

Former Nigerian military dictator meets with Obama, Kerry in Washington

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Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari met with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Vice President Joseph Biden in Washington Tuesday. The visits followed a meeting between Buhari and President Barack Obama the previous day.

The meetings marked the first visit to official Washington by the recently elected Nigerian leader and were focused on enhanced US military and economic involvement in the country, now the continent's largest economy and oil producer.

Discussions between Obama and Buhari focused on "US-Nigeria cooperation to advance a holistic, regional approach to combating Boko Haram," according to the White House.

"President Buhari comes into office with a reputation for integrity and a very clear agenda, and that is to make sure that he is bringing safety and security and peace to his country," Obama said in remarks Monday.

"He's very concerned about the spread of Boko Haram and the violence that's taken place there, and the atrocities that they've carried out, and has a very clear agenda in defeating Boko Haram and extremists of all sorts inside of his country. And he has a very clear agenda with respect to rooting out the corruption that too often has held back the economic growth and prosperity of his country."

Obama lavished similar praise on Buhari at the time of his election, calling his rise to power an "historic" event.

Buhari's meeting with Vice President Biden, held at the US Naval Observatory, focused on the need to "unlock the full potential of the Nigerian economy," according to a White House press handout.

"The Vice President reiterated U.S. support for Nigeria's efforts to not only defeat Boko Haram militarily, but also to invest in development and create

the conditions for lasting security, stability, and economic prosperity in northern Nigeria," a White House statement said.

Buhari's red carpet treatment and warm relations with the US political and media elite make clear that the former dictator, a retired military general who seized power in a coup d'etat in 1984, is being recruited as a favored instrument of Washington's drive to consolidate military and political domination over the continent.

CNN declared on Tuesday that Buhari "enjoys the most respected status internationally of any of his predecessors."

Buhari's presidential campaign, which featured similar public relations techniques used during Obama's own 2008 presidential run, was managed by the US consulting firm AKPD, which is headed by David Axelrod, Obama's close confidante and campaign adviser.

Buhari's predecessor, President Goodluck Jonathan, had increasingly come into conflict with Washington in part as a result of his moves to open Nigeria's oil sector to Chinese investment.

In 2014, Washington reined in US military and intelligence assistance to Nigeria, and US corporations cut purchases of Nigerian oil nearly to zero, an event that the Atlantic Council's Peter Pham characterized as a "sea change in Nigeria's relations with the United States."

As relations between the US and Nigerian governments were souring to their lowest point in years, the Jonathan administration announced the sudden cancellation of US-run programs to train new Nigerian military battalions in December 2014.

Since coming to power, Buhari has moved rapidly to purge Jonathan-era officials from the state-owned oil

company and renew joint military and intelligence activities with the US. American intelligence agencies are now working closely with the new administration to develop Nigeria's security forces, a Buhari administration statement confirmed this week.

Buhari has also announced plans to relocate Nigerian military headquarters to the northeastern capital of Maiduguri, as part of a broader drive to militarize the northeast in the name of fighting Boko Haram.

The Boko Haram militants, cited for years by the Pentagon's Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a main target for future US operations, gained sudden global prominence amidst a media frenzy over the kidnapping of scores of Nigerian schoolgirls in May 2014.

Last year, the Obama administration seized on the kidnappings to push for new US intervention in the country, including regular US drone flights over Nigeria, supporting a media propaganda campaign centered on images of US First Lady Michelle Obama holding up a #BringBackOurGirls sign and making a sad face.

By centering his platform on the war against Boko Haram, Buhari was signaling his intention to collaborate with the US drive to militarize Nigeria and reassert control over its oil resources.

Buhari has already moved to make good on his campaign vows, donating some \$100 million in funds to the anti-Boko Haram Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) established by the African Union (AU) in January. The MJTF, which includes soldiers from Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon, will launch new military operations inside Nigeria within one month, Buhari vowed on Tuesday.

In March, as part of an increasing military buildup of US forces throughout West Africa, including massive US-led war games centered around lake Chad Basin in the opening months of 2015, a joint force led by US-trained Chadian special forces invaded northeastern Nigeria. In the name of fighting Boko Haram and with tacit support from Washington, tanks and hundreds of ground troops from Chad, Niger, and Cameroon crossed the border and conducted air and ground assaults against Nigerian towns.

US imperialism has responded to growing Chinese influence in Africa with military involvement and political intrigues in every major strategic center on the continent. Nigeria is a central prize in this growing

confrontation between the US and China for control over the continent's vast reserves of natural resources and cheap labor. More than a decade ago, then-vice president Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force singled out Nigeria's offshore oil reserves as having special strategic significance for the US.

The rise of Buhari, who embodies the complete subservience of the ex-colonial bourgeoisie to imperialism and has already demonstrated his willingness to employ mass repression against the Nigerian working class, represents a victory for US efforts to sideline factions with the Nigerian elite that have moved to align more closely with China, while setting the stage for intensified conflict and militarization of broad areas of the country.



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