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THE BRITISH STRATEGY OF DEALING WITH NATIONAL SABOTAGE AND THE ALLIES' ECONOMIC INTERESTS THROUGH WARTIME IMPORT CONTROL IN NIGERIA, 1939-1945

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 had far-reaching impact on the history of the world, including the deployment of new strategies of war, the stresses and strains of the global economy and a global call for decolonisation. Through their works, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and economists have examined the developments that unfolded during the war. The mobilisation of the Allied powers' resources against the Axis powers, the bombardments of the enemy's territories within and outside Europe, the initial success of the Axis in the early stages of the war are typical examples of the developments that manifested during the Second World War. Similarly, scholars such as Kehinde Faluyi and Ayodeji Olukoju have interrogated the effects of the war on Africa, the various policies of the European powers in their respective colonies during the war, the mobilisation of human and material resources of these African colonies for war efforts, the impact of the war on the economy of the African continent as a whole, the nature of food supply from Nigeria as a colony for metropolitan war efforts and the intensification of economic blockade against the Axis' economic presence in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. These intellectual efforts seem to have neglected how the British used import control in Nigeria as a wartime tool for dealing with metropolitan sabotage adopted against the British war effort and the intensification of economic blockade against the British wartime allies in Nigeria. The paper argues that the British deployed import control to curb the national sabotage of the manufacturers in Britain and restrict the economic presence of their allies during the war.

Keywords: Nigeria, Import Control, Britain Wartime Allies

1. INTRODUCTION

Import control is a policy that emanates from the government through legal instruments. It can also be defined as a strategy of changing or sustaining the consumption pattern of a people through barriers against the importation of certain goods into a country as enshrined in the economic policy of a state. Control on imports can be achieved through local production of goods hitherto imported into a country. National sabotage is a process through which specific individuals consciously disregard or undermine certain government policies or make such policies less effective for their overall benefit to the nation's detriment. By the early nineteenth century, mercantilism had been well entrenched in the whole of continental Europe. European governments ensured a favourable balance of trade through restrictions on imports, while the export of goods abroad was reduced considerably.¹ The commencement of the industrial revolution in France and Germany in the early nineteenth century led to capitalist competition with Britain in Africa. This enabled France and Germany to secure inherent African and global trade opportunities.² The struggle for industrial dominance culminated in a new form of competition for areas of commercial influence in different parts of the globe, including Africa.³ With the so-called legitimate trade, which followed the end of the slave trade, Africa became an exporter of raw materials for European industries while it imported finished goods.⁴

In 1900, after revoking the Charter of the Royal Niger Company, the British Empire extended its rule over what would later become known as Nigeria. The British then began the systematic penetration of the colonial territory to accelerate the extraction of its resources to benefit the metropolitan economy. With the advent of colonial rule, the importation of goods and services was shouldered by the importing firms whose activities were regulated by the British colonial administration. However, this trend was reversed during the First World War as the right of importation by these firms was restricted. There is a rich literature on the British and Allied Powers' economic policies employed in their African colonies during the Second World War. This includes the British level of preparedness in terms of military and

1 I Woloch, and GS Brown, *Eighteenth century Europe: Tradition and progress, 1715-1789* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Incorporation, 1982), p. 207.

2 JA Hobson, *Imperialism: A study* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975), p. 66.

3 T Kemp, "The Marxist theory of imperialism". In: R Owen and B Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the theory of imperialism* (London: Longman Publishers, 1972), p. 18.

4 AG Hopkins, *An economic history of West Africa* (London: Longman Publishers, 1974), p.120.

mobilisation of financial resources,⁵ the nature of price flow within the British economy during the war,⁶ wartime controls of the Nigerian economy (the largest British colony in Africa),⁷ the naval supremacy of Britain, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and other members of Allied Group during the war,⁸ effective monitoring of British exports from Nigeria during the war through Marketing Boards,⁹ strategic demands of the British in Nigeria for metropolitan wartime benefits,¹⁰ and the intensification of wartime propaganda in Africa.¹¹ This paper instead focuses on how the British dealt with national sabotage as exhibited by the metropolitan exporters in Britain into the Nigerian market, as well as the damage of strategic economic interests of British wartime allies in Nigeria through import control from the time the Second World War broke out in 1939 to the end of the war in 1945.

Scholars have paid adequate attention to export restrictions, the usage of the Nigerian economy as an essential instrument for the prosecution of the war through exports of produce, and the vital role of the African economy in the prosecution of the war.¹² However, there has not been a comprehensive interrogation of how the British dealt with national sabotage as exhibited by the metropolitan exporters in Britain into the Nigerian market and the stifling of strategic economic interests of wartime allies in Nigeria through import control during the period 1939-1945. This is important because control on

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- 5 S Broadberry and P Howlett, "Blood, sweat and tears: British mobilisation for World War II". In: R Chickering and S Forster (eds.), *A world at total war: Global conflict and politics of destruction, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
 - 6 KO Rourke, "From empire to Europe: Britain in the world economy", Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History Number 106, University of Oxford. October 2012.
 - 7 RJ Garvin and W Oyemakinde, "Economic development in Nigeria since 1800". In: O Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 512.
 - 8 N Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, 5th ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), p. 101. See also, HL Peacock, *A history of modern Europe 1789-1981*, 7th ed (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1984), pp. 342-343. See also, RR Palmer *et al.*, *A history of the modern world since 1815*, 10th ed. (New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 2007), p. 827.
 - 9 EK Faluyi, "The development of agricultural exports and official intervention in produce marketing". In: GO Ogunremi and EK Faluyi (eds.), *Economic history of West Africa* (Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication, 1996), p. 175.
 - 10 Al Nwabughuogu, "British wartime demands and Nigerian response: The case of palm produce exports and internal trade between Eastern and Northern Nigeria, 1939-45". In: AE Ekoko and SO Agbi (eds.), *Perspectives in history: Essay in honour of Professor Obaro Ikime* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc, 1992), p. 76.
 - 11 B Ibhawoh, "Second World War propaganda, imperial idealism and anti-colonial nationalism in British West Africa", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16 (2), 2007, pp. 221-243.
 - 12 Scholars such as K Faluyi, in his work, "The development of agricultural exports and official intervention in produce marketing". In: GO Ogunremi and EK Faluyi (eds.), *Economic history of West Africa*; B Ibhawoh, "Second World War propaganda, imperial idealism and anti-colonial nationalism in British West Africa", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16 (2), 2007, pp. 221-243, have interrogated how export restrictions and the exploitation of the Nigerian economy were deployed for the benefits of the British wartime interests.

imports in Nigeria during the Second World War became a tool adopted by both the colonial and metropolitan governments to address the disloyalty of the British exporters and the undermining of the economic interests of other Allied powers within the Nigerian economy. The conventional wisdom of the literature on Nigeria's wartime experience emphasises the acceleration of exports from Nigeria for the metropolitan economic interests and the mobilisation of resources within and outside Europe by the Allied powers for the sustenance of war efforts.¹³

However, drawing on the effects of the mobilisation of iron and steel for war efforts in Britain, Christopher Hill challenged the conventional wisdom by maintaining that the mobilisation of these iron and steel-related materials affected British exports to their colonies in other parts of the globe, particularly Africa.¹⁴ Peter Cain and Anthony Gerald Hopkins corroborate this evidence by arguing that the War pushed the British to protect their economic interests globally vis-à-vis their export, while imports of the British colonies were strictly rationed.¹⁵ Similarly, Garvin and Wale Oyemakinde argue that the outbreak of the Second World War necessitated trade control due to Germany's dominance of the Nigerian economy through export trade before the war.¹⁶ Nkem Onyekpe contends that the British monopolisation of the Nigerian economy during the Second World War was perpetuated through the West African Produce Board. This provided a buffer for the British economic interests in the country.¹⁷

Apart from Hill, Cain and Hopkins'¹⁸ analyses on the commercial activities of British exporters and their exporting business to British colonies, particularly in Africa, extant studies have not paid adequate attention to how the colonial and metropolitan governments used wartime import control in Nigeria to deal with the unwarranted wartime exports from Britain into Nigeria as well as the whittling down of the economic interests of the British allies in Nigeria during the war. This article's main objective is to demonstrate that wartime import control in Nigeria became a tool used by the British in dealing with national disloyalty that threatened wartime efforts in the metropolitan

13 Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, p.101. See also, AFP Mendes *et al*, "Industrialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa and import substitution policy", *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* 34 (1), 2014, p. 122.

14 CP Hill, *British economic and social history: 1700-1982*, 5th ed. (Norwich: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1987), p. 268.

15 PJ Cain and AG Hopkins, *British imperialism: 1688-2000* (London: Longman Publishers Limited, 1993), p. 627.

16 Garvin, and Oyemakinde, "Economic development in Nigeria since 1800", p. 512.

17 JGN Onyekpe, "Western influence on Nigeria in the era of new imperialism". In: A Osuntokun and A Olukoju (eds.), *Nigerian peoples and culture* (Ibadan: Davidson Press, 1997), p. 231.

18 Hill, *British economic and social history: 1700-1982*, 5th ed; Cain and Hopkins, *British imperialism: 1688-2000*.

capital and the strategic positioning of the British economic interests above that of the allies in Nigeria. It is a contribution to the study of colonial rule in Nigeria. The study is divided into five sections: introduction, Nature of importation into Nigeria on the Eve of the war, Import Control and National Disloyalty of the British Exporters to the Nigerian Market, 1939-1944, Import Control Policy as a Protectionist Tool against War-Time Allies, 1941-1945 and conclusion.

2. NATURE OF IMPORTATION INTO NIGERIA ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

By 1900, colonial rule was firmly entrenched in Nigeria. With the advent of colonial rule, European import of goods and services was shouldered by the various trading firms with the supervision of the British colonial administration. The pricing of imports after 1900 was placed in the hands of the European firms.¹⁹ This commercial autonomy positioned the European firms in Nigeria as regulators of imports into the colony. However, the flow of imports into Nigeria did not go unhindered due to the absence of infrastructure. The lack of such infrastructure compelled the British to clear the inland waterways used by the European merchants and African traders when supplying imported goods to the people of the interior.²⁰ The inability to import European goods based on social and economic conditions of various kingdoms of the hinterland did not dissuade the British from improving their import profile in Nigeria. This manifested when two British shipping companies with the backing of Lagos and metropolitan governments transmuted into Elder Dempster Line Ltd.²¹

In the inter-war years, the entrenchment of the commercial position of some foreign importing firms through their collaborations with exporters from Europe, particularly Britain, created an unequal commercial relationship between these expatriate firms and indigenous importers.²² Firms such as United African Company (UAC), John Holt and Co, SCOA, CFAO and Lever Brothers regulated and controlled prices of imports on the one hand and determined what was imported for consumers' consumption on the other hand.²³ Despite the global economic recession of the 1930s, the European

19 AA Boahen, *African perspectives on colonialism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 61.

20 RO Ekundare, *An economic history of Nigeria, 1860-1960* (London: Methuen and Co. Limited, 1973), p. 71.

21 Ekundare, *An economic history of Nigeria, 1860-1960*, p. 75.

22 T Falola, et al., *History of Nigeria: Nigeria in the twentieth century* (Lagos: Lean Africa P.L.C, 1991), p. 39.

23 N Njoku, "Trade with the metropolis: An unequal exchange". In: T Falola (ed.), *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or development?* (London: Zed Books Limited, 1987), p. 127.

firms in Nigeria enjoyed the backing of the colonial and metropolitan governments as the firms assisted the colonial government in generating income through the influx of imported goods into the Nigerian market.²⁴ As the Second World War drew closer, the British conceived the idea of adopting importing restrictions as a policy of warfare in their African colonies. This implied the possibility of mounting economic pressure on the British trade partners in the interests of the United Kingdom.²⁵ As conceived by the British on the eve of the war, import restrictions were designed to cripple the enemy.²⁶

3. IMPORT CONTROL AND NATIONAL SABOTAGE OF THE BRITISH EXPORTERS' ACTIVITIES IN THE NIGERIAN MARKET, 1939-1944

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 led to the promulgation of Defence Control on Imports. Section 17 (1) of the Defence control of Import Regulation of 1939 states:

The Controller of Imports may, with the consent of any person alleged to have contravened the provisions of any of these regulations, exercise like jurisdiction as is hereby vested in a magistrate. In the exercise of such jurisdiction, the provisions of part XV of the Customs Ordinance shall apply and the Controller of Imports shall have the same powers, rights and privileges as are therein vested in the Comptroller of Customs. Any person contravening this regulation shall be punishable after summary trial by a magistrate by a fine not exceeding £500 or imprisonment up to 12 months or both, plus forfeiture of goods in respect of which the offence was committed²⁷

The promulgation of the Import Regulation Act gave powers to the Import Control Office to issue a wide range of licences, such as the Open General Licence, which covered a wide range of imports from the United Kingdom and some of its colonies. Imports into Nigeria under this licence were determined by the operation of export control of the country of origin and other encumbrances of international control.²⁸ A Nigeria quota licence

24 R Oliver and A Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, 5th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 153.

25 National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Chief Secretary's Office (CSO) 18/19, "Import and export restrictions, 1939": Secret: Import restrictions in emergency, 27 July 1939.

26 A Olukoju, "Buy British, sell foreign". External trade control policies in Nigeria during World War II and its aftermath, 1939-1950", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35 (2-3), 2002, p. 365.

27 NAI, Department of Commerce and Industries (DCI) 1/1/ 4032/ S: 13 Import Control: Power to Impose Penalties without Recourse to a Court, 1940-1941.

28 NAI, DCI1/1/4032/S 5, Import Control Open Licences, 1940-1949.

was also introduced, and it covered a wide range of goods under the Open General Licence. Importers were encouraged to obtain it by presenting their detailed information as registered importers. Specific Licences were issued to cover orders for any goods not covered by Open or the quota licence.²⁹ Following the outbreak of the war in 1939, the importation of various items into the British colonies, including Nigeria, was restricted. The most important of these items were iron and steel-related items. This was highly connected with the need to expand the munitions factories that produced iron and steel-related materials with the possibility of sustaining the war efforts.³⁰ By 1940, proper mobilisation of human resources was intensified. Men between the ages of 18 and 51 were made available for military service and work in the industries, while women under 30 were equally directed to industrial work.³¹ This mobilisation facilitated the expansion of munitions factories, which increased by 11 per cent by May 1940.³² The production of munitions required iron and steel-related materials previously destined for export.

The mobilisation of human and material resources became necessary to combat the imminent threat of defeat from the Axis powers. As production and mobilisation progressed, the export profile of manufacturers in Britain declined because the government had started demonstrating considerable interest in iron-related materials useful for munitions production. The implication was that the export of iron-related items such as nails, sewing machines and other equipment to the British colonies witnessed an all-time low due to import restrictions. This policy, applied to the British colonies in Africa, aimed to discourage the metropolitan manufacturers' export profile. As export regulation in Britain continued unabated, manufacturers were groaning under financial stress that became unbearable. Some of these metropolitan manufacturers found the courage to approach the Colonial Office in London to request permission to export some of their manufactured iron-related materials to their importers in Nigeria.³³ For instance, Peterson Zochonis' (PZ) appealed to the British authorities to export 100 cases 28 lbs of bright round wire nails of assorted sizes.³⁴

Unhindered importation into Nigeria was no longer possible without the approval of metropolitan and colonial authorities. Therefore, the response of the Colonial Office in London was not favourable to PZ. The office argued that the possibility of offering any practical assistance was unfortunately

29 NAI, DCI1/1/CS411A, Import Control Procedure Country of Origin, 1950-1956.

30 Hill, *British economic and social history, 1700-1982*, p. 268.

31 Hill, *British economic and social history, 1700-1982*, p. 267.

32 Hill, *British economic and social history, 1700-1982*, p. 268.

33 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:15, Import Control: Iron, Steel Product, 1940-1941.

34 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:15, Import Control: Iron, Steel Product, 1940-1941.

impossible because the war situation could not permit the Nigerian government to import nails from a sterling source.³⁵ Export restrictions coupled with the government's firm control over goods such as iron, steel, aluminium, machine tools, and taxation caused many manufacturers' profits.³⁶ This led to a reduced capital investment outside Europe, especially in the colonies.³⁷

The unpleasant wartime economic condition of the manufacturers in Britain necessitated the abandonment of formal communication with the metropolitan authorities, whose attitude was perceived by the British manufacturers as the product of bureaucratic rigidity. To this end, attempts were made to bypass the export authorities in London and mount pressure directly on the colonial administration in Nigeria. This attitude ignited a sharp reaction from the Colonial Office. On 25 February 1942 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Viscount Cranborne, wrote to the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Boudillon, to express his displeasure over incessant import demands of the Nigerian government.³⁸ Meanwhile, the export authorities in Britain confirmed their position by instructing that no new order of galvanised sheets from the United Kingdom would be allowed as the supply authorities had decided that their production must be curtailed drastically.³⁹

Reasonably, the reaction of the metropolitan authorities was hinged upon the surplus production of certain iron-related items by the British manufacturers to which galvanised sheets belonged. While the manufacturers hoped to export this surplus production to Nigeria, the authorities in Britain considered this dangerous for the wartime effort of the Allied powers. This was because exports of galvanised sheets out of Britain could indirectly find their way into the ships of the Axis, thereby empowering them to the detriment of the Allied powers' war efforts. In order to monitor the export flow from Britain, the Colonial Office clearly stated that the Nigerian government's special import requests must be essential. There must be a clear-cut distinction between the government's import demands and that of the importing firms.⁴⁰ The export authorities in Britain extended the restriction on colonial import to armoured electric cables and rubber.⁴¹

35 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:15, Import Control: Iron, Steel Product, 1940-1941.

36 Hill, *British economic and social history 1700-1982* 5th ed., p.271.

37 Hobson, *Imperialism: A study*, p. 73.

38 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 54 Import Control Circular From Colonial Office in London.

39 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 54 Import Control Circular From Colonial Office in London.

40 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 54 Import Control Circular From Colonial Office in London.

41 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 67 Import Control Telegraph from Colonial Office to British West Africa, 1942.

This was announced in a circular released by the export authorities in Britain to the British colonies in West Africa on 11 June 1942.⁴² The circular stated that licences on importing these products could only be granted where evidence of the highest degree of essentiality was produced.⁴³ The circular of June 1942 was followed by another telegraph sent from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of Nigeria in Lagos on 22 July 1942. This stated that the Colonial Office and export authorities in Britain were ready to maintain restrictions on the importation of rubber-related materials by the Nigerian government and allow only a few export openings in Britain.⁴⁴ This adjustment on the part of export authorities was consistent with the need to prevent complete stifling of importation in Nigeria.⁴⁵

In response to the telegraph from London, the Acting Secretary of the Nigerian Supply Board A.Y Cann notified the office of the Controller of Imports on the need to refuse applications for import licences in respect of rubber fan belts from the United Kingdom.⁴⁶ By November 1942, the decision to maintain few export openings from Britain was further necessitated for extracting raw materials from Nigeria to sustain the war effort.⁴⁷ For instance, rubber fan belts were essential for cooling the engines of machines used to extract raw materials in Nigeria.⁴⁸ In turn, the lack of rubber fan belts could affect the production of iron ore which was essential to the production of tanks, aeroplane engines, radio sets, armoured cars and other implements of war.⁴⁹

The British were also forced to accelerate the extraction of tin and other raw materials in Nigeria after the fall of the Allied far eastern colonies in 1942-43, which enabled Japan to control two-thirds of the world tin output.⁵⁰ This problematic situation, coupled with the lack of essential rubber materials in Nigeria, left London with no choice than to allow Goodyear, a manufacturing company of rubber related materials, to export rubber fan belts from the United Kingdom on colonial government's requirements for the year 1944.⁵¹

42 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 67 Import Control Telegraph from Colonial Office to British West Africa, 1942.

43 NAI, DCI 1/4032/S: 67 Import Control Telegraph from Colonial Office to British West Africa, 1942.

44 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

45 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

46 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943. It should be noted that some of the names of the actors of Nigeria's Import Control history during the Second World War were spelt without citing their initials in the archival documents.

47 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

48 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

49 AE Ekoko, "Conscript labour and tin mining in Nigeria during the Second World War", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 11 (3-4), 1982-1983, p. 67.

50 Ekoko, "Conscript labour and tin mining", p. 67.

51 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

This was due to the lack of rubber fan belts in Nigeria.⁵² Import requirements were eventually granted to United Africa Company and other importing firms under the auspices of the Association of West African Merchants in a circular dated 4 January 1944 by A.E Cook, the Acting Director of Supplies.⁵³

Realising their strategic importance, British manufacturers mounted pressure on the import authorities in Nigeria to bypass the Colonial Office and export authorities in London to allow the importation of vehicles and iron-related materials. In a letter dated 25 February 1944, the colonial administration requested the importation of vehicles and iron-related materials into Nigeria from the British Colonies Supply Mission in Washington.⁵⁴ The response of the British Colonies Supply Mission was unambiguous. It suggested that the colonial government should approach the Colonial Office in London, as the exportation of vehicles from the United States was limited due to stringent restrictions on export caused by the war.⁵⁵

The British Colonies Supply mission in Washington was cooperating with the Federal Export Authorities in Washington and the Colonial Office in London on comprehensive scrutiny of applications from British commercial exporters and manufacturers in London and Washington. Export requests of British exporters were not processed unless and until the exporters quoted the import licence issued by the importing country's government.⁵⁶ This bureaucratic consensus reduced the efficacy of import authorities in Nigeria. London and Washington superseded the latter in scrutinising the actions of British exporters, who could be disloyal to the British war effort. The colonial regime in Nigeria equally realised the necessity of yielding to the demand of London on stringent conditions of export to Nigeria because a refusal of such order could deny necessary import requests.

4. IMPORT CONTROL POLICY AS A PROTECTIONIST TOOL AGAINST WAR-TIME ALLIES, 1941-1945

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 polarised European powers into two different camps. The Allied powers were formed by Britain, France and Poland, while the Axis powers comprised of Germany, Italy and Japan. However, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941

52 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

53 NAI /1/4032/S:65 Import Control: Fan Belts, 1942-1943.

54 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:18 Import Control Motor Vehicles Excluding Correspondence about quota, 1944-1945.

55 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:18 Import Control Motor Vehicles Excluding Correspondence about quota, 1944-1945.

56 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A., 1943-1944.

through “Operation Barbarossa” violated the Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 between the two nations. The invasion was possibly connected with the fear entertained by Hitler about the possible attack of German forces by the Soviets in Western Europe.⁵⁷ In December 1941, the United States was also brought into the war after the Japanese attack on the American military base in Pearl Harbour. Until then, the US had been officially neutral but provided massive financial aid for Britain through the Lend-Lease Act of April 1941.⁵⁸ The attack on the USSR and United States dragged the two powers into the Allied alliance. The Allied coordinated their war effort against the Axis powers. Yet, the coordination was not extended comprehensively to the colonies of the European powers, especially the British and French ones. Britain’s pivotal role in the success of the alliance was immense.⁵⁹ This immense contribution compelled Britain to exclude her colonies from a broader coordinated strategy with the Allied Powers.

At that time, there was a solid American economic presence in Nigeria. This developed before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The Origin of the United States’ commercial presence in Nigeria could be traced back to the late nineteenth century when its cotton materials dominated the Nigerian market. However, attacks of pests on American cotton disrupted its flow into the British colonies, which led to the formation of the British Cotton Grower Association (BCGA) in 1902.⁶⁰ The BCGA was established to reduce Britain’s dependence on cotton supply from non-colonial sources. The body was comprised of government officials, spinners, manufacturers, merchants, shippers, and other representatives of the British cotton industry.⁶¹ However, the establishment of BCGA in 1902 did not bring about the end of the interaction of Nigeria with the United States. Textile producers still imported US cotton to supplement domestic production, which boosted Nigeria’s export profile in the international market. Supply problems emerged again in 1918 when another pest attack on American cotton occurred. This further reinforced scepticism about the danger of over-reliance on cotton sources outside the colonial empire.⁶²

During the inter-war years, the American economic presence in Nigeria was further boosted through the signing of an agreement at the Imperial Economic Conference of 1932 in Ottawa, Canada. After this, the British

57 Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, p. 95.

58 Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, p. 97.

59 Hill, *British economic and social history, 1700-1982*, p. 267.

60 A Hinds, “Colonial policy and Nigerian cotton exports, 1935-1951”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29 (1), 1996, p. 25.

61 Hinds, “Colonial policy and Nigerian cotton exports”, p. 26.

62 Hinds, “Colonial policy and Nigerian cotton exports”, p. 27.

Empire began to export tin materials to the United States.⁶³ The British and the Americans competed harshly. Yet, although the Americans lamented prohibitive tariffs in importing tin from the British Empire of Nigeria, Malaya and the British East Indies, British tin mining companies benefitted immensely from US patronage.⁶⁴ This was because 95 per cent of the world tin was produced in the British Empire, and tin itself had been classified as a strategic product by the US War Department after World War I.⁶⁵ Nigeria contributed significantly to the British tin supply to the United States. Moses Ochonu postulates that the northern part of Nigeria had a huge tin deposit, which made Nigeria become a tin-producing colony. This attracted a vibrant trade in foodstuffs and migrant labour which captured the interest of economic powers like the United States.⁶⁶

After entering the war, the US began to assist Britain in providing iron-related materials like vehicles to help the war effort. American vehicles and their spare parts flooded the British market and its colonies like Nigeria. Axis successes in 1942 stretched the supply of iron-related materials from the United States to the British Empire to its limit. By December 1942, a shortage of iron-related materials from the United States was announced by the Secretary of State for Colonies, Oliver Stanley, to the governor of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Boudillon.⁶⁷ It became essential for the Colonial Office in London, the United Kingdom Truck Mission, and the U.S s Authorities to agree on importing iron-related materials into British colonies, including Nigeria. A spare parts control organisation was created to check the orders before they were placed with United States manufacturers.⁶⁸

It was also agreed that orders (bulk purchases) could be placed through commercial channels, billed on the government account in collaboration with the Colonial Supply Liaison in Washington. Import requests were to be made six months or one year in advance.⁶⁹ The Colonial Office in London, the Colonial Supply Liaison and the United States authorities decided on a complete ban on importing vehicle spare parts such as crankcases, flywheels, and clutch housing axles into British colonies in West Africa.⁷⁰ These restrictions may have been necessitated by the need to sustain the war effort of the Allied Powers. Most probably, the announcement concerning the

63 M Ochonu, "Coinjoined to empire: The great depression and Nigeria", *African Economic History* 34, 2006, p. 106.

64 Ochonu, "Coinjoined to empire", p. 107.

65 Ochonu, "Coinjoined to empire", p. 107.

66 Ochonu, "Coinjoined to empire", p. 107.

67 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

68 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

69 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

70 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

shortage of iron vehicle spare parts from the United States emanated from the British authorities, not the colonial administration in Nigeria.

To the British, the announcement appeared strategic because the United States' involvement in the war could potentially threaten the British economic pre-eminence globally. The US was the world's greatest industrial power, which positioned her as a major supplier of materials for the Allied Powers.⁷¹ By late 1942 to early 1943, she had produced over 40 per cent of the world's iron ore consumed by industrial and less developed economies, crude steel, and over 60 per cent of motor vehicles and spare parts globally.⁷² A pointer to America's capacity for export to the British West African colonies, including Nigeria was the defiant posture put up by importers in Nigeria, who in the face of the war and the announcement on restrictions imposed on goods coming from the United States requested for licences in respect of motor vehicle spare parts from the United States.⁷³ This prompted the Acting Secretary, Nigerian Supply Board A.Y. Cann to write a letter dated 8 January 1943 to the Office of the Controller of Import directing the office to refuse licences regarding motor vehicle spares from the United States.⁷⁴

The refusal of the colonial government was not far-fetched. It appeared the importers in Nigeria were convinced about America's capacity for export into the Nigerian market. This explains their defiant posture against the official position of the Nigerian government on the issue of importation from the United States. The British did not also spare French products in their quest to protect their economic interests during the war despite both countries' collaboration against the Axis powers. Restrictions against France were a product of suspicion, emanating from the Axis' conquest of French territories of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in 1940. This resulted in the enactment of the British Trading with the Enemy Act of 1939.⁷⁵ With the first Allied victories against Germany at the dawn of 1943, the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1939 was revoked, but suspicion remained.

This could be seen in a telegraph dated 22 July 1943 sent by the Secretary of State for Colonies from London, Stanley, to the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Boudillon, intimating the latter to allow importation from French territories only if the exporter had an account domiciled within the Sterling Area.⁷⁶ Stanley also ordered to suspend transactions made with Metropolitan French franc. Trade between Britain and French North and

71 Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, p. 636.

72 Lowe, *Mastering modern world history*, p. 636.

73 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

74 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:110 Import Control: Motor Spares, 1942-1943.

75 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 143 Import Control: Imports From French Colonies, 1943-1944.

76 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 143 Import Control: Imports From French Colonies, 1943-1944.

West Africa was conducted through government channels, while private trade was stopped.⁷⁷ These comprehensive commercial restrictions were skilfully coordinated against the Axis, the French territories' invaders. These restrictions had adverse effects on the economic fortune of the Axis invaders of the French territories in Africa. The continuation of limitations to French trade after the defeat of Germany did not ignite sharp reactions from Paris due to the importance of unity of purpose needed among the Allied powers in the prosecution of the war. Similar restrictions were astutely erected against the United States, whose commercial dominance during the war was preparing her as a global economic power.

The restrictions Against the United States were carefully mapped out through the issuance of import licences on goods coming from the United States on government accounts. Import licences for commercial orders were closely monitored and scrutinised by the British Supply Mission in Washington and the colonial administration in Nigeria before they were issued.⁷⁸ This strategy was further strengthened when the financial committee of the Nigerian Supply Board, through its Financial Secretary, G.N. Farquhar, issued a memorandum dated 10 November 1943 to the Nigerian importers. This stated that the United States Export Authorities and the Import Authorities had demonstrated their readiness to establish an elaborate monitoring system with full supervision of goods from the United States into Nigeria.⁷⁹

It appears the memorandum was an attempt to browbeat prospective importers of United States goods. No document shows that United States authorities were aware of this document. To sustain this strategy, the colonial government stated that non-members of the Association of West African Merchants (AWAM) could only import goods from the United States by producing evidence of past performance on importing the same commodities. Part of the import licences granted to non-AWAM members would be taken from the import quota of AWAM with the association's approval through the Controller of Imports.⁸⁰ Importation according to this strategy was placed under government account with the possibility of dividing the importers in Nigeria. This could reduce the demand for import licences on goods from America.

As restrictions on goods from the United States continued, import requests of products of French territories from Nigerian importers were equally turned down. For instance, the *Societe Commerciale de l'Quest Africain*, an importing firm of French origin in Nigeria, requested to import

77 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 143 Import Control: Imports From French Colonies, 1943-1944.

78 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1943-1944.

79 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1943-1944.

80 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1943-1944.

dried and canned foodstuffs from North Africa, and this was turned down.⁸¹ The restrictions against importation from French territories in North and West Africa for economic reasons incurred the criticisms of some colonial officials in Nigeria who saw this as an impediment to the effort of the Allied Powers.

One example of such criticisms is in a private letter dated 16 March 1944, sent to the Office of the Director of Supplies in Lagos by one Dr. Jeffrey, a British official who travelled to Duala in Cameroon and saw the Duala wharf stacked with lorries that were urgently needed in Nigeria.⁸² According to the report compiled by Jeffreys, the Lorries belonged to the Lease Lend arrangement, a wartime assistance tool offered by the United States to her Allies.⁸³ Jeffrey's displeasure was hinged on the fact that these military Lorries could be used for economic activities if exported to Nigeria from Cameroon.⁸⁴

More than that, export quotas for bicycle chains, according to the Colonial Office, were issued independently alongside the right to export precision industrial chains. Export obligations from Britain were shouldered by exporting firms such as Reynolds and Coventry Chain Co. Limited and Perry and Co.⁸⁵ Despite the readiness of the metropolitan government to facilitate the export of bicycle chains, importation by various importing firms under Association of West African Merchants as was not allowed. The Board of Trade in London ensured that all non-government orders were placed through the normal trade channels that the Nigerian government was monitoring without the involvement of the Crown Agents.⁸⁶ The restrictive posture of the Nigerian government on imports continued unabated based on previous import performance. By March 1944, the colonial administration established the import quota of importing firms on previous performance.⁸⁷ Criticisms that emanated from individuals against the metropolitan and colonial governments' restrictions on goods coming from the French territories and other parts of the globe did not dissuade them from strictly monitoring the movement of goods into British West African colonies, including Nigeria. This strict monitoring was further enforced through the Tariffs and Trade Controls Orders No 1042 and No 3017 S.E of April 1944, enacted by the metropolitan government. The Order stated that:

81 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 143 Import Control: Imports From French Colonies, 1943-1944.

82 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:18 Import Control: Motor Vehicles Excluding Correspondence about quota, 1944.

83 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:18 Import Control: Motor Vehicles Excluding Correspondence about quota, 1944.

84 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S:18 Import Control: Motor Vehicles Excluding Correspondence about quota, 1944.

85 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 87 Import Control: Bicycles and Parts, 1942-1943.

86 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 87 Import Control: Bicycles and Parts, 1942-1943.

87 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 135 Import Control: A.G Leventis Company, 1943-1945.

Import Licence on goods from French colonies will be issued within the quota limits thus fixed, to importers authorised to claim allotment by virtue of the provisions of Order No 1042. Import licence will be issued to a group of importers, for quota corresponding to the shares of its members, the syndicate or group in question being required to distribute the goods received according to rules fixed by Order 1042. Individually, in the name of a merchant belonging or not to a syndicate or group on condition that the individual share of this merchant amounts to at least five per cent of the quota allotted to the distribution sector.⁸⁸

The above passage shows how the British and colonial governments restricted imports from the French territories. After the Axis' occupation of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in 1943, the restrictions on imports were meant to prevent the enemy's goods from entering Nigeria via the French territories.⁸⁹ The colonial government in Nigeria remained undeterred in the face of criticisms about its import restrictions against goods coming from the territories of the Allied Powers. By September 1944, the Office of the Chief Secretary to the government issued a directive to the Office of Comptroller of Customs and Excise that import control on goods from the United States should be rigidly enforced through the introduction of detention reports from Port Customs Officers on arrivals of unlicensed consignments from the United States.⁹⁰ The directive stated that:

To comply with new instructions from Washington, that import control should be rigidly enforced in respect of United States goods, the former system of detention reports from Port Customs Officers should be re-introduced for all arrivals of unlicensed consignments from the United States. We discussed the difficulties likely to arise in checking deliveries against block import licences permitting imports at any port in Nigeria. To overcome this, I am arranging to reduce the number of licences of this type to the bare minimum. Where block licences are unavoidable the only method of checking arrivals them will be for "Control" copies of Bills of Entry to be forwarded to the Import Control Office from the Ports so that arrivals may be entered on the triplicate copies of licences retained there. The actual consignments will of course, have to be released in the first instance on the assumption that block licences quoted on Bill of Entry by importers are genuine. I should be grateful, therefore, if you would instruct Ports to detain unlicensed arrivals from the United States, to call for the importers' explanations and report detentions in the same way formerly. Would you also be so good as to instruct all Ports to require "Control" copies all Bills of Entry covering United States goods entered against block licences, and to forward these Control copies monthly to the Import Control Office. I have verified from AWAM that practically all United States goods are entered at Lagos so that the great majority of

88 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

89 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032 S: 143 Import Control: Import from French Colonies, 1943.

90 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

licences can be made specific on Lagos and block Licences requiring Control copies of Bills of Entry should be few and far between.⁹¹

The above directives further propelled the colonial government to reduce block import licences to the barest minimum. At the same time, AWAM was notified to encourage its members who had obtained block import licences to ship their United States goods through Lagos Port to grant a special concession to the goods on the grounds of essentiality.⁹² Probably, the colonial administration sensed that the United States exporters and Nigerian importers were working together to undermine the import control policy of the Nigerian government. As argued earlier, America's emergence as a colossal economic power through the Second World War related to the need to secure markets for her goods globally. In addition, the colonial regime's import control policy was affecting the wartime economic fortune of American exporters.

The commercial "conspiracy" of American exporters and Nigerian importers against import restriction of the colonial government met the stiff opposition of the British Colony Supply Mission (BCSM) based in Washington. The position of the BCSM also ignited a sharp reaction from the Federal Export Authority (FEA) in the United States.⁹³ This was contained in a memo dated 4 September 1944 to the Secretariat of AWAM by the Director of supply Nigerian Supply Board, Cann. The Nigerian Supply Board intimated AWAM on the possible clash between BCSM and FEA over what should be exported to Nigeria through FEA without proper verification by BCSM.⁹⁴ To this end, the Nigerian Supply Board issued a stern warning to Nigerian importers on its readiness to confiscate unlicensed consignments from the United States and that only licensed goods with the approval of import authorities in Nigeria would be allowed into the country.⁹⁵ Therefore, the colonial government urged all Nigerian importers to provide triplicate copies of import licences issued to them by the Nigerian authorities for use by their exporting agents with the essentiality of the said goods stated. Exporting agents equally provided such details to FEA in the United States.⁹⁶ The United States authorities also prevailed on the colonial administration in Nigeria to always inform exporting agents in the United States about local import control regulations to prevent them from applying to FEA for export licences that were not duly covered by Nigerian import licences.⁹⁷

91 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

92 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

93 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

94 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

95 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

96 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

97 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

The Americans reacted subtly as they needed to tactically resolve the import control issue with Britain due to their alliance. However, both the British and the Americans demonstrated the importance of wartime economic survival as a post-war reconstruction strategy. In January 1945, the colonial government granted concessions on goods imported from the United States against 1944 licences. The goods could enter Nigeria through the Bills of Entry, endorsed for release by the Import Control Office.⁹⁸ The import licence procedure concerning goods coming from French colonies in West Africa was initiated by granting licences to importers and individual merchants based on quota rationing by the colonial government.⁹⁹ The return to commercial or private channels with the French territories in 1945 was based on the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Commerce in London. The recommendation enabled the colonial Office to issue directives to the colonial administration on the need to issue import licences to distribution sectors that were importing goods from French territories under Provision of Order No.1042 of 8 April 1944 and Order No. 3017 of 9 November 1944.

LIST OF IMPORTED GOODS PLACED UNDER RESTRICTION DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

S/N	Iron and Steel Related Materials	S/N	Iron and Steel Related Materials	S/N	Other Goods Other than Iron and Steel Materials
1	Steel Point Chisel End	21	Hoes	38	Flashlight cases for hand torches and lamp
2	Round Nosed Shovel Blades	22	Bicycles	39	Electric light bulbs
3	Steel Head Pans	23	Bicycle Parts Other Than Ball Bearings	40	Electric Dry Batteries
4	Galvd Buckets	24	Razor Blades	41	Filters
5	Cast Iron Pots	25	Spare Parts of Sewing Machines	42	Jugs
6	Enamel Basins	26	Rubber Rolling Machines	43	Mugs

98 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

99 NAI, DCI 1/1/4032/S: 162 Import Control: Goods from U.S.A, 1944-1945.

S/N	Iron and Steel Related Materials	S/N	Iron and Steel Related Materials	S/N	Other Goods Other than Iron and Steel Materials	
7	Tinned Cash Bowls	27	Trade Machines	44	Leather	
8	Enamel Plates	28	Typewriters	45	Sanitary Towels	
9	Watches	29	Radio Equipment	46	Tyres and Tubes	
10	Clocks	30	Motor Vehicle Spares	47	Glass Tumblers of not less than 8 fluid	
11	Locks (including padlocks)	31	Refrigerators			
12	Hinges	32	Cars and Spare parts			
13	Stew Pans	33	Commercial Vehicles, Chasis and Spare Parts			
14	Plates	34	Iron and Steel Manufacture			
15	Milk Pans	35	Machinery Including Tractors			
16	Filters	36	Railway Equipment			
17	Frying Pans	37	Railway Locomotive and Parts			
18	Fuel Burning Lamps and Lanterns					
19	Rubber Tapping Knives					
20	Matchets					

Sources: NAI DCI 1/14032/S 96 Import control: Rethreading equipment, NAI DCI 1/14032/S: 67

5. CONCLUSION

During the Second World War, the metropolitan and colonial governments put the nation over and above the economic interests of the individual citizen. The same cannot be said for many merchants, which put their interest above that of the United Kingdom and that almost jeopardised the effectiveness of the British bureaucracy both in Nigeria and London. The conflicting perception of the British officials in Nigeria and London provided the template for lobbying. The quest for collective national interests compelled the British officials both in Nigeria and London to deal with the lack of unwavering allegiance of the British exporters during the war. Despite the occasional compromise on the part of the colonial officials in Nigeria, the realisation of the need to protect the British economic interests necessitated import control in Nigeria during the war as a potent strategy of preserving the British economic interests in London and Nigeria. In turn, the interests of the British allies in Nigeria were damaged during the war. However, the British and their allies managed to settle their disputes in the name of the collective quest to win the war. It is plausible that this collective quest on the part of the British and their allies necessitated a compromise that partially sacrificed the British economic interests on the altar of the Allied Powers' war efforts.