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Nigerians Divided Over Anti-U.S. Foreign Policy Line

By Karen DeYoung
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Less than six months in power, the government of Nigeria has stirred up internal dissension by taking an anti-American line in its foreign policy and then seeming to back away from that line.

The conflict appears to be between those whose ideology makes them critical of the United States and those with strong economic links to America, which is Nigeria's biggest customer for oil. The military government of Gen. Murtala Mohammed appears to have antagonized both camps in turn.

The issue was Angola, which Mohammed made the occasion for his first public speech on an international stage—important in a country that, as black Africa's richest and most populous nation, has long sought an image as an international leader.

One of the criticisms of Mohammed's predecessor, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, deposed by a coup last July, was that he seemed to have passed up several chances to solidify such an image.

So two months ago Mohammed's government, taking advantage of the news of South African military involvement in Angola, seized such a chance. It announced its full political and financial support for the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, winning the approval of anti-American elements within Nigeria as well as capitalizing on the unpopularity of racially segregated South Africa.

Then, early this month, Mohammed went further, vehemently attacking President Ford for his attempt to rally support for the Popular Movement's two rivals and accusing the United States of "crude bullying and insulting logic at the expense of the Angolan people."

At about the same time, it became known that Nigeria had told the United States to close down its Foreign Broadcast Information Service installation at Kaduna, which had attracted criticism as a CIA base.

Pro-Western Nigerians, acutely aware that U.S. oil purchases finance Nigeria's multibillion-dollar development program, became concerned over how far the economic ties with the United States could be stretched.

Indications from the State Department still suggest, however, that the ties are not at the breaking point yet. Concerned private American businesses, which have close to \$1 billion sunk into Nigeria, have been assured that relations are still proceeding normally.

Evidence of a Nigerian attempt to respond to the pro-Western faction's concerns came in Mohammed's surprising moderate statement following adjournment of the recent Organization of African Unity summit meeting.

Although Mohammed had pledged to lead pro-Popular Movement forces at that meeting, and denounced the U.S. attempts to influence uncommitted delegates in the opposite direction, he refused to label the stalemate a failure, saying that no one "could begrudge either view" of the Angolan issue.

One indicator of the direction Mohammed's government may take, observers say, will be arms purchases to outfit Nigeria's quarter-million-man army, the largest in black Africa.

Most of the equipment used by the Nigerian government during the four-year civil war came from the Soviet Union, because the United States refused to supply weapons to fight against the Biafrans.

That Soviet equipment is now wearing out, and the angry ban Nigeria established against American arms at the

end of the war in 1970 has been allowed to lapse.

So far, Nigeria's biggest weapons expenditures have been split down the middle:

five C-130 transport planes from the United States and a squadron of Soviet MiGs. State Department officials say that other purchases of American arms are "in the works."

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