

# THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NIGERIA\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *In Nigeria, Britain asserted its post-colonial security role during and immediately after the transfer of power, and remained responsible for assisting the Nigerian armed forces. While the Americans recognized Nigeria's potential as an important partner in the Cold War, they preferred to focus on development aid. Washington was thus supposed to complement British assistance, while leaving the responsibility for the security sector to London. But with the escalation of the Cold War in Africa, the Nigerians' efforts to reduce their dependency on the United Kingdom, and Nigeria's growing significance for the United States in African affairs, this Anglo-American burden-sharing was increasingly questioned in Washington. The United States thus eventually decided to militarize its aid policy towards Nigeria. In analysing the militarization of US aid policy towards Nigeria, this article will, first, assess the Anglo-American relationship in the early 1960s; secondly, position Nigeria in American Cold War policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa; thirdly, question the role of military assistance in Washington's policy towards Nigeria and Africa; and fourthly, discover the regional and local factors that influenced policy-makers in Washington and London.*

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In assessing Britain's position in Nigeria in February 1963, less than three years after independence, the US ambassador in Lagos praised the British for a smooth transfer of power, but also observed that 'British prestige and, therefore, influence have...been on decline in Nigeria ever since independence.' On the one hand, Joseph Palmer II saw this as the inevitable consequence of Britain's diminishing great power role, the decreasing importance of the commonwealth following London's shift towards Europe, Whitehall's policies elsewhere in Africa, as well as Nigeria's continued decolonization process after independence. But on the other, he observed that while American interest in Nigeria had increased, the Nigerians were looking to the United States (US)

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'as their major hope for reducing their dependence on [the] U.K.'. Fearful that Lagos might turn elsewhere if Washington was not willing to compensate for the British, Palmer concluded that 'we cannot give a boost to British prestige by holding ourselves back'.<sup>1</sup>

At this juncture, the US was already Nigeria's most important national provider of foreign aid by having pledged almost twice as much as Britain to its national development plan.<sup>2</sup> But when it came to military assistance, the Americans were largely absent. Despite Lagos's efforts to diversify its sources of military assistance, it still relied heavily on Britain.<sup>3</sup> The White House had a strong preference for development aid, but from early 1963 it began to consider seriously more substantial military assistance to Nigeria. By the time the government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was overthrown by the January 1966 coup, the US was about to become responsible for the training of the Nigerian army.<sup>4</sup> This was, after the abrogation of the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement in early 1962, yet another setback for the British, who feared completely losing their influence on the Nigerian armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

This shift in US aid policy towards Nigeria allows us, first, to assess the Anglo-American relationship in the early 1960s; secondly, to position Nigeria in American Cold War policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa (henceforth Africa); thirdly, to question the role of military assistance in Washington's policy towards Nigeria and Africa; and fourthly, to discover the regional and local factors that influenced policy-makers in Washington and London.

The first question that the militarization of US aid policy towards Nigeria raises is whether the Anglo-American relationship in Nigeria was marked by co-operation or, like Franco-American relations in Africa in the early 1960s, by rivalry.<sup>6</sup> The late 1950s and early 1960s have generally been considered a period of revival in the 'special relationship' and, according to Wm Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, there was no hostile takeover of the former British empire by the US. Instead, Washington expanded its influence in partnership with the British, who after the Suez Crisis of 1956 teamed up with the Americans to fight the Cold War also in the Third World, believing that colonial reflexes would be counterproductive in winning over local elites and

<sup>1</sup> The British Position in Africa, Palmer to Department of State (DoS), 16 Feb. 1963, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA), Record Group (RG) 84, UD 3050, box 7.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Idang, *Nigeria: internal politics and foreign policy, 1960–1966* (Ibadan, 1973), p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Luckham, *The Nigerian military: a sociological analysis of authority and revolt* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 231–2.

<sup>4</sup> N. J. Miners, *The Nigerian army, 1956–1966* (London, 1971), pp. 155–79.

<sup>5</sup> Olasupo A. Ojedokun, 'The Anglo-Nigerian entente and its demise, 1960–1962', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 9 (1971), pp. 218–20.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre-Michel Durand, *L'Afrique et les relations franco-américaines des années soixante: aux origines de l'obsession américaine* (Paris, 2007).

maintaining informal influence.<sup>7</sup> Yet as Nigel Ashton has shown, US and British interests and policies also clashed during this period, for instance in Africa over the Congo.<sup>8</sup> This article will thus assess whether the Congo was the exception to the rule, and Washington and London ‘shared the burden’ in Nigeria.

Anglo-American competition or cooperation inevitably depended on Washington’s Cold War policies towards Africa and Nigeria. The globalization of the East–West confrontation was slow to spread to Africa, and the superpowers only began to take a closer interest in the region with decolonization gathering pace in the late 1950s. The Soviet Union and the US wanted to gain the allegiance of the emerging states to their respective camps.<sup>9</sup> The administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, which did not attribute any major strategic importance to Africa, believed that this could be achieved by relying on Britain and France. While Soviet inroads into West Africa raised concern in Washington, it was only in the wake of the independence of numerous countries in the ‘Year of Africa’ (1960), the Congo Crisis, and the arrival of John F. Kennedy in the White House that Africa’s strategic importance increased and the Americans became more active. The Congo Crisis was of particular concern to the US, because after being confronted with the secession of the mineral rich Katanga immediately after independence, a lack of support from the Eisenhower administration, and a largely ineffective United Nations peacekeeping operation, Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba had turned to the Soviet Union for help. Even though Lumumba was – with the tacit approval, if not support, from the US and other Western powers – assassinated a few days before Kennedy’s move into the White House,<sup>10</sup> the new American administration wanted to prevent his political heirs from seizing power, and a return of the Soviets, who had been driven out of Central Africa after Lumumba’s downfall.<sup>11</sup> But despite the transformation of the Congo into one of the main Cold War battlegrounds of the early 1960s, Africa remained of secondary importance to US policy-makers when compared to other world regions.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the US deployed relatively important

<sup>7</sup> Wm Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, ‘The imperialism of decolonization’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22 (1994), pp. 480–3, 494–5.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: the irony of interdependence* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 5, 109–26.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the Cold War in Africa, see Jeffrey James Byrne, ‘Africa’s Cold War’, in Robert J. McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford and New York, NY, 2013), pp. 101–23.

<sup>10</sup> On the murder of Lumumba, see Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kuklick, *Death in the Congo: murdering Patrice Lumumba* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> On the Congo Crisis, see Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960–1965* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ebere Nwaubani, *The United States and decolonization in West Africa* (Rochester, NY, 2001); James P. Hubbard, *The United States and the end of British colonial rule in Africa, 1941–1968* (Jefferson, NC, 2011); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy’s courting of African nationalist leaders* (Oxford and New York, NY, 2012); Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States foreign policy, 1945–1980* (New York, NY, 1988), pp. 111–16.

resources, and singled out specific African countries, notably Nigeria, on which to concentrate its efforts. Nigeria was central to the African strategy of Kennedy and his aides. Supposed to be a showcase for Washington's modernization policy in Africa,<sup>13</sup> Nigeria became the biggest recipient of US aid south of the Sahara in the early 1960s.<sup>14</sup> This brought Nigeria, according to Bassey E. Ate, into a relationship of dependency and alignment with Washington.<sup>15</sup> Since development aid seemed to deliver tangible political results, this article seeks to answer why the US decided to 'militarize' its aid policy to Nigeria.

The military dimension of Washington's aid policy towards Nigeria in the 1960s has largely gone unnoticed. It has even been argued that the US deferred to Britain on Nigerian military affairs.<sup>16</sup> This should not come as a surprise, because this is what the Americans had done at first; the January 1966 coup in Nigeria led to the cancellation of the planned US military assistance programme; Lagos relied on British and Soviet arms supplies during the Nigerian Civil War; American arms transfers to Nigeria can only be traced from the 1970s onwards;<sup>17</sup> and finally, US military assistance to Africa was, in comparison to other regions, very modest during the 1960s and focused predominantly on East Africa, notably Ethiopia.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the militarization of US aid policy towards Nigeria predated the transition from British to American leadership in military assistance to Kenya in the 1970s,<sup>19</sup> and was seen by the Nigerian leadership as a means to reduce further their dependency on the British.

It was this Nigerian search for alternative sources of military assistance in reaction to domestic and regional pressures that triggered the militarization of Washington's aid policy. In line with the 'post-colonial turns' in African, imperial, and Cold War history, this article shows how the Nigerian leadership affected the security relationships between Lagos, London, and Washington.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, it was the Nigerian government's Western-oriented neutralism that drove it in the pursuit of reducing its military dependency on

<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the nonaligned world* (New York, NY, 2013), p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Robert B. Shepard, *Nigeria, Africa, and the United States: from Kennedy to Reagan* (Bloomington, IN, 1991), p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Bassey E. Ate, *Decolonization and dependence: the development of Nigerian-US relations, 1960–1984* (Boulder, CO, 1987), passim.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> 'Transfers of major conventional weapons from the US to Nigeria between 1950 and 2016', SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, [http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade\\_register.php](http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php), accessed on 17 May 2017.

<sup>18</sup> William H. Mott IV, *United States military assistance: an empirical perspective* (Westport, CT, and London, 2002), pp. 255–9.

<sup>19</sup> David A. Percox, *Britain, Kenya and the Cold War: imperial defence, colonial security and decolonisation* (London and New York, NY, 2004), pp. 173–4.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2005); Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial history and post-colonial theory', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 24 (1996), pp. 345–63; Heonik Kwon, *The other Cold War* (New York, NY, 2010).

Britain, but simultaneously prevented it from looking beyond Western, neutral, and non-aligned countries for alternative sources of military assistance.<sup>21</sup> This also helps to explain why the Soviets and the Chinese, whose competition for world communist leadership heavily affected Africa,<sup>22</sup> only played a hypothetical role in this Cold War episode. Research at the National Archives of Nigeria in Ibadan and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Lagos did not unearth directly relevant sources providing the Nigerian perspective. But a careful reading of a vast body of American and British sources, and an awareness of the potentially incomplete nature of (post-)colonial archives and biased discourse of US and British policy-makers,<sup>23</sup> allows us to also grasp Nigerian agency. Moreover, whereas a racially motivated feeling of superiority is apparent in the documents of the Eisenhower period, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations seemed to be – despite a patronizing tendency and Cold War blinkers – genuine in their support towards Nigeria, and the available British sources reflect Whitehall's esteem for Balewa and his closest associates.

Based on this archival material, the article first analyses Washington's endorsement of British pre-eminence in Nigerian security affairs and focus on development aid during the transfer of power, and then the process leading to the militarization of Washington's aid policy towards Nigeria from 1963 onwards. Thereby, it argues that for the Americans the decline of British influence made the provision of military assistance seem inevitable, a stable and Western-oriented Nigeria was a cornerstone in the African Cold War, the provision of military assistance was a means of last resort in Africa, and depended on Nigerian requests and co-operation. This illustrates the regional and local peculiarities of the Global Cold War, and allows the article to contribute to the growing historiographical engagement with Africa's role in the East–West struggle.<sup>24</sup>

## I

During the transfer of power in Nigeria, the US endorsed Britain's pre-eminence in Nigerian security affairs. The Eisenhower administration was sympathetic towards Nigeria, and acknowledged the country's potential importance for the US and the Western bloc. The American position was, however, to support British efforts to maintain its influence and retain the Nigerians

<sup>21</sup> Marco Wyss, 'The challenge of Western neutralism: Britain and the build-up of a Nigerian air force', *Journal of Cold War Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> On the Sino-Soviet competition in the Third World in general and Africa in particular, see Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: the Sino-Soviet competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Jordanna Bailkin, 'Where did the empire go? Archives and decolonization in Britain', *American Historical Review*, 120 (2015), pp. 884–99.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: race and the Cold War* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA, 2016); and Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968* (New York, NY, 2016).

within the Western orbit. US–Nigerian relations became more intensive with the Congo Crisis and Kennedy’s arrival in the White House. But whereas the Americans pledged substantial development aid, they were not willing to respond to Nigerian enquiries with a military assistance programme.

This reflected the broader pattern of Washington’s African policy during this period. Similar to their predecessors in the White House, the Eisenhower administration embarked on a ‘middle path’. While it spoke out in favour of African self-determination, it tacitly supported the colonial position of its European allies. This provoked anger and frustration in Africa, which, in combination with the rise of the Afro-Asian movement and non-alignment, Ghana’s independence, and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s Third World offensive, pushed Washington to pay closer attention to the African continent. This led to the first National Security Council paper on Africa in 1957 (NSC 5719), and the creation of a Bureau of African Affairs in 1958. Yet Washington’s African policy had not changed, only evolved. Distrustful of the ability of Africans to govern themselves, the US was supposed to support its European allies to achieve an orderly transfer of power, and to retain the newly independent states in the Western camp.<sup>25</sup>

A more significant policy shift only came with Kennedy, who believed that the future of the East–West struggle for the Third World was to be played out in Africa. Therefore, and in support of African nationalism, he opposed European colonialism, accepted African neutralism, launched a charm offensive with African leaders, and initiated aid programmes. In line with modernization theory and in combination with technical assistance, foreign investment, and integrated planning, development aid was supposed to accelerate the transformation of traditional societies to the liberal, capitalist, and democratic model of the US. Thereby, newly independent African and other Third World states were supposed to be stabilized and sheltered from communism.<sup>26</sup> But when it came to military assistance, it was feared that it would provoke an arms race and turn the Cold War ‘hotter’ in Africa. Military assistance was thus limited and aimed at strengthening the domestic security and territorial integrity of African states.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in 1961, US Congress imposed a ceiling of \$25 million per year for equipment for military assistance programmes in Africa.<sup>28</sup> Even though this ceiling was slowly raised from the late 1960s onwards, Africa

<sup>25</sup> John Kent, ‘United States reactions to empire, colonialism and Cold War in black Africa, 1949–1957’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33 (2005), pp. 195–220; James H. Meriwether, ‘“A torrent overrunning everything”: Africa and the Eisenhower administration’, in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds., *The Eisenhower administration, the Third World, and the globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD, 2006), pp. 175–96.

<sup>26</sup> Michael E. Latham, *The right kind of revolution: modernization, development, and US foreign policy from the Cold War to the present* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, pp. xii–xiii, 44–8.

<sup>28</sup> Conference of ambassadors and principal officers, Lagos, 27–31 May 1965, summary of discussions and conclusions, NARA, RG 59, 5235, box 1.

only received a fraction of US arms transfers during the Cold War. Whereas between 1950 and 1985 Europe received nearly \$230 billion worth of weapon supplies, Asia over \$120 billion, the Middle East some \$95 billion, and Latin America about \$9 billion, Africa received a mere \$4.5 billion. Washington privileged development aid, and from 1956 to 1965, it disbursed \$2,272 million of economic aid, but only \$160.2 million worth of military assistance to Africa.<sup>29</sup> Thereby, the US was first supposed to play a complementary role to that of its European allies in general, and to that of Britain in particular.<sup>30</sup>

By the late 1950s, it had become easier for the US to support Britain, because policy-makers in Whitehall had come to accept decolonization in West Africa. Nigeria was not considered fit for independence. But the temporary closing of ranks between the three major and regionally dominated parties – the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG) of the Western Region, and the predominantly Eastern-based National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) – rising nationalist sentiment, Ghanaian independence, the forthcoming emancipation of French West Africa, and the constitutional process towards self-government dramatically reduced London's options.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the British worried for their international reputation, and feared that further delaying independence could provoke unrest, undermine Nigerian goodwill, and thereby reduce Britain's influence and open the door to communist infiltration. As a result, in the rounds of constitutional talks between 1957 and 1959, London gave in to the Nigerian demand to set a firm date for independence, which was to be in October 1960.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the British cabinet only made this commitment once it had secured its strategic interests in Nigeria. With overflying and staging rights in the Middle East increasingly questioned in the wake of the Suez disaster in 1956 and the Iraqi Revolution two years later, the alternative air route through West Africa gained unprecedented strategic importance in Britain's global defence planning. The Kano airfield in Northern Nigeria was considered an 'essential link' on the trans-African air reinforcement route. Defence Minister Duncan Sandys and Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd thus obtained a commitment, from the Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the regional premiers, to enter into a defence agreement with Britain upon independence. In exchange for staging and overflying rights, Britain was supposed to provide Nigeria with military assistance.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Mott, *United States*, pp. 31, 256.

<sup>30</sup> Hubbard, *United States*, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup> Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled giant: Nigeria since independence* (Bloomington, IN, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> John Darwin, *The empire project: the rise and fall of the British world system, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 614–16; Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire: the road to decolonisation, 1918–1968* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 272–5; Martin Thomas, *Fight or flight: Britain, France, and their roads from empire* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 267, 275.

<sup>33</sup> Marco Wyss, 'A post-imperial Cold War paradox: the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement, 1958–1962', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44 (2016), pp. 976–1000.

With the responsibility for the development of the Nigerian armed forces in British hands, the Americans did not see the need to get involved in Nigerian security affairs. Washington had nevertheless fostered a closer relationship with Lagos prior to independence, because with the increasing Soviet involvement in West Africa, first in Guinea and Ghana, and then in the Congo, the large and populous future state of Nigeria was gaining in importance.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the Nigerian leadership, despite its declared foreign policy of non-alignment, was clearly pro-Western – while it was seeking aid from the US, it rebuffed Soviet overtures.<sup>35</sup>

The British too were hoping for American support. Within the framework of the Bermuda Conference in March 1957, during which British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Eisenhower restored the Anglo-American relationship in the wake of the Suez Crisis, the British foreign secretary met with his US counterpart to get – among other things – American backing in Africa. Dulles broadly agreed with Selwyn Lloyd's view 'that the battle [against communism] for the next ten years would lie on the continent of Africa'. The US secretary of state was particularly disturbed by the planned establishment of diplomatic relations between Ghana and the Soviet Union. Therefore, and in reaction to Lloyd's presentation of the situation in British colonies and the path towards independence in Nigeria, Dulles emphasized that the US would not exert pressure on Britain to grant 'premature independence'. The British foreign secretary thus concluded that in Africa, unlike the Middle East, the US and Britain should be able to work together to keep the communists out.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, British policy-makers detected signs of American attempts to extend their influence in Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> With independence on the horizon, the American consul in Lagos, Ralph H. Hunt, met with leading Nigerian politicians to discuss the march towards independence, and the potential of communist penetration in Nigeria. In discussions with Nnamdi Azikiwe, the premier of the Eastern Region and leader of the NCNC, and Obafemi Awolowo, the premier of the Western Region and leader of the AG, he was assured that Nigeria was largely immune to communism, and that they were confident

<sup>34</sup> On the Soviet position towards and role in West Africa, see, for instance, Sergey Mazov, *A distant front in the Cold War: the USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> On Soviet–Nigerian relations, see Maxim Matusevich, *No easy row for a Russian hoe: ideology and pragmatism in Nigeria–Soviet relations, 1960–1991* (Trenton, NJ, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum of a conversation, Mid-Ocean Club conference room, Bermuda, 23 Mar. 1957, *Foreign relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1955–7, xviii, Africa, pp. 53–6; [assessment, agreed with Mr Dulles, of communist interference in tropical Africa]: circular tel. (no. 67) from Mr Selwyn Lloyd to British representatives in Africa, 10 Apr. 1957, *British documents on the end of empire (BDEE), The conservative government and the end of empire, 1957–1964*, series A, vol. 4, part II, pp. 230–3.

<sup>37</sup> CPC (57) 27, 'Future constitutional development in the colonies': report (CO print, GEN 174/012) of the officials' committee (chairman Sir N. Brook) (CO(o)(57)5), May 1957, *BDEE*, series A, vol. 4, part I, p. 4.

that Britain would not delay the granting of independence. On the issue of communism, Hunt remained sceptical, however.<sup>38</sup> In addition, he was told by Balewa 'that the US must expect Nigeria to swing more and more in its direction as the country nears independence'.<sup>39</sup> While Nigerian leaders tried to present themselves and their future country in a favourable light, they were also actively seeking support from the US. Already in October 1957, the Northern politician and federal minister of lands, mines, and power, Muhammadu Ribadu, called on Palmer, at the time deputy assistant secretary for African affairs, to ask for economic assistance. While there was no communist menace in Nigeria, he argued, financial aid would help protect the country from communist incursions in the future. Palmer answered evasively, saying that while US assistance was not necessarily related to a communist threat, a Nigerian request for help would be carefully considered.<sup>40</sup> Yet as the British governor-general, Sir James Robertson, pointed out to Hunt, the Nigerian leadership believed that it was exactly because of the absence of an imminent communist threat that its requests for American aid were not duly considered.<sup>41</sup> Robertson thus expressed his hope to the American consul that the US would provide aid to Nigeria.<sup>42</sup>

The Americans were favourably disposed towards providing aid, not least because despite Nigerian assurances to the contrary, their country was considered vulnerable to communism and Egyptian pressures. Moreover, Washington had political, economic, and strategic interests in Nigeria. According to the US Operations Coordinating Board's (OCB) operations plan for Nigeria of July 1958, Nigeria was 'one of the areas of greatest U.S. interest among the dependent overseas territories'. Nigeria was expected to play a major role in West Africa and Africa more generally, and seen as a growing market for American exports and investments, as well as a reliable source of raw materials. From a strategic perspective, the primary interest was to deny communist control, and in the event of war or air and sea barriers in the Middle East, it was important to control sea and air communications through Nigeria. The US thus had to provide economic and technical assistance to establish friendly relations and keep the Nigerians in the Western camp. Britain was, however, to remain the lead Western nation. American departments and agencies were encouraged to assist the British in the orderly transfer of power, and

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, premier of the Eastern Region, Hunt to DoS, 25 Apr. 1957; constitutional conference developments and reactions, 6, interview with Chief Obafemi Awolowo, premier of the Western Region, Hunt to DoS, 18 Oct. 1957, NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal Files (CDF) 1955–9, box 3238.

<sup>39</sup> Comments by the federal prime minister, Hunt to DoS, 17 Feb. 1958, NARA, RG 84, UD 3050, box 3.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum of conversation, DoS, 8 Oct. 1957, *FRUS*, 1955–7, xviii, Africa, pp. 603–4.

<sup>41</sup> Despatch from the consulate general at Lagos to the DoS, 11 Dec. 1957, *FRUS*, 1955–7, xviii, Africa, pp. 606–7.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with governor-general (Sir James Robertson), Hunt to DoS, 1 May 1958, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955–9, box 3238.

promote close relations between Britain and Nigeria after independence. The US was only supposed to complement British efforts and intervene at the levels of diplomacy, aid, and propaganda. At the military level, there was no action plan other than keeping an eye on developments in Nigeria and its region.<sup>43</sup> The emphasis on aid and propaganda was confirmed in the OCB's response of January 1959 to NSC 5818 on US policy towards Africa.<sup>44</sup> This policy was reflected in the tripartite talks between Britain, France, and the US on Africa of April 1959, during which the Americans made it clear that they envisaged only 'a modest amount of military assistance' and were happy to leave the defence field to the colonial powers.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, in line with the OCB's plan, Washington observed the development of the Nigerian armed forces, and the evolution of the Anglo-Nigerian security relationship during the run up to independence. The gist of most reports was that the Nigerian army would be able to maintain law and order in co-operation with the police, but not to defend the country. Since there was no external threat, this was not necessarily a problem. The real issues for US observers were tribalism and Nigerianization. On the one hand, it was feared that tribal and regional politics could undermine the army's efficiency. On the other, as a result of the slow pace of Nigerianization, the Nigerian army and navy remained dependent on British officers. But ultimately, the Americans saw the Nigerian security forces, and the British role therein, in a favourable light.<sup>46</sup> They were aware that the Anglo-Nigerian defence relationship was not unproblematic. Azikiwe (NCNC) and Awolowo (AG) voiced their discomfort with the planned Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement – not for anti-Western reasons, but because of anti-colonial and domestic political issues.<sup>47</sup> The governor-general thus felt obliged to assure the American

<sup>43</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, Washington, DC, operations plan for Nigeria, 24 July 1958, NARA, RG 59, A1 1586B, box 14.

<sup>44</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, Washington, DC, report on Africa south of the Sahara (NSC 5818), 14 Jan. 1959, NARA, RG 59, A1 1586B, box 14; National Security Council report, NSC 5818, note by the executive secretary to the National Security Council on US policy toward Africa south of the Sahara prior to calendar year 1960, 26 Aug. 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–60, xiv, Africa, pp. 23–37.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 16 Apr. 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–60, xiv, Africa, pp. 45–51; JP (59)64(Final), Tripartite talks on Africa, report by the Joint Planning Staff, 30 May 1959, The National Archives, Kew, London (TNA), DEFE 6/56.

<sup>46</sup> Nigerian security forces, Emmerson to DoS, 21 July 1959, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955–9, box 3239; conversation with deputy governor-general, A. G. H. Gardner-Brown, Dorros to DoS, 31 Mar. 1960, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1698; personnel policies of the royal Nigerian navy, Emmerson to DoS, 17 May 1960; present Nigerian military forces and foreign military assistance, Emmerson to DoS, 19 May 1960; Nigerian officers in army to double by August 1961, Emmerson to DoS, 12 July 1960; political activities of Nigerian army officers, Emmerson to DoS, 26 Aug. 1960, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1699.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum of conversation, Emmerson to DoS, 15 June 1959, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955–9, box 3239; conversation with Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, president of the Nigerian Senate, Emmerson to DoS, 4 May 1960, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1698.

consul that the majority of the Nigerian leadership would stand by their promise to enter into a defence agreement upon independence.<sup>48</sup> For as long as the British seemed to be in control, Washington did not see a need to get directly involved in Nigerian security affairs.

This approach was again confirmed on the eve of independence by NSC 6005/1, the 'Statement of US policy toward West Africa' of 9 April 1960. Despite the growing political significance of West Africa, and independence providing an opportunity for communism, the US was to leave the main responsibility for the region to the former metropoles, and mainly complement their aid efforts. Military assistance was, however, the undisputed prerogative of the former colonial powers. Washington aimed to '[d]iscourage the development of an arms race in Africa and of the concept that the United States is prepared to provide military assistance to any nation which requests it'. American military assistance was only to be considered if the metropole was unable to provide such assistance and US interests were at stake. As for Nigeria, there definitely seemed to be no urgency, since it was considered 'a potential force for political moderation' among African nations.<sup>49</sup> Thereby, NSC 6005/1 not only confirmed previous policies but also the earlier assessments of the regional importance of Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> The unfolding crisis in the Congo further increased the importance of Nigeria to the US, because Lagos was willing to provide troops for the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) after independence, and to allow the United Nations to use Kano airfield as a staging ground.<sup>51</sup> Balewa was the ideal African partner for Washington in the Congo. On the one hand, his staunch anti-communism made him oppose Patrice Lumumba and later his heirs. On the other, he could not tolerate a secessionist Katanga because of Nigeria's own potential for internal conflict.<sup>52</sup>

Immediately after Nigeria's accession to independence in October 1960, the Nigerian prime minister was thus received by President Eisenhower. Balewa confirmed American expectations by emphasizing Nigeria's potential leadership role in African affairs, his pro-Western attitude, dislike of the Soviet Union and communism, and his hope for US aid so as to avoid turning to the Soviets. In sum, in contrast to Guinea and Ghana, he portrayed his country in a favourable light while nevertheless asking the Americans to work towards an

<sup>48</sup> Nigerian security forces (Part 1): general – comment, Emmerson to DoS, 21 July 1959, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955–9, box 3239; conversation with governor-general, Sir James Robertson, Dorros to DoS, 1 Apr. 1960, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1698.

<sup>49</sup> NSC 6005/1, statement of US policy toward West Africa, National Security Council, 9 Apr. 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–60, xiv, Africa, pp. 117–26.

<sup>50</sup> National intelligence estimate, the outlook in West Africa through 1960, 16 June 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–60, xiv, Africa, pp. 54–7; chief of mission review of FY 1961 mutual security programme for Nigeria, Emmerson to secretary of state, 2 Nov. 1959, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955–9, box 3239.

<sup>51</sup> Whitney to secretary of state, 15 July 1960; conversation with the prime minister, Emmerson to DoS, 31 Aug. 1960, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1699.

<sup>52</sup> Shepard, *Nigeria*, p. 18.

easing of Cold War tensions. Eisenhower was willing to discuss this and other issues, such as the seating of the Chinese communists in the UN, but remained non-committal by emphasizing in relation to ‘immature nations’ that ‘you cannot make a tree grow overnight’.<sup>53</sup>

The foundation of Washington’s policy towards Nigeria had been laid by the end of Eisenhower’s term. While the British were supposed to keep the lead on Nigeria and be responsible for military assistance, the US would provide development aid. This was perfectly acceptable for the financially overstretched British. During his visit to Nigeria in January 1960, Macmillan had told ministers of the Western Region, for instance, that he saw a role for the US (and West Germany) in external aid.<sup>54</sup> The British did not see their position in Nigeria threatened by the Americans, and even helped them obtain Nigerian consent for the establishment of a tracking station at Kano for NASA’s space satellite project Mercury in 1959.<sup>55</sup> This burden-sharing approach towards Nigeria, with Britain in the leading role, was also accepted by the incoming Kennedy administration. The only tangible difference at first was the desire to step up development aid.

In mid-May 1961, Walt W. Rostow, the deputy national security adviser, addressed the issue of co-operation with Britain and France in Africa, in a memorandum to his superior, McGeorge Bundy. The British and the French, wrote Rostow, were ‘still bearing a primary responsibility’ in Africa, ‘but the U.S. is being drawn increasingly into African affairs’. Therefore, the president wanted a common Western strategy to ‘create islands of responsibility’, notably in Nigeria; to prevent incursions by communists in areas where revolutionary forces provided them with an opportunity; and to address commonly the issue of protracted decolonization.<sup>56</sup> In the Nigerian case, this led first to a more active development aid policy, starting in May 1961 with the visit of a special US economic mission to Nigeria. In its report, the mission wholeheartedly recommended stepping up American development aid to Nigeria, because not only was it looking to the West, but it had the unique advantage on the African continent that it could ‘achieve economic development in a democratic framework’. It was thus, the report concluded, ‘in the West’s interest generally, and in the U.S. interest particularly, to facilitate the growth of the Nigerian

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum of conference with President Eisenhower, J. S. D. Eisenhower, 8 Oct. 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–60, xiv, Africa, pp. 282–32.

<sup>54</sup> Note of a meeting held at Ibadan at 12.00 noon on Thursday, 14 Jan. 1960, between Mr Macmillan and the premier and other ministers of Western Nigeria, TNA, FCO 141/13603.

<sup>55</sup> Eastwood to Robertson, 18 Aug. 1959; Bell to Bello, 28 Aug. 1959, TNA, FCO 141/13702.

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum from the president’s deputy special assistant for national security affairs (Rostow) to the president’s special assistant for national security affairs (Bundy), 13 May 1961, *FRUS*, 1961–3, xxi, Africa, pp. 290–2.

economy in the context of free institutions'.<sup>57</sup> The matter received a certain urgency when a Nigerian economic mission visited the communist countries of Czechoslovakia, Poland, China, and the Soviet Union. Thereafter, the mission also visited the US, where it was received by the president, whose administration was anxious to match the receptions by the communist countries that the Nigerians had previously visited.<sup>58</sup> As a consequence, the US rapidly evolved into a major donor of Nigeria, and the Nigerians became one of the prime African recipients of US aid. While in December 1961 the US pledged \$225 million to Nigeria's six-year plan, by 1963 Nigeria formed with the Congo, Liberia, Morocco, and Tunisia a select group of countries that received 55 per cent of the total of US aid to Africa of \$540 million.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, within this group Nigeria, together with Tunisia, received the lion's share.<sup>60</sup>

Although the US saw its role in development aid, the July 1961 visit of Balewa to Washington, and the increasing unpopularity of the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement in Nigeria, raised the spectre of US military assistance. But the American and British governments agreed that if Balewa should ask Kennedy for military aid, as their representatives in Lagos suspected, they would first have to discuss how British assistance could be complemented.<sup>61</sup> London was assured that the US had no wish to 'poach'.<sup>62</sup> Washington wanted to increase US influence, but not at the expense of Britain.<sup>63</sup> The position paper on military assistance for Balewa's visit thus made it clear that for political reasons 'any Nigerian request' was to be approached 'in a forthcoming spirit', but the Nigerians would be informed that the Americans would first have to take this up with the British.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, rather than promoting an arms race, the

<sup>57</sup> Report of the special US economic mission to Nigeria, 17 June 1961, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), papers of John F. Kennedy, presidential papers, National Security Files (NSF), Countries, Nigeria.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum for the president to receive the Nigerian economic mission, 21 June 1961; memorandum for Mr McGeorge Bundy, the White House, Battle, 5 July 1961; memorandum to the president, Rostow to Kennedy, 7 July 1961, JFKL, papers of John F. Kennedy, presidential papers, President's Office Files (POF), countries, Nigeria: general, 1961–2.

<sup>59</sup> African foreign economic and military assistance – your memorandum of 23 Jan. 1963, Williams to McGhee, 27 Feb. 1963, entry 5235, box 3, RG 59 NARA.

<sup>60</sup> Chiefs of mission conference, Lagos, Nigeria, minutes of meeting on AID and MAP, 28 May 1965, NARA, RG 59, 5235, box 1.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce to secretary of state, 17 July 1961, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1699; American military aid to Nigeria, United Kingdom High Commission Lagos (UKHC Lagos) to Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 19 July 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

<sup>62</sup> American military aid to Nigeria, CRO to UKHC Lagos, 17 July 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum for the president, Rostow to Kennedy, 21 July 1961, JFKL, papers of John F. Kennedy, presidential papers, POF, countries, Nigeria: general, 1961–2.

<sup>64</sup> Prime Minister Balewa's visit, Washington, 25–8 July 1961, position paper, military assistance to Nigeria (to be raised at Nigerian initiative), 19 July 1961, NARA, RG 59, 3017, box 4.

aim was to get Balewa on board for Washington's arms limitation plans in Africa.<sup>65</sup>

Eventually, while the Nigerian prime minister stated that Nigeria did not need external defence aid, his foreign minister, Jaja Wachuku, asked whether the US would provide assistance for a Nigerian air force. The Americans informed the British, however, that they had discouraged the Nigerians 'about the chance of prestige assistance of this kind'.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, London was aware that Washington preferred the Nigerians to spend their money on development, rather than on defence in reaction to Ghana's military buildup.<sup>67</sup> But changes in Washington's attitude towards Africa, frustration with Nigerian development, the decline of Britain's security role, domestic crises in Nigeria, regional tensions, and a more assertive Nigerian leadership would eventually lead to a militarization of US policy.

## II

American enthusiasm for Africa already began to ebb before Kennedy's assassination. The Congo Crisis brought home the risks of a heavier involvement in African affairs, the engagement with African leaders did not produce the expected political dividends, the Bureau of European Affairs and its allies in the White House succeeded in restoring Europe's undisputed supremacy in relation to Africa, and, as a corollary, Portugal and South Africa regained their voice in Washington. Moreover, with the escalation of the US involvement in Vietnam, Africa again faded into the background. These trends were confirmed after Kennedy's death in November 1963, because President Johnson did not share his predecessor's enthusiasm for Africa. The US Congress was reluctant to approve large aid budgets for Africa, and the influence of the Bureau of African Affairs and the Africanists Kennedy had brought into his administration decreased. It was thus hoped that Britain and France would continue to 'assume the burden' in Africa.<sup>68</sup>

This inevitably also affected the relationship with Nigeria. In addition to their traditional disgust for the treatment of African-Americans in the US, both the Nigerian people and policy-makers took issue with Washington's close

<sup>65</sup> Prime Minister Balewa's visit, Washington, 25–8 July 1961, position paper, arms limitation in Africa (to be raised at US initiative), 19 July 1961, NARA, RG 59, 3112G, box 2.

<sup>66</sup> Note of a meeting in Mr Chadwick's room at 11 a.m. on Friday, CRO, 4 Aug. 1961, Sir Abubakar's visit to the US, 8 Aug. 1961; record of a meeting held in the Commonwealth Relations Office at 11 a.m. on 15 Sept. 1961, CRO, 15 Sept. 1961, TNA, DEFE 7/1486; memorandum from the president's deputy special assistant for national security affairs (Rostow) to President Kennedy, 18 Sept. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961–3, ix, Foreign Economic Policy, pp. 258–9.

<sup>67</sup> Brief for Anglo-US talks, Washington, Nov. 1961, Federation of Nigeria – armed forces, CRO, 15 Nov. 1961, TNA, DO 195/97.

<sup>68</sup> Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, pp. 193–4, 198; Zaki Laidi, *The superpowers and Africa: the constraints of rivalry, 1960–1990* (Chicago, IL, 1990), pp. 18–19; Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, pp. 231–2.

relationship with Lisbon and Pretoria. While the South African apartheid regime and Portuguese colonialism were an insult to their beliefs, Lagos had to condemn publicly the US collusion with white supremacists and colonialists to burnish its leadership credentials in African affairs. Moreover, the proliferation of American activities in Nigeria, ranging from the extensive deployment of the US Peace Corps to US Information Agency propaganda, and the slow disbursement of aid could at times be a thorn in the relationship. Nevertheless, Lagos continued to co-operate with Washington in and over the Congo, and despite stressing its neutralist foreign policy, it continued to advocate for moderation in inter-African affairs. Therefore, and spurned by the trade agreement that Lagos had concluded with Moscow in July 1963 to burnish its neutralist credentials, the US still saw Nigeria as an important partner in Africa, and continued to provide substantial development aid despite disappointing growth figures.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, however, it seemed increasingly unrealistic to leave the leadership of Nigerian security affairs to Britain.

After opposition to the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement had escalated, the British and Nigerian governments agreed to abrogate it in January 1962, and thereby protect the pro-British Balewa government. Despite a written promise by Balewa to uphold the major provisions of the agreement, the defence relationship between Britain and Nigeria rapidly deteriorated.<sup>70</sup> Under the aegis of Ribadu, now defence minister and seemingly anti-British, the Nigerian military turned to other sources of military assistance, most prominently to West Germany for the air force, and India for the military academy. With the accelerated pace of Nigerianization in the army and the navy, Britain thus feared being entirely cut out from Nigerian defence.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, the Nigerian army assumed an increasingly important role in domestic politics because of escalating regional and tribal tensions. During the 1964 elections, for instance, the army was deployed to maintain law and order – notably in the Tiv Division in Northern Nigeria and the Western Region.<sup>72</sup> In light of Britain's declining defence role and the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria, the Americans began to consider seriously the provision of military assistance.

Washington's response to Nigerian calls for military assistance was slow and incremental. In addition to the partnership with the British, this reflected disagreements within the US administration and conflicting signals from Lagos. From early 1962 to the end of the First Nigerian Republic in January 1966,

<sup>69</sup> Shepard, *Nigeria*, pp. 17–30; Ate, *Decolonization*, pp. 82–9; briefing papers, Governor Williams's African trip (21 June – 9 July 1963), Nigeria, 5–7 July 1963, Office of West Coast and Malian Affairs (AFW), NARA, RG 59, 3112G, box 2; memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 10 July 1963, *FRUS*, 1961–3, xxi, Africa, p. 568; invitation to Dr Azikiwe to make a state visit to the United States, Trimble to Tasca, 25 July 1963, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>70</sup> Wyss, 'A post-imperial Cold War paradox', *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> Luckham, *Nigerian military*, pp. 232–3.

<sup>72</sup> Jimi Peters, *The Nigerian military and the state* (London and New York, NY, 1997), pp. 86–7.

the Americans first agreed to a token of military training in the US, then an expansion of this training programme, and, finally, to send an army training team to Nigeria. Had it been the decision of the US defence establishment, this process would have been speeded up considerably. Already in late January 1962, the joint chiefs of staff called for a military assistance programme to Nigeria, alongside the entente states (Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Upper Volta, and Dahomey), Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. This aid to Western-oriented West African countries was supposed to act as both a deterrent and an inducement to the 'radical' countries of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.<sup>73</sup> Since this was not in line with Washington's policy towards West Africa and Nigeria, the Bureau of African Affairs succeeded in preventing such a dramatic step. American support was to be limited to a few training spaces for Nigerian officers in US service schools. The Nigerians were not to be encouraged to look to the US for military assistance, and it had to be made clear to both the British and them that there would be no military assistance programme. Rather, the Nigerians were to be encouraged to continue to look to Britain for military assistance or, as an alternative, to other commonwealth countries, notably India, Pakistan, and Canada.<sup>74</sup>

The Americans remained in close consultation with the British. In summer 1962, they were informed that the Nigerians were increasingly unresponsive to London's offers of military assistance, and in search of alternative sources. Nevertheless, Whitehall reassured them that the Nigerians would eventually come back.<sup>75</sup> But behind closed doors, the British were worried, and even reluctant to share with the Americans intelligence that could present Anglo-Nigerian relations in an unfavourable light.<sup>76</sup> In reaction to Ribadu's dismissive attitude towards British military assistance offers, it was feared in London that Britain could be forced out of the Nigerian security 'market for good'.<sup>77</sup> By spring 1963, the British military attaché in Lagos concluded that the Nigerian defence minister was anti-British, and was therefore 'deliberately going to other nations for assistance'. In reaction to suspicions of Ghanaian involvement in the Togolese coup of January 1963, Ribadu wanted to strengthen the Nigerian armed forces for regional and not, as the British and Americans would have preferred, for domestic purposes. Thereby, he looked to Washington and Bonn, instead of London.<sup>78</sup>

Washington was increasingly concerned about domestic security in Nigeria, especially after the discovery of plans of a coup by supposedly Soviet- and

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum prepared by the joint chiefs of staff, 31 Jan. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961–3, xxi, Africa, pp. 310–14.

<sup>74</sup> Military assistance for Nigeria, Dumont to Wolfe, 29 Jan. 1962, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1960–3, box 1699.

<sup>75</sup> Military assistance in Africa, Wolfe, 13 July 1962, NARA, RG 59, entry 3107, box 1.

<sup>76</sup> Shaw to Martin, 9 Mar. 1961; Watts to Shaw, 10 Apr. 1962, TNA, CAB 163/54.

<sup>77</sup> Price to Head, 2 Nov. 1962, TNA, DO 195/97.

<sup>78</sup> Flint to Price, 15 Mar. 1963, TNA, DEFE 7/1307.

Ghanaian-sponsored members of the AG led to the imprisonment of Awolowo and a crisis in the Western Region in 1962. Against the background of decreasing British influence, the US thus began to review its position on military assistance. The Americans wanted to assess with the British the security situation in Nigeria, and how they could best play a complementary role in strengthening the Nigerian security apparatus.<sup>79</sup> Even from within the Bureau of African Affairs, which had consistently favoured development over military aid, came calls for a heavier military involvement. In January 1963, following a recommendation of the US army's African Division, Ambassador William C. Trimble, the director of the Office of West Coast and Malian Affairs, expressed his hope for an increase in the training programme for Nigerian military personnel.<sup>80</sup> This went in parallel with his lobbying inside the administration for a general increase in aid to Nigeria, which with \$53.8 million for 1963 was already the major recipient of American development aid in Africa.<sup>81</sup> The 'moderate' Nigeria was considered key to US policy in Africa, and the British did not have the means to secure the Nigerians' Western orientation on their own.<sup>82</sup> Following his trip to Nigeria, US Assistant Secretary for African Affairs G. Mennen Williams largely supported this view. Although he did not want to encourage a military build-up in Africa and wished to defuse tensions between Ghana and Nigeria, he recommended to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs George C. McGhee a stronger supplementary role of the US in Nigeria to strengthen the position of the West.<sup>83</sup>

The issue was brought up in the Anglo-American talks in London of December 1962 and, as a result, the US ambassador assessed the internal security situation in Nigeria with the British high commissioner in Lagos. During their meeting in spring 1963, Palmer was reassured by the British general officer commanding the Nigerian army, Major General Christopher E. Welby-Everard, that the Nigerian security forces were able to maintain law and order for the foreseeable future. This ability was, however, threatened by the rapid pace of Nigerianization, tribalism, and the further loss of British

<sup>79</sup> Position paper, US-UK talks on Africa (4–5 Dec. 1962), 5a. Nigeria, 30 Nov. 1962; Mathews to Williams, 7 Dec. 1962, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 2.

<sup>80</sup> Ambassador Trimble's trip to West Africa, Toomey, 9 Jan. 1963, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 68.

<sup>81</sup> Memorandum from the president's special assistant (Dungan) to President Kennedy, 6 Mar. 1963, *FRUS*, 1961–3, xxi, Africa, p. 330.

<sup>82</sup> AFW contribution to the study of attitudes of lesser-developed countries receiving foreign economic and military assistance, Trimble to Kling, 14 Feb. 1963, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 68.

<sup>83</sup> Williams to Rusk, 25 Feb. 1963, NARA, RG 59, 3112G, box 2; African foreign economic and military assistance – your memorandum of 23 Jan. 1963, Williams to McGhee, 27 Feb. 1963, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 3.

influence.<sup>84</sup> In London, it was believed that this exchange had been sufficient to reassure the Americans.<sup>85</sup> This was overly optimistic, because in Washington the training of Nigerian officers in American schools was not only seen as a means to foster closer relations, but also to ‘demonstrate to the Nigerians that we appreciate their desire not to depend solely on the British’.<sup>86</sup>

Towards the end of 1963, coinciding with the death of Kennedy, US policymakers had reached a consensus that it was in the US’ best interest to step up its military assistance to Nigeria. According to the National Strategy for Nigeria of November 1963, Washington was supposed to respond favourably to ‘Nigerian requests for increased training programs’. This was supposed to reinforce American influence, compensate for Britain’s declining role, and to strengthen internal security in Nigeria.<sup>87</sup> The Americans did not want to encourage the Nigerians to look to the US for military assistance and were worried that military expansion could come at the expense of development. But wary that Lagos could turn to the Eastern bloc, they did not see any option other than responding more favourably to Nigerian requests – as they explained almost apologetically to the British in early 1964. The British came to accept this policy, because they preferred ‘Nigerians crossing the Atlantic than going to certain other countries’.<sup>88</sup>

In early 1964, the provision of military training to Nigerians in the US was thus extended.<sup>89</sup> In addition, Washington agreed to largely symbolic arms supplies, such as a limited number of recoilless rifles and carbines.<sup>90</sup> This remained unchanged for the remainder of the year, even though there were renewed calls for an increase in US military assistance to Nigeria. But this time it was not for Nigeria’s, but the Congo’s security. Confronted with the withdrawal of ONUC in June, Washington wanted the Nigerians to retain army and police forces in the Congo to support the government in Leopoldville. At first, in addition to diplomatic interventions, including a letter from President Johnson to Prime Minister Balewa, the idea was to finance the continued presence of Nigerian forces in the Congo.<sup>91</sup> But in light of Nigerian reluctance and lack of military

<sup>84</sup> Memorandum of conversation, Palmer, 24 Apr. 1963; Fowler to Price, 3 June 1963, TNA, DO 195/114.

<sup>85</sup> Martin to Moreton, 1 Aug. 1963; Moreton to Martin, 26 Aug. 1963, TNA, DO 195/114.

<sup>86</sup> Anticipated questions concerning military assistance programmes in AFW area and our answers, Dorros to Oulashin, 6 May 1963, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 68.

<sup>87</sup> National strategy series, Nigeria, DoS, 5 Nov. 1963, JFKL, papers of John F. Kennedy, presidential papers, NSF, Subjects.

<sup>88</sup> Nigeria, Chadwick to Martin, 30 Jan. 1964, TNA, DO 195/305; US–UK talks on Africa, Washington, 27–8 Jan. 1964, Bureau of African Affairs (AF), 23 Jan. 1964, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 6; meeting with Mr Kitchen today, Wellons to Mathews, 6 Mar. 1964, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 77.

<sup>89</sup> Various documents in NARA, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files (SNF) 1964–6, box 1683.

<sup>90</sup> Owen to Cox, 13 Mar. 1964, TNA, DO 195/305.

<sup>91</sup> US contribution to the cost of Nigerian assistance to the Congo – action memorandum, Williams to Harriman, 9 Apr. 1964; Davies/Johnson to Palmer/Balewa, 22 June 1964,

capacity, Deputy Assistant for Politico-Military Affairs Jeffrey Kitchen and Defence Secretary Robert McNamara advocated extending US military assistance to Nigeria.<sup>92</sup> Yet the effectiveness of military assistance for Nigerian peace-keeping was questioned by the American embassy in Lagos<sup>93</sup> and, eventually, the Nigerians agreed to remain in the Congo without additional military assistance.

Meanwhile, in light of the mounting political tensions in Nigeria between the main regionally dominated parties and within the Western Region, by late 1964 Washington had shifted its focus back on domestic security, and the related threat of Sino-Soviet penetration.<sup>94</sup> The situation seemed sufficiently severe for Washington to justify an extension of its military assistance to Nigeria. The main aim was to strengthen internal security, and thereby help maintain national unity and prop up the pro-Western Balewa regime.<sup>95</sup> In Washington, it was soon realized that it was not only a question of whether it was willing to offer a military assistance programme, but also if the Nigerians actually wanted one.

In light of its declared non-alignment policy and negative experience with the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement, the Balewa government was reluctant to engage in a substantial and thus visible military relationship with the Western superpower.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, while the Nigerians looked up to the US, they were also frustrated with its slow disbursement of aid and, especially, domestic racial tensions and cosying up to the South Africans.<sup>97</sup> According to the UK High Commission in Lagos, the US had ‘a poor image in Nigeria and is often clumsy in her diplomacy’. Therefore, it was observed, ‘American influence counts for comparatively little here compared to our own.’<sup>98</sup> The British perception was not only exaggerated, but also self-flattering, especially in light of Balewa’s praise for Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ programme.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, in

NARA, RG 59, SNF 1964–6, box 1683; telegram from the Department of State to the embassy in Nigeria, 19 June 1964, *FRUS*, 1964–8, xxiii, Congo, 1960–8, pp. 255–6.

<sup>92</sup> Kitchen to Sloan, 7 May 1964, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 77; memorandum for the files, 11 Aug. 1964, *FRUS*, 1964–8, xxiii, Congo, 1960–8, p. 306.

<sup>93</sup> Scott to Bolen, 11 Dec. 1964, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 77.

<sup>94</sup> Memorandum from Samuel E. Belk of National Security Council staff to the president’s special assistant for national security (Bundy), 30 Dec. 1964, *FRUS*, 1964–8, xxiv, Africa, pp. 612–13; Part i: Sino-Soviet efforts in Nigeria / Part ii: United States activities especially aimed at offsetting or precluding Sino-Soviet efforts in Nigeria, AFW, 1 Feb. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>95</sup> Scott to Bolen, 30 Apr. 1965; justification for official visit by Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, AF/AFW, 23 Mar. 1965; Nigeria, current politico-economic problems, AF/AFW, 7 Apr. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum of conversation, Ambassador Mathew’s discussions with Department of Defence, 22 Apr. 1965, NARA, RG 59, SNF 1964–6, box 1683.

<sup>97</sup> US position in Nigeria, AF/AFW, 30 Apr. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>98</sup> Extract from Lagos despatch no. 6, Lagos to CRO, 26 May 1965, TNA, DO 195/311.

<sup>99</sup> Balewa to Johnson, 29 May 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 80.

July 1965, the Nigerian government did not take up Washington's offer of a Combat Intelligence Training Team for the Nigerian army.<sup>100</sup>

By that time, however, the Nigerian position towards American, and even British military assistance, had already begun to change. In the wake of Ribadu's sudden death in May 1965, and his replacement by Inuwa Wada, the Americans and the British were informed about a change of policy. During the summer, Sule Kolo, the permanent secretary at the Nigerian Ministry of Defence, not only visited Britain to enquire about the supply of seaward defence vessels and training assistance,<sup>101</sup> but also told the American deputy chief of mission (DCM) in Lagos that Nigeria increasingly wanted to turn to the US and Britain for military assistance. Yet such assistance had to be discreet, in order not to 'attract accusations of Western imperialism...by certain OAU [Organization of African Unity] countries which would be harmful to both sides'.<sup>102</sup> According to the British High Commission, with which the DCM raised the apparent policy shift, the change 'was more one of atmosphere than of any intention to request significant assistance'.<sup>103</sup> This was perhaps true in the British case, but Kolo made it quite clear to the Americans that his government's long-term plan was to enter into a closer defence relationship with the US, but this required a more favourable domestic climate.<sup>104</sup>

This did not preclude the Nigerians from seeking more US military assistance in July 1965. Instead of welcoming a Combat Intelligence Training Team, Nigerians would participate in the Foreign Intelligence Assistance Programme through training in the US. Moreover, Kolo enquired about the possibility of a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) for Nigeria, similar to that for Ethiopia, one of Washington's major beneficiaries of military assistance in Africa.<sup>105</sup> In early autumn, the State Department decided to respond favourably to this request, 'and to send an army survey team to Nigeria to determine in detail the US training role'. From a political perspective, this was seen as a means to retain Nigeria as a moderate friend in Africa, and to strengthen the Balewa regime, not only domestically, but also vis-à-vis Ghana.<sup>106</sup> Strategically, it was considered in the US' interest to strengthen

<sup>100</sup> Combat intelligence training for Nigerian army personnel, Kolo to Scott, 6 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum of conversation, United Kingdom military assistance, Berger, 8 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>102</sup> Memorandum of conversation, changes in Nigerian Ministry of Defence, Scott, 12 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>103</sup> Memorandum of conversation, attitudes of new Nigerian minister of defence, Scott, 19 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>104</sup> Scott to Bolen, 29 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum of conversation, US military assistance for GON, Berger, 20 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>106</sup> Ball briefing, Nigeria, Sloan to Ball, 9 Sept. 1965; appointment with the president for Nuhu Bamali, Nigeria's minister of state for external affairs, action memorandum, Williams

the defence relationship with Nigeria, because it ‘was one of the most advanced nations in Central Africa, and whose strategic location is of considerable importance’, and it would provide – in addition to Ethiopia and Liberia – a third area of influence across Central Africa.<sup>107</sup>

The Americans, as they explained to the British, did not want to substitute Britain, but to complement British and German military assistance to Nigeria in co-ordination with London and Bonn.<sup>108</sup> The British believed the Americans. Instead of voicing their anger to Washington, they were disappointed by Lagos. Arthur Bottomley, the secretary of state for commonwealth relations, thus asked the Nigerian minister of defence why he had turned to the US for the bulk of army training. The less than satisfying, and almost sarcastic, answer by Wada was that if the Nigerians ‘came to Britain for everything, they would only overload our resources’.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, by stating that Nigeria’s real problem was the navy, he asked Bottomley for a naval training team.<sup>110</sup> The British were eager to comply with this request, because with the air force in German hands, and the army now seemingly in those of the Americans, this was the only service in which Britain could hope to retain a substantial degree of influence.<sup>111</sup>

Yet Britain’s decline in Nigerian security affairs seemed confirmed, and this was indicative of Britain’s rapidly diminishing global role. In light of the imminent British withdrawal from east of Suez, the West Africanists in the State Department predicted that this would also affect Britain’s position in Africa as a whole.<sup>112</sup> As a result, West African countries would increasingly look to the US as an alternative source for military assistance, and Nigeria was indicative of this trend.<sup>113</sup> More specifically, Lagos had turned to Washington for military assistance because it did not want to be ‘overly dependent on any one country’; after ‘having too rapidly phased out British officers...it would be an admission of defeat to ask the UK to reassume its former role’; and ‘the Nigerians may

to Rusk, 26 Aug. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79; national intelligence estimate, 26 Aug. 1965, *FRUS*, 1964–8, xxiv, Africa, pp. 613–14.

<sup>107</sup> Military training mission for Nigerian army (U), CINCSTRIKE USCINCMEAFA to RUEKDA/JCS, 10 Sept. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>108</sup> Talking paper for the secretary’s discussions with the Nigerian minister of state for external affairs, Bamali, Bolen to Rusk, 14 Sept. 1965; matters of mutual interest in English-speaking West Africa, Oss, 6 Oct. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>109</sup> Record of discussion between the commonwealth secretary and the Nigerian minister of defence in the Commonwealth Relations Office on 5 Oct. 1965, CRO, 7 Oct. 1965, TNA, DO 195/306.

<sup>110</sup> Record of conversation between the secretary of state for defence and the Nigerian minister of defence on Tuesday, 5 Oct. 1965, Ministry of Defence, 8 Oct. 1965, TNA, DO 195/306.

<sup>111</sup> Annex to brief for the secretary of state, visit by Alhaji Inuwa Wada, Nigerian minister of defence, CRO, 5 Oct. 1965; Hughes to Mayhew, 5 Oct. 1965, TNA, DO 195/306.

<sup>112</sup> See Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s retreat from east of Suez: the choice between Europe and the world, 1945–1968* (Basingstoke, 2002), *passim*.

<sup>113</sup> Effects of possible diminution of British military commitments east of Suez, Feld to van Oss, 8 Oct. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

think that they can get more from the US than...from the UK'.<sup>114</sup> The British High Commission in Lagos reached almost identical conclusions.<sup>115</sup>

### III

The militarization of US aid policy towards the First Nigerian Republic lends support to the thesis of Louis and Robinson that the British empire 'was transformed as part of the Anglo-American coalition'.<sup>116</sup> In Nigeria, Washington and London co-operated, because they both followed a Cold War agenda, which aimed to keep independent Nigeria in the Western camp. For as long as the British seemed to be in control and the Nigerians did not seem at risk of falling prey to communism, the Americans were happy to leave them with the prime responsibility for Nigeria. The US wished to play a complementary role, and aware of Britain's persistent financial difficulties, aimed to strengthen the Western position in Nigeria through development aid. Only after the anti-colonial reflexes of the Nigerian opposition and people pushed the Balewa government to seek alternative sources of military assistance, and domestic instability, regional tensions, and a communist offensive seemed to make Nigeria vulnerable to Sino-Soviet advances, did Washington decide to militarize its aid policy. Whitehall would certainly have preferred to retain its predominant role in Nigeria. But similar to the American ambassador in Lagos, British policy-makers realized that their loss of influence was inevitable. As the good cold warriors that they were, they preferred that the Nigerians turn to the Americans, rather than to a hostile power.

Washington too would have preferred the continued reliance of Nigeria on Britain for military assistance. As much as Nigeria was considered a key state in the region, and despite the Kennedy administration's courting of African leaders, the Americans were reluctant cold warriors in Africa. The Congo Crisis had put them off from a heavier involvement, they were increasingly absorbed by more pressing issues in other regions – notably in Southeast Asia – and, despite its domestic troubles and potentially pro-Soviet neighbours, there was no acute communist threat to Nigeria. Yet, most importantly, Washington never considered Africa of prime strategic importance. This, in combination with the limited communist military threat, the remaining influence of the former colonial powers, and the Kennedy administration's belief in modernization as the best way to immunize newly independent states against communism, explains Washington's predilection for development, instead of military aid. The US wanted to avoid a militarization of the Cold War in Africa, and only reluctantly militarized its aid policy towards

<sup>114</sup> Effects of possible diminution of British military commitments east of Suez – Nigeria, Bolen to Feld, 12 Oct. 1965, NARA, RG 59, entry 5235, box 79.

<sup>115</sup> Hawley to McNeill, 9 Nov. 1965, TNA, DO 195/306.

<sup>116</sup> Louis and Robinson, 'Imperialism', p. 462.

Nigeria. US military assistance in Africa did not follow commercial objectives, and focused on key security partners like Ethiopia. As the Congo and later crises in Southern Africa and the Horn illustrated, the Soviet-sponsored threat had to be acute to bring about a heavier military involvement.<sup>117</sup> Yet, even then, US military assistance to Africa remained negligible when compared to other world regions.

In Nigeria, US military assistance was triggered, and its extent also determined by Nigerian policy-makers. It was their search for alternative sources of military assistance that allowed the Americans to enter the Nigerian defence market. Moreover, the fear of compromising their position in the Cold War and African affairs, their proclaimed non-aligned foreign policy, and domestic opposition made the Nigerians wary of extensive and thus visible American military assistance. Nigerian agency was also important when the 1966 January coup brought the British-trained Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi to power, who favoured a more prominent British role in Nigerian security affairs. Fearful of becoming embroiled in Nigeria, the Americans seized this opportunity to shelve their half-hearted plans for a MAAG, and hoped the Nigerians would rely again on the British.<sup>118</sup> The American position did not change when half a year later another coup brought the Sandhurst-trained Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon to power.<sup>119</sup> During the ensuing Nigerian Civil War, the Johnson and Nixon administrations even imposed and upheld an arms embargo on both sides and left it to Britain to safeguard Western interests in Lagos.<sup>120</sup>

During the first decade of African independence, the US was – in contrast to the 1970s – reluctant to get more heavily involved in Africa. In order to forestall communist advances, Washington preferred, whenever possible, to rely on the former colonial powers, which retained influence in this world region. Even though the French position increasingly eclipsed that of Britain, London was still a security player in post-colonial Africa. The influence of external powers was, however, dependent on developments on the ground and the collaboration of local elites. Africa's Cold War was thus heavily affected by regional, local, and post-colonial factors.

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign intervention in Africa: from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York, NY, 2013), passim.

<sup>118</sup> Report and recommendations – US military survey, Nigerian army – action memorandum, Clark to Trimble, 26 Jan. 1966; Coote to Clark, 21 Feb. 1966; Clark to Coote, 28 Feb. 1966, NARA RG 59, entry 5235, box 80; quarterly report by the defence adviser to the British high commissioner, Lagos, as at 28 Feb. 1966, Pearce, 12 Mar. 1966, TNA, DO 195/306.

<sup>119</sup> On Ironsi and Gowon, as well as the coups, see Luckham, *Nigerian military*.

<sup>120</sup> Shepard, *Nigeria*, pp. 34–49.