, 1994, the chancery building of the Nigerian Embassy in Riyadh was commissioned by then Foreign Affairs Minister, Ambassador Babagana Kingibe (ME 10/1/Vol.VI).

In 1962, the Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and the Sardauna of Sokoto received a cablegram from His majesty, King Saud of Saudi Arabia. In the cable, it was pointed out that, His majesty would be very pleased to welcome the premier who

intends to perform the Holy pilgrimage. The King expressed the hope that the visit would facilitate the cordial relations, which for long existed between the two countries. King Saud further stressed that the cooperation he and his people always offered to Sardauna was duty, which they must do for the sake of Islamic brotherhood; this resulted in excellent relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (Jabo, 2012, P. 92, as cited in Nigerian Citizen News Paper, May 5, 1962).

In the same vein, the Sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III, was the first Sultan to visit and perhaps perform pilgrimage to Mecca. The Sultan left for Mecca in 1964, in company of Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Governor of the Northern Region, Sir Kashim Ibrahim and many others (Jabo, 2012, P. 92, as cited in Nigerian Citizen News Paper, April 15, 1964). The Sultan of Sokoto, as a spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims, his Hajj visit to Saudi Arabia further concretized the excellent diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Due to close ties between Sir Ahmadu Bello and the Saudi ruling family, particularly, Prince Faisal, in appreciation and recognition of Sardauna's tireless efforts as regard to the propagation of right tenets of Islam, Faisal wrote a letter to Sardauna. The letter read in parts:

His Excellency the Sardauna the Premier of Northern Nigeria, peace be upon you and mercy of Allah and His blessing on what you are undertaking in the necessary work of a call to Islam and working to elevate the flag of Islam and its principles in pursuance of the 1st good work started by you in what you are funding in your befitting effort in order to support the Islamic call, and what you are undertaking personally for the sake of Muslim in the case of Nigeria and in what you are spending for the sake of propagating the Islamic principles, especially after holding the last conference of the Muslim Scholars in Nigeria from which the society of *Jama'atul Nasaral Islam* (JNI) emanated to keep the interest of Islam in Northern Nigeria. And because of the truth in strengthening the right religion which shines from here, the place where the revelation had descended and which in the destination of their hopes and wishes, so that its light which radiate upon the people to direct them in organizing their life and among the worldly affairs will remain as the true religion for all mankind up to the Day of Resurrection. We attached here with a cheque of Sixty Thousand Pound Sterling. We hold a firm hopes that this will help in making some good and in support the Islamic call not only in Northern Nigeria but also in all its parts... (Jabo, 2012, P. 93, as cited in Nigerian Citizen News Paper, June 24, 1964).

The above letter further demonstrates cordial bilateral relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. It also alludes the extent to which religion formed considerable basis on Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. In January 1966, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto was assassinated. When the news of his martyrdom reached Saudi Arabian government, King Faisal ordered the two Holy Mosques (Mecca and Medina) to offer funeral prayers for the soul of Sardauna (Paden, 1986, P. 673). It is imperative to state that this is the highest honour that can be accorded to any Muslim. Sardauna was highly respected by the Saudi Arabian

government. In 1975, when the sad news of the death of His majesty King Faisal Ibn Abdul Azeez of Saudi Arabia brought to the Nigerian Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, in reciprocity, he immediately appointed a high-powered delegation to represent the country at the funeral prayer of the King. The delegation was led by the Deputy Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters and also the Federal Commissioner of Establishment and Service Matters, Major General Hassan Usman Katsina. The Envoy left for Saudi Arabia on 26th March, 1975, with a condolence message from the Nigerian Head of State to the new Saudi Arabian King, Khalid Ibn Abdul Azeez and the entire Muslim *ummah* (people) of the country. The message read in parts:

The sad news of sudden death of His majesty King Faisal Ibn Abdul Azeez Al-Saudi of Saudi Arabia has been received here in Nigeria with great shock and sorrow. King Faisal was a man of outstanding honesty and sincerity with a deep concern for humanity and the promotion of peace and progress in the world. King Faisal will be long remembered for his single-minded devotion to the cause of justice and truth and by his tireless advocacy and foresighted measures for the reduction of tension and creation of harmony in the Middle East in particular and the World in general. He will also be particularly remembered in his country for his constant and unfailing care of thousands of Nigerians of the Muslim faith who usually undertake pilgrimage to the holy places in Saudi Arabia...Please accept and also kindly convey to the people of Saudi Arabia my sincere condolence and those of the entire government and people of Nigeria. May Allah grant him perfect peace (Oyediran, 1978, P. 210).

This heart-felt concern was not only restricted to condolence message, the Head of State went further to declare 27th March, 1975 as a National Day of mourning in honor of the late King Faisal. He similarly, directed that the Nigerian flag should be flown at half-mast throughout the country. This gesture had explicitly elucidated the magnitude of the cordial diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Nigeria – Saudi Arabia Diplomatic Relations, 1990s and Beyond

The prompt response by the Saudi Arabian authority to the tragedy event of 11th July, 1991 plane crash, which 242 Nigerian pilgrims lost their lives in Jeddah Airport was a testimony of cordial relations between the two countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sent its heart-felt condolence of both his royal self and the entire people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Nigerian government and entire Muslim *Ummah* in the country. He also provided sufficient place in the Holy land of Mecca for the burial of the victims (Jabo, 2012, P. 95).

In the realm of the Nigeria's political transition program in the early and middle 1990s, essentially, as it relate to annulment of June 12 election, General Babangida, the then Head of State, sent special envoy to Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Colonel Lawal Gwadabe, members of the delegation included; Ambassador Zakari Ibrahim and Peter Onu. The mission of the envoy was to present a message of the president to the Saudi Arabian government about the annulment of June 12 elections of 1993. Equally, in 1994, General Sani Abacha sent a special envoy to Saudi Arabia under the leadership of the then Minister of

Foreign Affairs, Babagana Kingibe. The essence of the envoy was to further explain Nigeria's political situation as his predecessor did (GS1/4/Vol. IV). In 2000, President Olusegun Obasanjo delegated Vice President, Atiku Abubakar to deliver a message to Saudi Arabian government. Although the message was not officially announced, but it may not be unconnected with the then religious crisis that bedeviled the country (Sadiq, 2000).

On the 3rd October, 2007, President Musa Yar'Adua went for *Ummrah* as part of his visit to Saudi Arabia. When the president was in the holy land, His majesty King Abdallah Ibn Abdul Azeez paid a courtesy visit to the President Yar'ua, at Mecca. The King together with other officials of the Saudi Arabian government met with the President Yar'adua. Issues discussed included among others; areas of common interest between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia as well as global issues especially those affected Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Equally, the King invited President Yar'adua to attend the 3rd OPEC Summit of Head of States and Government, hosted in Riyadh, 17th-18th December, 2007 (Jabo, 2012, P.96). Yar'adua's visit mirrored re-invigoration of both bilateral and multilateral relations as it were in the early days of independence between the two countries.

In 2019, President Buhari visited Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where he equally attended and participated in the Future Investment Summit held in Riyadh. During the visit, president Buhari met with King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz. Issues discussed during their meeting include; strengthening cooperation between both countries on combating terrorism and coordinating their work on international and regional matters of common interest to both countries. Similarly, during the meeting agreement was reached on establishing a Saudi-Nigerian Council with the aim of enhancing mutual investment and supporting developmental projects in Nigeria, in all sectors; oil and other non-oil sectors (Ambassador, 2019).

Of all the visits made by some Nigerian dignitaries, there was no much reciprocation by the Saudi Arabian side. Except that, in 1963, the Chief Imam of Medina, Shiekh AbdulAziz came to Nigeria specifically to perform opening ceremony of 100,000 pound sterling Sultan Bello mosque in Sokoto. When he was in Katsina, the Chief Imam conveyed to the Sardauna and good people of Nigeria, a good will message from the people of Medina (Jabo, 2012: P. 97 as cited in Nigerian Citizen News Paper, July 3, 1963). Similarly, in 2001, The Chief Imam of Kaaba, Sheikh AbdulRahman Al-Sudais visited Nigeria, Sokoto in particular, during the visit the chief Imam commissioned the multi-million Naira ultra-modern Institute for Quranic and General Studies in Sokoto city (Abdulsalami, 2001). Equally, in 2007, Sheikh Sudais visited Yobe State where he commissioned aged long Mosque project. The Mosque was expected to accommodate 20,000 worshipers (Gusau, 2007, P. 25). Although, as a result of President Shagari's invitation, King Khalid IbnAbdulaziz of Saudi Arabia wanted to visit Nigeria, but due to his health problem the visit could not materialized till the time he died in 1982 (ME 10/2/Vol. III).

Similarly, in 1991, there was unsuccessful visit of the Saudi Arabian special envoy to solicit Nigeria's logistic support and participation in the anti-Iraq Gulf collation. In fact, despite the visit there was no military support from the Nigeria government for the annexation of Kuwait by the Iraq. The Nigeria's refusal to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in that regard posed serious obstacles to the bi-lateral relations between the two countries,

especially during that period (ME 10/2/Vol. III). In 2019, a delegation from King Salman of Saudi Arabia visited Nigeria. The delegation was led by Nasser bin Mutlaq presented to the president Buhari relief materials worth 10 million US Dollar, the donation was mainly for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In fact, the visit and donation was an extension of the good relations both countries had shared over the years (Buhari Received Saudi Delegation-Relief Materials for IDPs).

The Strains of the Relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia

Relations among nation states may not be free from diplomatic debacles. Sometime the strains could be emanated either from within or outside domestic settings. In the development of Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations there were quite a number of occasions when there was diplomatic face-off between the two countries. Suffice it to mention that the challenges may not be unconnected with following factors: (a) Presence of Nigerian settlers/illegal immigrants in Saudi Arabia (*Takari*). (b) Arrests, detention and executions of Nigerians by the Saudi Arabian authorities.

There are five categories of Nigerian settlers in Saudi Arabia. But the third group, which comprises mostly of illegal immigrants (*Takari*) constituted serious consular threat on Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. The group usually engages in all sorts of crimes ranging from drugs trafficking, money laundering, and prostitution. Although these crimes are serious offences in Saudi Arabia, yet many Nigerians engaged in it with a view to improving their economic status. Persistent occurrence of cases pertaining to prostitutions, drugs trafficking, money laundering etc, usually, prompted Saudi Arabian authorities to take punitive measures against such Nigerians. As a result of this, since 1960s, Nigeria has made several efforts to repatriate its citizens from Saudi Arabia, with a view to reducing involvement of Nigerians in serious crimes in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such episodes consistently posed consular problems between the two countries.

In fact, as a result of large concentration of Nigerians in Saudi Arabia, particularly, in Mecca and majority of them did not secure resident permit. Their concentration in Mecca facilitated perpetuation of immoral activities such as sales of beer and violin plays (*Goge*). Moreover, Kano-Jeddah travelling agents also contributed to the escalation of the diplomatic strain between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. The agent usually sponsored young girls to Saudi Arabia under the pretext of getting jobs for them. Whatever amount of money realised, more than half of it would go to the agent to argument the cost of transporting them to Saudi Arabia (Umar, 2007, P. 98). In reaction to these dubious activities, between 2004 and 2006 Saudi Arabia deported about 85,000 Nigerians (Umar, 2007: P. 103).

Equally passport racketeering is also one of the major challenges on Nigeria-Saudi Arabia relations. It is discovered that Nigerian passports were illegally sold in Saudi Arabia particularly in Mecca (*Dogon-gida*). The passports were cheaply sold to other nationals, especially of Chad, Cameroon, and Niger etc. The attendant consequences of this are; offences committed by these nationals have always been blamed on Nigerians, thereby eroding Nigeria's image in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia thereby causing serious diplomatic debacles between the two countries, which ultimately, weakening the strength of the cordial relations between the two countries.

Apprehensions, detentions and executions of Nigerians by the Saudi Arabian authorities posed consular problems between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. On various occasions Nigerians were detained and prosecuted by the Saudi Arabian authorities. Many of them were executed following their conviction for involvement in drug trafficking, money laundering and other related financial crimes. These nefarious activities have seriously dented Nigeria's image in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The detention and executions of Nigerians by the Saudi authorities usually provoked diplomatic face-off between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. But the most serious among them was the arrest and detention of Nigerian Member of House of Representatives, Sani Ibrahim Rowan Doruwa. Ruwan Doruwa was arrested and detained despite holding a diplomatic passport. He was apprehended for an alleged importation of fake United States dollars and also attempted to bribe Saudi Arabian officials. As a result of this, the two countries engaged in a serious diplomatic debacle. On the peak of the face-off, Nigeria gave Saudi Arabia two weeks ultimatum within which to release the Ruwan Doruwa. Saudi Arabia's reactions over the issue prompted Nigeria to ponder over severance of the diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Diplomatic discussion was conducted at the highest-level with a view to solving the problem. The intensity of the problem prompted President of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo to reject the letter of credence from the newly posted Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Nigeria. After series of diplomatic discussions Ruwan Doruwa was released.

Although Ruwan Doruwa was found guilty, Nigeria struggled to protect its highly placed citizen. Saudi Arabia arrested Ruwan Doruwa with established facts which led to his conviction. But the question is why Saudi Arabia in spite of the established facts, which called for the conviction of Ruwan Doruwa but later, released him? In response to this question, two issues are central. First, there may be economic considerations, because over the years, Nigerians patronizes Saudi Arabian markets particularly during Hajj and *Umrah*. Therefore, if Saudi Arabia carries out the execution it could economically affect its relations with Nigeria. Moreover, Nigeria's position in OPEC is also very fundamental in this regard, if Saudi Arabia refused to concede the execution of Ruwan Doruwa, it may not be easy for it to approach Nigeria in any facet of OPEC politics, which Nigeria is very instrumental. Secondly, Nigeria's position in World politics, particularly in Africa region, could be among the reasons. If Saudi Arabia convicted Ruwan Doruwa, Nigeria might decide to sever its relations with the Saudi Arabia. It could further affect Saudi Arabia's relations with other African countries, because Nigeria could use its position in Africa to mobilise African countries to take punitive measures against the Saudi Arabia.

It is imperative to stress that the implications of numerous cases of detentions and executions of Nigerians in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very paramount. Some of the diplomatic debacles between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia usually stemmed from such arrests, convictions and executions of Nigerians by the Saudi Arabian authority. In fact, the problem did not only limit within the domestic circles of the two countries, but further elicited international outrage. For example, in 2005 Amnesty International wrote to Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demanding the status of 13 Nigerians that were executed by the Saudi Arabia. This is to further buttress the strength of detention and executions of Nigerians in precipitating diplomatic strains between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

It could undoubtedly be argued that there is an aged-long diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, the relations spanned for many centuries. Three major factors; religion, Arabization and economy conspicuously precipitated the relations between the two countries. On the economic aspect, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are indispensable members of OPEC due to their huge oil deposits, they therefore, may share common front essentially, as it relate to stability of oil market. On the religious point of view, Hajj is a stronghold on the establishment and continuity of the relations between the two countries. The paper established that the relations between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia started long before the emergence of colonial rule in Nigeria. During colonial administration the relations persisted, although with lackadaisical attitude due to imperial hatred on Islam. Immediately after Nigeria attained its independence in 1960, the relations took unprecedented development, largely, due to Sardauna's passion, particularly, on the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. From 1960 to date as pointed in the paper there were exchanges visits at the diplomatic level between the two countries. It also stressed some major factors that caused diplomatic face-off between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. In conclusion, the paper recommends that in so far as Nigeria cannot afford to cut off diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, even for the purpose of protection of Nigeria's image, the Nigerian government should take stringent measures to curtail the inflow of Nigerian illegal immigrants into Saudi Arabia.

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