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## Prognosis of Nigeria's Relations with the Arab World

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### Abstract

Historically, Africans and Arabs have maintained contacts through trade, pilgrimage and scholarly exchange before the arrival of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa by the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. These relations, particularly between Nigeria and Arab countries spanned the colonial era and accelerated after independence. However, Nigeria-Arab relations appear to have been threatened in recent years by the overbearing influence of the West on Nigeria. This study, therefore, carries out a prognosis on the future of these relations. It identifies issues and areas of cooperation that can provide the basis for sustained Nigeria-Arab solidarity which will in the long run result in economic development of Nigeria. The paper adopts historical/descriptive analysis methodology to interrogate autobiographies, theological tracts, conference proceedings, pilgrimage memoirs and secondary documents that deal with contacts between Nigeria and the Arab world. The findings of this paper show that these relations, if strengthened, should play decisive roles in international politics and will constitute a formidable force capable of ushering in socio-economic development in the country. The paper recommends the creation, promotion and sustenance of broad exchanges and interaction as well as discussions in cultural, political and economic fields with the Arab world.

### Introduction

Without doubt, Nigeria is the most populous State in Africa. Her geography, demography, history among other factors makes the nation an interesting socio-political and cultural experiment. Religiously, Nigeria is a

land with believers in both Islam and Christianity; a country whose northern parts were conquered by Muslim warriors and whose southern portions were Christianised by Christian missionaries. Thus, Nigeria is a meeting ground for two important events in African History: it is a place where Islam still rejoices over its past glories and successes and it is also a place where Euro-western Christianity has made a major breakthrough. Therefore, Nigeria is a good object of study in Afro- Arab relations, which is an important area of investigation in international relations. This point is buttressed by the fact that Arabs and Africans, share a long standing history of relations. Apart from resource endowments and factors of history, geographical proximity between Africa and the Arab world has facilitated close socio-political, cultural and diplomatic relations over the centuries.

Africa is rich in history and harbours much of the world's natural and human resources. The Arabs, on the other hand, occupy parts of Asia and North Africa. Islam originated from among the Arabs and spread to other parts of the world, including Africa. Through the religion of Islam, the Arabs have influenced the world in religion, language, law, science, art, literature, architecture and a great civilization. As Colin puts it, "the world's largest oil reserves are found under Arab soils and territorial waters."<sup>1</sup> Based on these facts, Cervenka holds the opinion that Afro- Arab relations could play very decisive roles in shaping international politics and can as well constitute a formidable force capable of playing a prominent role in the economic development of Africa.<sup>2</sup> The unity of Africans and Arabs, two communities of developing nations straddling two Continents and comprising some of the richest and poorest countries, emerged as a significant feature in the international scene since the Afro- Arab solidarity in 1973. This happened when a substantive number of African States cut off diplomatic relations with Israel and made their first ever support for the Arab cause<sup>3</sup>.

It is against this background that this paper explores the subject of Nigeria- Arab relations. The study traces the historical roots of the relations between Arab and African Countries and establishes its importance in the field of international relations. It draws parallels between Arab oil power and Arab aid to Africa, Arab shift towards the West and the lull in Afro-Arab solidarity. It also examines the dynamics of the Nigeria-Arab relations through various administrations in Nigeria since independence till the

Fourth Republic. The major issues which characterise the Nigeria-Arab Relations are also discussed and analysed. In conclusion, a case is made for the revival of the Afro-Arab solidarity and cooperation in ways that will benefit the Arab and the African peoples who share historical commonalities and mutual interest.

### **Nigeria and The Arab World**

Nigerians and Arabs have maintained contact through trade pilgrimage, and scholarly exchange even before the advent of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. From the period of colonial rule and accelerating after independence, technological, political, and economic changes increased the intensity and diversity of contacts between Northern Nigeria and the Arab world. After the 1950s, increasingly Nigerian Muslims studied in Islamic Universities in Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc, while hundreds of thousands of Nigerians performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Arab regimes reached out to Nigerian Muslims through radio and the print media. Arab leaders, missionaries, and teachers visited Nigeria as well as other African states. Arab organizations courted Nigerian religious leaders and gave funds to religious movements for the construction of mosques and Islamic schools. These developments have, since the 1970s, played significant roles in the spread of Islamic education in Nigeria.

Trimmingham traces the advent of Islam in Northern Nigeria back to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD and played a major role in the historical developments of this part of Africa<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, one of the effects of Islamization of Northern Nigeria was the emergence of a full-fledged Islamic culture and civilization in some parts of present day Nigeria. The sphere of Islam was extended by the Fulani jihad, and the push south of the Islamic movement in Nigeria resulted in the conversion of almost half of the Yoruba population. As a result of these Islamic gains, Nigeria today dramatizes well the three strands of thought which late President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana identified as Islam, Euro-Western Christianity and Traditional African Thought. Each of these three competing ideologies on the African intellectual landscape is represented in the world of African symbols<sup>5</sup>. Islam is represented by the masjid (Mosque) and the Al-Hajji (Muslim pilgrim), Christianity is represented by the Missionary schools and the African Christian Ministers while the traditional African religion is still present in the person of the *Babalao* (Yoruba) the *Dibia* (Igbo) or the

### *Abia Idiong* (Ibibio).

Islam, in retrospect has been an important factor in Nigerian history and culture. Because of this, we can now argue that Nigerian-Arab relations go back to the early contacts between peoples of Northern Nigeria and Arab merchants and scholars, who came to sell their wares and to promote their Islamic beliefs. Though these early relations were not highly developed, they meant a great deal to a good number of Nigerian Muslims in the pre-colonial period. Evidence of this can be seen from the number of Nigerian Muslims who walked across the border, bound for the holy cities of Islam in Arabia via Sudan and the countries along the Red Sea<sup>6</sup>.

Early pre-colonial contacts between Arabs and Nigerians took a significant form of intellectual borrowing and cultural transplantation. Arabs did not only bring some wares from the Arab-Islamic world, but they also introduced new concepts and new ideas to the Africans' mental horizon. It was men like the Shehu who sowed the seeds for Afro-Arab relations and today modern Nigerians are asked to make the best of these legacies. As we shall see shortly, the decolonization of Africa and the greater participation of African States in world affairs would bring the Africans south of the Sahara closer to the Arabs of North Africa and the Arabs of the other side of the Red Sea<sup>7</sup>.

### **An Overview of Nigeria-Arab Relations since 1960**

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the Nation joined a group of Afro-Arab states at the United Nations. These States were united by a common interest for decolonization and the end of racial and white settler domination in Africa. The newly independent African States, however, needed new supporters and helpmates who were not going to put them in a state of dependence. Because of Israel's size and her non-imperial tradition, she became ideally fitted to meet these conditions. This was because from its early beginnings, till that moment, Israel was ideologically committed to international cooperation and development aid<sup>8</sup>. Because of the Arab-Israeli struggle in Africa, Nigeria and all other independent sub-Saharan States found themselves in the thick of Middle East politics. This international issue began to affect the nature of domestic politics in individual African States. Therefore, during the administration of Sir, Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria tried to take a neutral position towards the two

contending sides. But such a federal policy of neutrality was unacceptable to certain regional leaders in Nigeria. The Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and his associates were not pleased with neutrality. Actively involved in Pan-Islamic and Afro-Arab conferences, the Sarduna found it politically embarrassing to tolerate an Israeli diplomatic tent in a land with a sizeable Muslim population. But such logic from the Northern Muslim leadership was deeply resented in both Eastern and Western Nigeria where the Israelis had already penetrated<sup>9</sup>.

Paden identified one critical issue that dominated Nigerian-Arab relations during the First Republic. This was the constitutional wrangle over the extent to which the regional governments in Nigeria could pursue their own ties with either the Arabs or the Israelis. Because of the ambiguities in interpretations, the pro-Israeli Eastern and Western regions and the pro-Arab North under Sir Ahmadu Bello, went their separate ways.<sup>10</sup> The governments of the south opened up to Israeli Agricultural and Technical Assistance. Premiers Michael Okpara of Eastern Region and Samuel Akintola of Western Region made pilgrimage to Israel and the Israeli government extended the red carpet treatment to the Nigerian supporters of the Jewish State. In the Western Region of Nigeria, the Israeli construction company, Solel Boneh, signed an agreement to help develop the water resources of the region. In the Eastern Region, the Israelis were involved in a wide range of activities. They helped in agricultural development along with the American Peace Corps. They also provided first aid services and agricultural training in rural areas<sup>11</sup>. In addition, they gave a number of scholarships to Nigerians to study either in the Histadrut Institute for Labour Studies or in one of the Israeli Universities.

During this time (the first republic), people in Northern Nigeria also had their own political and cultural honeymoon with the Arab States. The Sarduna was invited to Arab states where he often made politically charged statements which did not go down well with the Foreign Ministry people. One of such statements was his declaration that Nigeria would support and if need be join the proposed Pan-Islamic grouping which King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was promoting.<sup>12</sup> This idea was immediately challenged by the Nigerian press, particularly the Southern press. As a result of the editorials and commentaries, the government of Balewa retracted the claim. But while the political and international forays of the Sarduna triggered

hostile responses from both pro-Israeli Nigerians and others interested in keeping religion out of politics, he succeeded in laying the basis of trust and confidence between Nigerian Muslim leaders and their Arab counterparts.

When the military seized power in Nigeria on January 15, 1966, the Nation's foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict was neutral. The most critical factor that was destined to put the Arab states in good light was the eruption of the Nigerian Civil War and the international offer or denial of moral and diplomatic support to Nigeria's secessionist-opponent Biafra. As a result of the outbreak of the conflict between secessionist Biafra and the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Middle Eastern countries began to take sides. The Israelis, trying to reciprocate the support for their country, found it diplomatically useful to rally support for Biafra. This act infuriated the Federal leadership. Apparently, the Israeli Foreign Ministry officials erroneously calculated that the Biafran venture would succeed and that in a free, independent Igbo State, they could develop a springboard for greater penetration in Africa<sup>13</sup>. This Israeli support for Biafra was countered by general Arab support for the Federal Government in the Arab media, especially those with Islamic leanings. Nigeria was portrayed as a land with a Muslim majority threatened by Zionist forces acting through local agents within the non-Muslim community. Because the Arabs feared that Nigeria, the most populous African State, was about to be dismembered through the mercenary of Israel, they made it a point to offer at least diplomatic support to the Federal Government. This fact was not lost to the military commanders at the helm of affairs in the embattled republic. Writing many years after the civil war, former Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo said,

*In the Middle East, Israel was also more forthcoming, though covertly, in supplying arms and ammunitions to the rebels through a third country such as Tanzania or Gabon. Israel obviously would have liked to counteract the Arab influence on the Federal side. Naturally Israel cast her lot with 'Biafra' the Persecuted Jews of Africa.<sup>14</sup>*

Owing to the compromised nature of Israel's role in the Nigeria-Biafra crisis, the Nigerian leadership began to take a more critical look at Israel. This was destined to coincide with other developments in Africa. By 1967 Israeli ties with Guinea (Conakry) were snapped, and her occupation

of the Sinai was certainly not endearing to other African States. But, on the balance, one can argue that Israel was still tolerated although African states were beginning to blame her for intransigence. At the OAU and the United Nations, Nigeria still projected a 'neutral' position with occasional support for the Arabs. Nigeria's Head of State General Gowon was one of Africa's representative selected by the OAU Summit to work a peace arrangement between the Israelis and the Arabs. The African delegation, interestingly, visited only Egypt and Israel.

When Alhaji Shehu Shagari became President in 1979, the Nation was locked in an embrace with the Arab States. During the first three years of his administration, Shagari's government exhibited an easy going attitude towards the Arab States. There were only two issues that featured prominently in Nigeria-Arab relations during this period. The first was the question of Chad and Libya's involvement. The Nigerian authorities at one point wanted an immediate cessation of hostilities. But when it became clear that President Woddeye wanted to use OAU troops to protect his regime, Nigeria pulled back her troops. Nigeria's relations with Libya were also affected when it became clear that Libya was bent on having her way in Chad. Nigeria decided to resist this adventure of Gaddafi because of her growing suspicion. Nigeria joined the French and others in calling for Libyan withdrawal, although Shagari was careful not to be perceived as a faithful tool of French imperialism in Africa<sup>15</sup>.

Another issue of importance in the realm of Nigerian-Arab relations was the question of the Polisario. Nigeria decided to take a cautious move when the Secretary General of the OAU acted on what he thought was the majority decision to seat the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic delegates (i.e Polisario members) at the OAU meeting in Freetown. This decision opened a deep wound in the organization. Nigeria's role in the whole conflict had been low-keyed and watchful. This was evident during the abortive Tripoli One Summit. President Shagari kept the world guessing whether he would or would not go to Tripoli. His failure to show up at the summit was seen as an act of opposition to Gaddafi and his possible assumption of the chairmanship of the OAU<sup>16</sup>.

During this era, Nigeria also broke up ties with Libya because of Gaddafi's decision to convert his Embassy in Lagos to a Peoples Bureau. Finally, Nigeria's suspicions of Libya were heightened by the 1980 Kano uprisings led and fomented by a religious leader, Muhammad Marwa, who

was later slain. Though Libya's innocence was professed and then supported by Northern Nigerian intellectuals such as Dr. Bala Usman, the fact is that Nigerian-Libyan relations remained strained.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, followed by the global oil crisis, most of the Sub-Saharan countries severed diplomatic ties with Israel, arising from two prime factors: promises of cheap oil and financial aid and compliance with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) resolution, sponsored by Arab countries, calling for the severing of relations with Israel. Nigeria was among these countries, and consequently, official cooperation and development projects between Nigeria and Israel were stopped. Diplomatic relations were finally restored in April, 1992. In September, 1992, Nigeria opened an Embassy in Israel for the first time. In 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which formalized the bilateral consultations on political issues between the two countries, was signed by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries. Commercial ties did, however, continue to some extent. Nigerian students participated in training courses in Israel; and Israeli consultants and experts were active throughout the country.<sup>17</sup>

Israeli-Nigerian relations have since become warm and firm, as expressed in reciprocal visits by high-level government officials and the intensive exchange of technical and professional knowledge through the Israeli Centre for International Cooperation programmes. Economic and commercial relations between the countries are also thriving, as more and more Israeli companies from various sectors are attracted to invest in Nigeria.

In 2006 the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which formalized the bilateral consultations on political issues between the two countries. Under the initiative, Israel and Nigeria agreed to consult on issues of bilateral relations and other regional and international issues of mutual interest, as well as to exchange views on matters of mutual concerns.

Today, many Israeli companies operate in Nigeria in the fields of construction, infrastructure, Hi-tech, communications and IT, agriculture, water management and other sectors. The trade between the two countries is on the rise, while joint efforts by the Governments of the two countries aim to ensure the ongoing expansion of these mutually beneficial economic relations. The dynamic economic relations include bilateral consultations

and discussions between the two governments; mutual visits of business delegations; participation in International Exhibitions and other commercial events in both countries; and various activities to promote trade and commerce, carried out by the Israeli Export and International Cooperation Institute, the Nigerian-Israeli Chamber of Commerce (NICC), the Israel-Africa Chamber of Commerce and other institutions.

### The Impact of Nigeria Arab Relations

Nigeria-Arab relations have come a long way but the pertinent questions are: how much of this historical relations remain? Of what cultural, political or economic value was the contact? What can we refer to as Nigeria's gains from her relationship with the Arabs both in retrospect and prospect. This paper, here attempts to examine such gains. However, it is important to state that Nigeria's gains or benefits are classified into five.

### Arabic Language

Nigeria appears to have benefited from the survival and ascendancy of Arabic language. Arabic is an important language as some one hundred million people speak it all over the world including Nigeria and six other members of the African Union (A.U.)<sup>18</sup>. The importance of Arabic becomes further pronounced when it is realized that it is one of the five official languages of the United Nations Organization (U.N.O) and one of the three official languages of the AU.

Arabic was the first non-Nigerian language known to Nigerians. As put by M.S.Al-Garh "*Arabic is the first non-native language which brought its educational achievements as well as its rich literature to the Nigerian and West African environment many centuries-before a single Nigerian or West African citizen ever spoke a word of English or French*".<sup>19</sup>

As the first foreign language in Nigeria it is not surprising that Arabic has greatly influenced the linguistic behaviour of Nigerians and Nigerian language. It is well known that a whole ethnic group in Nigeria, namely the Shuwa Arabs, speak Arabic while the language has enriched Nigeria's local languages like Hausa and Yoruba into which Arabic loan - words have crept.

A greater impact of Arabic language on the speakers of local Nigerian languages like Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba is seen in the valuable

works written by Nigerian authors in their native languages using the Arabic script. Asaju has also called our attention to the 'Arabic Muslim influence' in the Nigerian currency and the Nigerian Armed forces emblem which bear Arabic inscriptions.<sup>20</sup>

### Intellectual Awareness

One major fall-out of Nigeria Arab relations was the efflorescence of Arabic-Islamic scholarship, particularly in West Africa. Timbuktu was the most prominent of these intellectual centres, although it was by no means the only one. There were Kano and Katsina among other centres. Nigeria produced great scholars who had contacts with the centres of intellectual ferment in Arab lands and also rubbed shoulders with their giants<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the fact that Nigeria-Arab relations have served as a vehicle of intellectual awareness in Nigeria in particular and in the West African sub-region in general cannot be over estimated. Professor K.O. Dike, a onetime Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan commented on the intellectual value of Arabic language by saying that:

*It had been a revelation to the whole world of scholarship to realize for the first time that Africa before the European penetration, so far from being a "dark continent" was in fact a continent where the light of scholarship shone brightly, as the Arabic works now being discovered bear testimony.*<sup>21</sup>

Arabic works are of such immense significance to the recovery of Nigeria's past that Hunwick says,

*"For the Hausa past before 1500 we are wholly dependent upon local chronicles composed in Arabic and relatively late in date even though based upon earlier records of which the Kano Chronicle is much the fullest and most informative."*<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore indisputable that Nigeria has benefited immensely from its relationship with the Arabs particularly from the perspective of the accumulation of past records, and bridging of the communication gap which existed in the past and also by enabling Nigerian scholars to benefit

from Arabic works written on various subjects.

Nigerian students are many in Saudi Arabia studying largely on Saudi scholarship. Most of them read Islamic Law (Shari\_ah), Arabic, Islamic History or other Islamic Sciences. Even in the cases where the scholarships offer the pursuit of other courses, there have been the condition (for the award of the scholarship) that the awardees read Shari\_ah for a number of years, three years in most cases before they could pursue other disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

It was reported in 1978, that forty-six Nigerian rejected Saudi scholarship because of the strings attached. In the same 1978, Saudi Arabian Government was reported to have resolved to give a thousand scholarships to Nigerian students. These scholarships would guarantee Nigerian students to study various disciplines in five universities in Saudi Arabia. This assurance was given by the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Nigeria at that time, Alhaji Muhammed Faki.<sup>24</sup>

It is instructive to note that the Saudis came to Nigeria to tap the country's human resources, especially in the 1980s when Nigeria served as a beehive of Saudi recruiting activities. Thousands of medical doctors and professionals in the allied sciences, nurses, laboratory scientists and so on, left Nigeria in droves for Saudi Arabia where they were offered fabulous salaries. Today, there are many Nigerian doctors in Saudi Arabia some of whom have lived there for upward of twelve or fifteen years. These doctors and paramedics leave for Saudi Arabia because of the offer of better remuneration. A State Commissioner for Health among other medical doctors were interviewed for job in Saudi Arabia. Salaries offered ranged between \$60,000 and \$80,000 a month. At a time, whopping 2000 doctors, nurses, laboratory scientists, including professors, medical directors, interviewed were to work in Saudi Arabia<sup>25</sup>.

### Nationalism

Both the Arabised African countries and Black Africa suffered the same fate of colonization as a result of the inhuman process initiated by Portugal in 1444 and joined by England in 1562 culminating in the balkanization of Africa in 1884.<sup>13</sup> Arab North Africa was the first to become aware of nationalism. It was also able to influence the rest of Africa (including Nigeria) in this sphere. Just as the American Revolution of 1776

influenced and hastened the French revolution of 1789, so did Arab aversion for colonialism and early nationalist movements of North Africa influence nationalist thoughts in Nigeria and the whole of West Africa.

It is on record that nationalist movement had started agitating in Egypt long before the Second World War and Egypt became independent early in 1922.<sup>26</sup> These movements brought pressure to bear on Europe to the extent that although only three African countries had been independent before 1955 (Liberia, Egypt and Ethiopia), twenty-four African countries became independent between 1955 and 1960. Whereas Nigerian leaders aligned with the conservative Monrovia bloc which was more Pro-U.N.O than pro-African, if not absolutely anti-Pan-African, the Arab countries of North Africa supported the radical and dynamic Casablanca group. While Nnamdi Azikiwe, then Governor General of Nigeria openly opposed full and immediate independence for the continent and Awolowo changed his toga of dynamism over the Pan-African issue Jamal Abdul Nasir of Egypt, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria and King Hassan of Morocco cooperated fully with Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to demand "full self government now, an African High Command, and an African Common Market".<sup>27</sup>

It can be said with certainty that the struggle for independence by African countries in the colonial period was ignited ab-initio by the encouragement given by the Arabs in the United Nations Organisation as well as the example of nationalism in North Africa emulated by Nigerian nationalists.

### Cultural Benefit

Although Islam, the religion brought by the Arabs, is more widespread in Northern Nigeria than in the South, Arab cultural impact is still palpably felt among the Yoruba who constitute a great chunk of ethnic groupings in Southern Nigeria. It is, therefore, very common to see Nigerians in Arab dresses (particularly the long gown called jalabiyah or turbans) in the streets of Kano, Sokoto or Zaria in the North or in Lagos, Ibadan or Abeokuta in the South. A large number of Nigerians have also benefited from cultural exchange programmes embarked upon by various Arab governments. For example, the al-Azhar foundation of Egypt dolls out scholarships to Nigerian scholars every year.<sup>28</sup> Although there are beneficiaries in other sectors of the Nigerian economy, no less than a dozen

lecturers of Arabic and Islamic studies in Nigerian universities alone have benefited from such cultural programmes organised by Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq and Kuwait<sup>39</sup>.

Apart from the educational advantage, such programmes have greatly enhanced the economic chances of the beneficiaries, whose chances have been made brighter than they would otherwise have been. Also, both the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy have gained tremendously through such programmes since they help in providing manpower in necessary areas. It should be noted, however, that language and religion are not the only disciplines in which Nigerians train in Arab countries. Quite a number of Nigerians study medicine, agriculture, food and dyeing technology and so on.

### **A Prognosis of Nigeria-Arab Relations**

Examining Nigerian-Arab contacts and their effects sheds new light on the intersection of Islam and politics in several spheres: the competition for international influence between Middle Eastern actors, Muslim participation in electoral politics in Nigeria and religio-political violence in Nigeria. At the Continental level, this study has observed that personal ties between some Nigerian and Arab nationalist leaders have regulated the early relations between Africa and Arab World. The founding fathers of OAU now AU, have had special relationships among themselves. Jamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt was a very close friend to Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. In fact, the latter got married to an Egyptian woman, from whom he got his first son, whom he called Jamal, after the Egyptian President. It has also been observed that the emergence and spread of Islamic radicalism poses a serious threat to closer Afro-Arab ties. The presence of Islamic extremist groups who engage in acts of terrorism in Africa tends to make African nations suspicious of the Arab world.

Nigeria – Arab economic relations are sporadic, involving low economic transaction, with one-sided presence of nationals and largely informal. Nigeria – Arab Association, which was registered in 1983 and the Nigeria - Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry, inaugurated in April, 2001 are two non-governmental organizations aimed at fostering cooperation between Nigeria and the Arab world and promoting the development and protection of trade and commerce between Nigeria and Arab countries, through public and private sector cooperation.

Nigerian-Arab relations have gone through three distinct stages in the contemporary era. During the early post-colonial period in which Nigerian leadership was divided along regional lines on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Civil War was also a decisive factor for it made Nigerian military leaders to take a more critical view of Israel. In the light of these developments, it can be said that Nigerian-Arab relations would now depend on the behaviour of the Arabs in North Africa and their attitudes towards the political issues within Africa and the AU.

### **Conclusion**

Arabs and Africans, share a long standing history of relations. Apart from resource endowments, history and geographical proximity between Africa and the Arab World, these Nations have facilitated close socio-political, cultural and diplomatic relations over the centuries. Africa is rich in history and harbours much of the world's natural and human resources. The Arabs, on the other hand, occupy parts of Asia and North Africa. Islam originated from among the Arabs and through them was spread to other parts of the world, including Africa. The Arabs have therefore through the religion of Islam influenced the world in religion, language, law, science, art, literature, architecture and their civilization. And because the world's largest oil reserves are found under Arab soils and territorial waters, Nigeria-Arab relations could play very decisive roles in international politics and can constitute a formidable force capable of playing a prominent role in the economic development of Nigeria and free Nigeria and the Arabs from the apron string of the West.

Nigerian Muslim elites studied in Islamic universities in Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere while hundreds of thousands of Nigerians completed pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. And Arab leaders, missionaries and teachers also visited Nigeria and gave money to religious leaders for the construction of mosques and Islamic schools, thereby playing a significant role in enhancing Nigeria's relations with the Arab world. This is evidenced by the support Nigeria gets from Arab countries in OPEC, UN and the non-align movement. But these relations continued to wane and seemed to have completely collapsed by the end of the twentieth century.

Today, there exists the fragility of Nigeria-Arab relations. There is little economic complementarity between the two, since both are dependent on imported food and technology; the main need of most African countries

is oil, where Nigeria is in competition with the Arab countries. There is little flow of Arab capital to Nigeria. It is instructive to stress here that the Arabs should not seek to make religion the basis for Afro-Arab cooperation.

### Recommendations

This paper strongly recommends the revival of Afro-Arab solidarity and cooperation in the ways that will benefit the Arab and the African peoples who share historical commonalities and mutual interest. Necessary institutions for Afro - Arab cooperation should be put in place and Nigeria, as a leading country in Africa should play a leading role in the revival of this solidarity. Such institutions include the Nigeria – Arab Association. This Association should be strengthened as Relations between states have often been enhanced by inter-governmental diplomacy, which promotes inter-governmental collaboration, contacts and transactions between corporate bodies across frontiers and increased inter-personal relationship among citizens of particular states.

If there is only cooperation between two governments without people-to-people contacts, there would not be a solid basis for the relations between the two countries. This is particularly true about Nigeria's relations with the Arab world, relations that are at best in-between compared to its relations with the industrialized states of the North.

Nigeria's foreign policy should be deliberately designed to:

1. Create, promote and sustain broad exchanges and interaction as well as discussions in cultural, political and economic fields between Nigeria and the Arab world.
2. Encourage and facilitate mutual understanding by Arabs and Nigerians of each others', opinions, attitudes and actions on all issues of substances.
3. Facilitate the exchange of experience and ideas between Nigeria and Arab professionals.
4. Create a bridge between Nigerians and Arabs for mutual understanding of each other's development and learning processes.
5. Identify and promote joint development programmes by Nigerian and Arab authorities and bodies.
6. Encourage and facilitate the establishment of professional, cultural and sporting contacts between Nigerians and Arabs.
7. Evolve various means of fostering co-operation and solidarity between Nigeria and the Arab world in all fields.

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<sup>20</sup>Hitti, P. *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. (10<sup>th</sup> Edition). (London: Macmillan,1970), p.108

<sup>21</sup>Mckay, V. *Africa in World Politics*(New York: Harper and Row, 1963) p.66.

<sup>22</sup>*Daily Times*, August, 1963:11.

<sup>23</sup>*Daily Times*, August, 1963:11.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*