

National Interest and Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Nigerian-British Relations, 1960-1999

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Abstract

The relations between Britain and Nigeria were chequered in the four decades following Nigeria's independence in October 1960. Only a slight difference is discernible in the level of closeness between both countries when Nigeria was under democratic governments or under military dictatorships. The fact that Nigeria was governed by authoritarian military regimes for much of the period from 1960-1999 did not therefore substantially affect relations even though British foreign policy has emphasized opposition to dictatorial governments and military juntas for centuries. This article interrogates the seeming contradiction and challenges the notion that the values defended by liberal democracies like Britain automatically make relations between them and military regimes adversarial. It maintains that there are instances where this general pattern is not followed depending on other factors. This is clearly revealed by the fact that the first half of the 1970s marked one of the best experiences of Anglo-Nigerian relations even though Nigeria was under a military government during the period. The relations between Britain and Nigeria however turned sour under another military government in Nigeria from 1976-1979. A similar pattern of chequered relations is discernible from 1984-1998. The article contends that economic considerations, the approach of Nigerian leaders to governance at different times, whether civilian or military, and the prevailing condition of the international system were prominent factors that shaped the Anglo-Nigerian relations. The factor of undemocratic government in Nigeria was therefore only one of numerous other determinants of relations.

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