

**The role of Religion in shaping Saudi Arabia's Foreign
Policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa: A case Study of Uganda**

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*A dissertation presented to the Faculty of Arts in the University of
Malta for the degree of Master in Contemporary Diplomacy*

May 2010

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work.

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26 May 2010, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Acknowledgement

The task of putting this work together has been both tedious and challenging. I am indebted to a number of people on whom I depended to accomplish it. While it is not possible to mention all of them here, I wish to mention just a few without whose endeavors this work would probably not have seen the light.

First and foremost, my thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. Anna Khakee, Lecturer in the International Relations Department, University of Malta whose intellectual and professional input and guidance have greatly enriched my work. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to Hannah Slavik, the Director of Studies at DiploFoundation and the entire staff at DiploFoundation for their valuable support since I started this course one and half years ago. Patrick, Sylvana and Tanja deserve special mention for their understanding and willingness to help.

My great appreciation also goes to my former boss Amb. Aziz K. Kasujja, the Ambassador of Uganda to Saudi Arabia for his parental advice and encouragement

The contribution of my dear wife Aisha to this work is beyond measure. Her care, encouragement and efforts were strong pillars on which I leaned while compiling this work. I thank her most sincerely.

I also thank my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uganda namely; Evans, Carol, Michael Wamai and Michael Bulwaka and the members of the so called MMM for their cooperation and intellectual input. I cannot forget the help of my colleague at the OIC Mr. Hasan Basry Arslan in finding and down- loading the resource materials for this work.

Special thanks go to Amb. Dr. Ahmed M. Kisuule, Uganda's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hajj Ahmed Munfanjara, the retired Secretary General of Uganda Muslim Supreme Council for having enhanced my understanding of this area of research through granting interviews and long conversations that I have had with them.

Abstract

Cultural and Geographical proximity between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan African region makes the relations between the two sides an interesting and wanting area of study. It was against this backdrop that this researcher decided to investigate into this important area.

This study seeks to probe the extent to which religion influences the relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan African countries. The first chapter of the study examines the role that religion plays in the Saudi society tracing the genesis of this role to historical factors associated with the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a nation. Chapter two looks at policy responses by Sub-Saharan African countries to the Saudi foreign policy towards them. The spread of Islam in Africa, colonial powers and Pan-Africanism movement after independence are considered as some of the factors that have shaped these responses.

The third and fourth chapters deal with the case study; Uganda comparing two distinct periods in the recent history of that country. The Amin factor in the politics of Uganda and his association with Saudi Arabia are elaborated in these two chapters. A summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations are offered at the end of the study for consideration by policy makers and researchers on both sides. This study is a combination of theoretical and historical analysis and lays in place intellectual tools, clues and cues which may prompt further research in this area.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS:

| | |
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| AGOA: | African Growth Opportunity Act |
| CIA: | Central Intelligence Agency |
| COMESA: | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa |
| CPA: | Comprehensive Peace Agreement |
| EAC: | East African Community |
| EBA: | Everything But Arms |
| ECOWAS: | Economic Community of West African States |
| FRONASA: | Front for National Salvation |
| GCC: | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| IDB: | Islamic Development Bank |
| IIRO: | International Islamic Relief Organisation |
| MWL: | Muslim World League |
| NEPAD: | New Partnership for African Development |
| NGOs: | Non-Government Organisations |
| NRM | National Resistance Movement |
| OAU: | Organisation of African Unity |
| OIC: | Organisation of the Islamic conference |
| OPEC: | Oil Producing Countries |
| SABB: | Saudi British Bank |
| SADC: | Southern African Development Community |
| SPLA: | Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army |
| TPDF: | Tanzanian People's Defence Forces |

TPS: Tariff Preferential System
UAE: United Arab Emirates
UNLF: Uganda National Liberation Front
USA: United States of America

INTRODUCTION CHAPTER:

Background:

To the 1776 Baptist Minister John Leland this statement is attributed “Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics ...let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods...let Government protect him is so doing” (cited in Corn, 2007). Apparently those were times when religion would be confined inside the walls of houses of worship and remain private opinions of the individual believers. However, at a time when religious opinions of men, as put by Minister John Leland, impact not only on national security and stability but also determine how the country conducts its relations with the outside world, government cannot be expected less afford to look on and simply protect men as they exercise their religious freedoms.

This research attempts an inquiry into how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the most influential countries in the Middle East, employs religion as its guiding principle in the way it conducts its foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa with Uganda as a case study.

The Sub-Sahara African region has lagged behind in terms of development. This is attributed to a number of factors the most important of which are the two unfortunate phenomena that befell this region and contributed to its stagnation in terms of development namely slavery and colonialism. The former robbed the region of its potential manpower while the latter was responsible for plundering of its natural resources by the colonial powers. One cannot, however, ignore the role of internal factors pertaining to issues of governance, democracy and accountability.

On the other hand, in this era of globalised world and in the wake of international problems such as proliferation of refugees, terrorism and human trafficking of which the former Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan once said that they do not need passports, major economies and countries in the world have realized the need for concerted efforts to assist the Sub-Saharan African region to get out of the quagmire in which it finds itself in.

Consequently, these countries in conjunction with the affected region have put in place initiatives and programmes based on mutual benefit and respect to help this region to develop. Initiatives such as the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) by the US, Everything But Arms (EBA) by European countries are examples of such initiatives. They are meant to help Africa export certain products to the markets of those countries quota-free and tax-free. China and Japan have also introduced programmes of their own in favour of Africa.

In the political domain, the Western countries mentioned above have also tried to help Africa improve its standing on matters of democracy and good governance through a number of initiatives. The 'Peer Review Process' of the New partnership for African Development (NEPAD) originally introduced by Japan is one example of endeavors.

A quick survey by someone who is familiar with the Arabian Gulf region and who is aware of the region's capabilities cannot help wondering at the lack of keenness on the part of the Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia which is the biggest economy in the region to develop meaningful relations with African countries south of Sahara. This matter is exigent enough to arouse intellectual curiosity. More so of a person who, in the course of his profession, has worked or closely followed the development of these relations.

This study is therefore based partly on my personal experience with the topic in question. As a junior Foreign Service Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Uganda in 2003, I was desk officer for Saudi Arabia, among other countries. In the course of my duty, I observed many things and interacted with many people that were engaged in one way or the other in this field. I also took part in formulating and implementing many initiatives meant to stimulate bilateral relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia. Later in my career, I was posted to the Uganda Embassy in Riyadh to continue fostering relations between Uganda on one hand and Saudi Arabia and other countries to which that Embassy is accredited i.e. Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen and Jordan on the other.

As a Muslim myself , I was also aware of the notion of “Islam Din wa Dawla” which though more pronounced in the political discourse of Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood it is also widely believed by many Arabs and it means that in Islam there is no separation between politics and religion (McLean, McMillan, 2009, p. 276). However, I felt the urge to probe further about the extent to which religion has shaped Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa and how this influence has helped or impeded the development of meaningful relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa hence the interest in this study.

I chose the sub-region because of the personal attachment first but also because the issue of religion is not so pronounced in Saudi Arabia’s relations with other regions. Its relations with the Arab world which includes the Northern part of Africa are clearly characterized by the common causes such as the cause of Palestine and other issues that arise from time to time such as Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon.

Strategic interests such as security and stability in the Gulf region and oil issues undoubtedly dominate relations between Saudi Arabia and the Western world.

The term religion as used in this study refers to Islam which is the predominant religion for Saudi people. In fact, in some places of the study those two terms i.e. religion and Islam will be used interchangeably. This is so because when one talks of religion in relation to Saudi Arabia what comes to mind is Islam.

The term foreign policy refers to the approach of any given country in its relations with other countries.

Research question:

Slogans such as Islamic solidarity, joint Islamic action and the interest of the Muslim Ummah have become a truism in conferences and fora that bring Arab countries together with Sub-Sahara African countries. The term Islamic solidarity as a foreign policy concept however was first coined by King Faisal bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia in the early 1970s when he visited a number of Sub-Sahara African countries. The concept was retained by his successors but how it has been applied is one of the issues that this study has sought to tackle.

In light of the few tangible and measurable results emanating from many years of the much-talked-about Afro-Arab cooperation whether in the political, cultural or commercial domains, this study seeks to look critically at the approach of the biggest economy and one of the most powerful country among the Arab countries i.e. Saudi Arabia with a view of identifying the single factor that informs this approach. This study hypothesizes that this factor is religion and the research questions chosen is “to what extent does religion influence Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa?”

Importance of the study:

This study has identified the Saudi approach in its relations with Sub-Saharan Africa. It is set to validate or disapprove the hypothesis that religion plays a significant role in informing Saudi foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa. The multid denominational and diverse nature of Sub-Saharan African societies especially Uganda, which was used as a case study, is meant to examine the effectiveness of the Saudi approach of using religion as a guiding principal in dealing with these countries. It is hoped therefore, that policy makers in both Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa can use the findings of the study to improve the effectiveness of their policies.

The study will further act as a building block for researchers and students interested in the subject as they carry out further studies and researches in ways and means of improving the relations between these two regions which, as the study has demonstrated, need each other in their quest for development and safeguarding their interests.

Methodology and sources:

In conducting this study I have relied mainly on documentation. I have in the process of the study gone through the works of other researchers that deal with the subject or any of its elements, journals, newspapers and to a certain extent some official documents. I have also used observation of the systems in both Saudi Arabia where I currently live and work and in Uganda which I use as a case study representing Sub-Saharan Africa. I have also interviewed a number of personalities who have in one or the way played some role in the relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia.

Scope of the study:

In terms of the subject, this study covers Sub-Saharan African region with Uganda as a case study. The choice of Uganda in this regard was, to a great extent, influenced by my personal attachment to the country but also, and more importantly, because Uganda offers a good example of a country in Sub-Saharan Africa where the Islamic religion was at one time one of the salient factors in shaping the foreign policy in that country. It also has had a Muslim leader who technically turned Uganda into an Islamic country despite the fact that the Muslims in Uganda were at the time less than 10% of the population. It has also had leaders who tried to reverse the policy of Islamisation by undermining Islam and persecuting its followers. The reaction of Saudi Arabia in its dealing with Uganda in both cases forms the focus of this study.

In terms of period, the focus is on the period between 1971 up to date. This period has been divided into two sub-periods with distinct characteristics: The period from 1971-1979 in which Uganda had a Muslim leader who technically turned Uganda into an Islamic country by joining the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) despite a negligible percentage of the Muslim population. The second sub-period is from 1979 up to date a period characterized by efforts on the part of leaders to undo some of the policies that Amin instituted. However, a historical background is given in the first chapter about the state of relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia in the period immediately after independence.

Literature review:

I have not come across any work that addresses this particular subject. The works that exist only address some of its elements. The work of Al-Tarif (2005) which, in my view, is the closest to this subject talks about the relations between Saudi Arabia and Africa during the reign of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz. Though it discusses the birth of the concept of 'Islamic Solidarity' referred to earlier and the religious factor that were the guiding principles of King Faisal's policies towards relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa, it is limited to only one reign thus leaving the reader wondering whether this trend was maintained by other leaders of Saudi Arabia or not. It will be noted here that the term Africa in Arab works carry the meaning of Sub-Sahara Africa for they seldom consider North Africa as part of Africa. In fact, the term used in Arab works for that region is "Al-Maghribi Al-Arabi" meaning the western Arab region. So basically, Al-Tarif in his above-mentioned work titled 'Al-Alaqaat Al-Asaudia – Al-Afriqiyyat Khilal Ahd Al-Malik Faisal Bin Abdulaziz meaning Afro-Saudi relations during the reign of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz was referring to relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa even though the title gives an impression that it is about Africa as a whole.

Similar to the work of Al-Tarif in both focus and scope is the work of Yamani (1990). In this work, the author traces the development of relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa to the reign of King Faisal and like Al-Tarif tackles the religious factors that informed King Faisal's policies towards Africa. The difference between the two works being that the latter emphasizes the religious aspect and hardly discusses other aspects of relations.

The majority of other works that are related to the subject are those that discuss the Afro-Arab relations and in most cases, in such works, emphasis is put on relations

with North African countries such as Egypt, Algeria and Libya. Such works include the likes of Yousuf, (1986) and Kamil, (2007). I have also come across some works that are issue-specific also within the framework of relations between Arab countries and sub-Saharan Africa. An example of such works is Mertz and Mertz, (1983) which specifically addresses the issue Arab aid towards Africa.

On the whole, I consider this study as a humble pioneering work on which other researchers can build to inquire into this important subject of Saudi-Sub-Saharan Africa relations.

Challenges:

In the course of carrying out this study, I have encountered some difficulties. One such difficulty has been accessing resources in Saudi Arabia. Efforts to interview some people in the system have been in vain as the subject is considered too sensitive. Furthermore, some important websites that would have given some insight on the activities of Idi Amin while in Saudi Arabia were blocked and I had to fill-up forms to get them unblocked explaining why I want them unblocked but even then most of them were not availed. Given the time and resource constraints, I was not able to travel so that I could access such sites from outside the country nor was I able to travel to Uganda where I could have accessed some vital information on the subject such as government archives and other official documents. Another challenge was related to my status as a serving officer in Uganda's Foreign Service. I had to be selective in the kind of information that I use in the study and limit myself to only information that is publicly known. Using information that I am privy to in the course of my duty would be in conflict with the oath of secrecy that I have taken as a Foreign Service Officer.

On the whole, literature on the subject is scarce and even that which is available was not easy to come by due to administrative, time and resource constraints.

Structure of the study:

The study is divided into four chapters, introduction and conclusion. The first chapter gives an overview of the role that religion plays in the Saudi society and how this has impacted on its relations with Sub-Saharan African countries. The second chapter looks at how Sub-Saharan Africa has responded to the Saudi foreign policy which is rooted in religious principles. The third chapter examines relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia during the time of Idi Amin from 1971-1979. The fourth Chapter deals with Uganda-Saudi relations in post-Idi Amin time. The study ends with a summary of the topics covered and also offers some recommendations on what both sides ought to do in order to make the relations mutually beneficial and rewarding.

CHAPTER ONE:

**CONSTANT AND VARIABLE ASPECTS OF SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY:
OBJECTIVES AND IMPACT ON RELATIONS WITH SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA: A CASE FOR UGANDA**

Introduction:

This chapter examines Saudi domestic policy, its history, geography and how those factors impact on its foreign policy objectives towards Sub-Saharan Africa. It is premised on the fact that a foreign policy of any country is, to a large extent, a reflection of the situation that is obtaining at the domestic scene.

Saudi –Sub-Saharan Africa: the need for each other

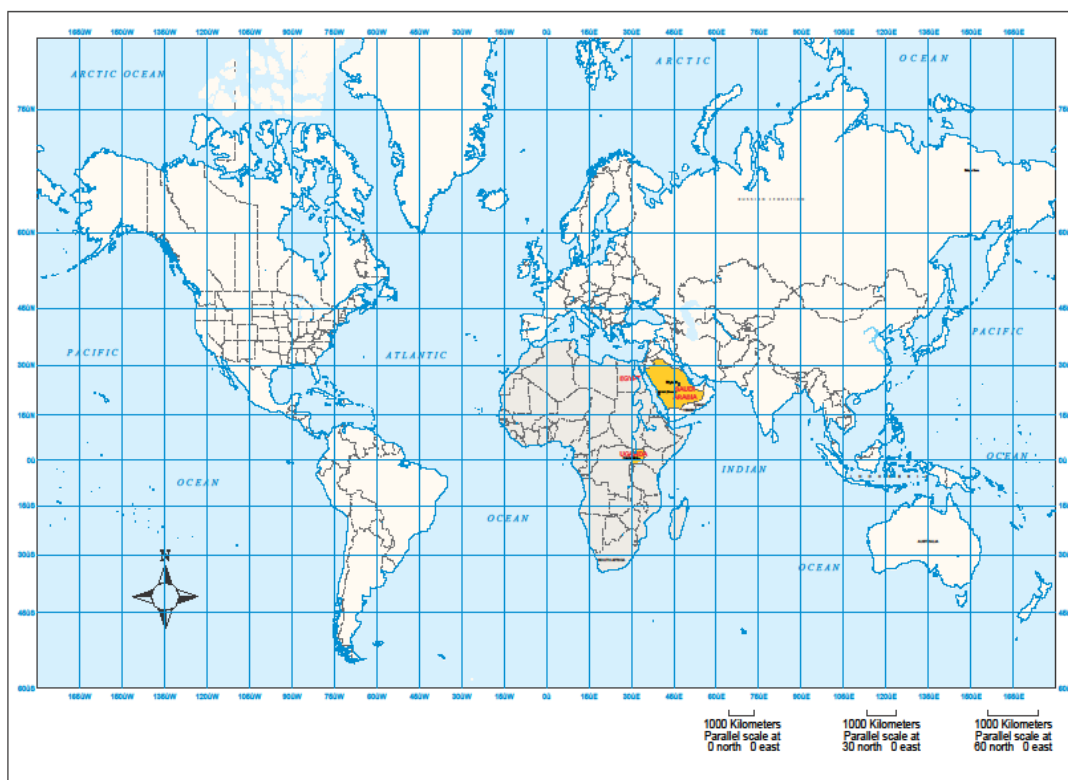
Situated in the South-Eastern part of the Asian Continent with 1700 kilometers of western coast along the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia is strategically positioned to act as a link between the African continent and the Gulf Countries on one hand and between Africa and the larger Middle Eastern region on the other.

Coupled with its strategic geographical position in relation to the African continent, Saudi Arabia is endowed with large oil and other mineral deposits thus making it an economic power in the region. The complimentary between its economic set-up and that of Africa seems just right: Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest exporters of oil in the world, with the biggest oil reserves in the world, exporting over 10 million barrels of oil per day (CIA, undated).

This commodity is rare in Africa with the exception of a few countries in the western and central parts such as Nigeria and Gabon. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a net importer of food stuff owing to its harsh desert climate yet many of the African countries with the tropical climates can benefit so much from exporting food to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region in general. This perhaps may explain why Saudi Investment Companies such as FORAS and the Saudi billionaire Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi are moving to acquire agricultural land in a number of countries in sub-Sahara Africa. (Vidal, J. 2010)

Furthermore, as Saudi Arabia seeks to diversify its economy and move away from dependence on oil export, it has started manufacturing goods for which it will need market. Added to growing and preserving dates, the country manufactures several petroleum products such as engine oils, gas, greases, metal working lubricants and plastics. All these products benefit largely from the international market. Given the proximity of the two regions, (see the map below) Africa constitutes an ideal market for Saudi products.

Map of the world showing the geographical location between Saudi Arabia and Africa



Politically, Saudi Arabia's influence in the Gulf region especially within the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.) makes it a credible partner for Africa if the latter is to build bridges with this important region. No wonder many African countries which cannot afford resident diplomatic Missions in every country of the G.C.C. have chosen Saudi Arabia as the residence of their Missions from where they

operate in other countries. Such an action, symbolic as it may look, is an acknowledgement of Saudi Arabia's leading role in the region. Take Uganda for example, its Mission in Riyadh is accredited to the other four Gulf Council member states namely Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and it is only last year that another Mission was opened in Abu Dhabi¹. Uganda's Mission in Riyadh is further accredited to both Jordan and Yemen in addition to being Uganda's Permanent Mission to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

¹ See the diplomatic lists of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the States of Qatar, UAE, Kuwait and Sultanate of Oman.

Culture is perhaps the most binding factor between Saudi Arabia and the African continent. Africa's sizable Muslim population looks up to Saudi Arabia in its capacity as the cradle of Islam. Hundreds of thousands of Africans are among the many faithful Muslims who visit Saudi Arabia every year to fulfill the fifth pillar of Islam i.e. pilgrimage (Hajj). In addition, those who can afford are allowed to perform a minor pilgrimage (UMRA) any time of the year. Saudi Arabia has opened cultural offices in many of the African capitals² whose mission is to deepen this cultural relationship between her and the African continent. Scholarships are extended to the African students to study in Saudi Universities and other educational institutions. It is estimated that by 1998 a total of 5932 Scholarships had been awarded to Muslim countries especially African countries and a total of 2372 Islamic teachers in various Muslim countries were being sponsored by Saudi Arabia (Saudi Ministry of Finance and National Economy, undated).

On the humanitarian front, Saudi Arabia based charity Organisations such as Muslim World League (MWL), International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO), Al-Haramain Foundation etc. are spread throughout Africa and are extending assistance ranging from relief goods to people affected by disasters to construction of projects such as mosques, schools, health centers and boreholes to provide clean water in rural Africa. The King Faisal Foundation, Sultan Abdul-Aziz Al Al-Saud Foundation also help in mosque and borehole construction, promoting education and giving aid to the sick.

From the above, it is evident that there is potential for more beneficial relations between Saudi Arabia and sub-Saharan Africa especially in the areas of

² Examples of such are the Saudi Cultural centre in Kampala located at King Fahd Plaza Kampala Road and the Saudi Cultural Centre in Nairobi located Jamia Mosque.

commercial and economic cooperation, trade and investment. This paper, however, seeks to put these relations in context with a view of examining the single most important factor that directs Saudi policies towards Sub-Saharan Africa. My submission is that religion is this single most important factor that informs Saudi policy towards sub-Saharan Africa.

The role of religion in a day-to-day life in Saudi Arabia and how this directs its foreign policy towards Sub-Sahara Africa:

a) Historical factors and the conservative nature of society

In order for one to understand and make sense of a country's foreign policy, one needs to look at the domestic policy and the social norms of that country. As Hynes, (2009) observes foreign policy is a reflection of a country's domestic milieu, its needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses. It is in this context that I find it prudent to examine the role that religion plays at the domestic scene in Saudi Arabia in order to understand the influence it has on Saudi's foreign relations towards Sub-Sahara Africa in general and Uganda in particular.

Literature is abundant on how the founder of modern Saudi Arabia Ibn Saud otherwise known as King Abdulaziz used religion in his campaign to win over the chiefdoms that were spread all over what is now Saudi Arabia (Commins, 2006; Metz, 1993; Tignor and Quandt, (1983;). Using the teachings of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab as a rallying ideology, Ibn Saud managed to conquer the emirates and chiefdoms that reigned in the Arabian peninsula to found the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as it known today in 1932 (Commins, 2006).

This relationship manifested itself into sharing of power with King Abdulaziz and his descendants known as the Saud Family taking charge of the

country's administration while the descendants of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab and the adherents of his interpretation of Islam were left to take care of the spiritual matters. The sons of King Abdulaziz from King Saud bin Abdulaziz up to the current King Abdullah who have since ruled Saudi Arabia have maintained this arrangement in varying degrees a situation that has led to the birth of what is often referred to as the religious establishment which according to some is a state within a state in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Abukhalil 2004; Obaid, 1999).

A number of reasons have been advanced to explain this state of affairs. It has been argued that religion is one of the sources from which the ruling family in Saudi Arabia derives its legitimacy (Al-Rasheed, 2007). Being the cradle of Islam and the home to the two holiest shrines in Islam, Mecca and Medina its leaders have to be seen to be committed to the values of the religion. It is therefore not surprising that the past and the present Monarchs in Saudi Arabia have adopted the title 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' which, if said in Arabic, as 'Khadim Al-Haramain Al-Sharifain' connotes modesty and humility for the word 'Khadim' literally renders the meaning of servant and not "Custodian" as officially translated³. This is the extent to which the authorities in Saudi Arabia go to show commitment to the Islamic religion. The rationale behind all this is for the leadership to claim that they are the vicegerents of God on earth and they rule by the will of God and work to implement His will (Al-Rasheed,1996).

This also tells a lot about the conservative and religious nature of the Saudi society. This fact is further demonstrated by the behavior of the private sector

³ See Al-Mawrid Dictionary (2002) by Muni Baalbaki & Dr. Rohi Baalabaki (English –Arabic and Arabic English) under the entry Khadim. Published by Dar el-ilm lilmalayin , Beirut.

companies. Financial institutions often have to portray their various products as Shariah compliant so as to attract a large number of customers. Banks that are perceived to abide by religious teachings as far as financial transactions are concerned attract a bigger number of clients and so are supermarkets and stores that shun the sale of cigarettes. One can refer here to Al-Rajhi, an indigenous bank that has grown so rapidly having been founded in 1957 overtaking other mainstream commercial banks and has established a big chain of branches throughout the Kingdom. This has been a result of its Islamic posture especially not taking interest on loans and neither giving it on deposits. It is probably because of this religious posture that it was once a subject of debate within the US security officials because it was viewed as a bank favoured by extremists (Simpson, 2007).

This has prompted other big business to appoint religious advisory committees on their boards or secure favorable edicts from reputable religious scholars and renowned clerics on some of their products that might be doubted by the public as regards their compliance to the teachings of religion. New products for companies such as insurance companies are often accompanied by edicts by renowned scholars in the Kingdom to testify their compliance to religion. For example, Saudi British Bank (SABB) gives the following piece of information to comfort clients of its new product called Takaful (SABB, undated):

Shariah

All SABB Takaful products are reviewed and approved by SABB

Advisory

Takaful's Shariah Committee, comprising the following respected scholars:

1. Sheikh Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al Manea
2. Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mohammad Al Mutlaq
3. Sheikh Dr. Mohammed A. ElGari Bin Eid

At official level, this show of commitment to religion is not only symbolically expressed in adopting titles but the religious establishment has been deliberately left to control some crucial sectors in the Saudi Affairs. Important domains such as the judiciary, women education and Ministries such as that of Islamic Affairs and charity organizations are dominated by members of the religious establishment. There are significant institutions of a religious nature in structure, staffing and functions which are fully recognized and supported from public funds to carry out their functions. One can mention here fully-fledged Ministries such as that of Islamic Affairs and Endowment, the Ministry of Hajj. There are institutions which are almost equivalent to government Ministries whose functions are largely religious. In this context, one can refer to the Supreme Council of Senior Ulema a body that is responsible for issuing religious edicts on any aspects of life in Saudi Arabia as well as providing advice to the King on religious matters. There is also the powerful Commission for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice popularly referred to in the western media as 'religious police'. This body is under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and until recently it wielded a lot of power in its function of enforcing the Islamic moral code.

There is talk among observers that the current King is trying clip the powers of this body as demonstrated by the recent replacement of its hard-liner head with someone known to have a moderate religious outlook (Dickey, 2009) There are other bodies of a religious nature handling different specific tasks such as the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques responsible for running the affairs of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina.

While the religious establishment does not seem to have a foothold in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign affairs, it is quite possible that they relate with the

Ministry through the Department of Islamic Affairs which coordinates the activities of Saudi charity organizations abroad.

b) Regional and international factors

Apart from the local environment however, the Saudi Arabia foreign policy posture is further prompted by regional and international dynamics. Regionally, Saudi Arabia used the religious card to resist the Pan-Arab nationalist movement of Abdu Nassir of Egypt that was sweeping the region in 1960s until early 1970s (Reich, 1990). Towards the end of the 1970s, the Islamic revolution in Iran even put more pressure on Saudi Arabia to remain relevant and maintain the leadership of the Muslim world. If the Nasserite movement had forced Saudi Arabia to consolidate its position in the Gulf region and its environs especially in regard to South Yemen which was the bastion of the pro-Nasser politics, the Islamic revolution in Iran compelled Saudi Arabia to reach out to those regions that had significant Muslim population in the African continent. While other Muslim countries in the Arab world and Asia could easily identify with Saudi Arabia and resist Iranian expansionist tendencies on ethnic and ideological grounds, Africans were susceptible to buy the Iranian revolution slogans. The Saudis feared that the new leadership in Iran would export the revolution at the expense of Saudi Arabia because its position in the Muslim World was being contested by the tough talking revolutionaries in Iran (Niblock, 2006).

Saudi official policy and its undeclared interests in Sub-Saharan Africa:

The declared principles of the Saudi foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa can be extracted from what the people of Saudi Arabia call the Islamic and International Circles of the Saudi Foreign Policy. In this context they list the

following guiding principles for the foreign policy towards countries that do not fall in the first two circles namely Gulf Council and Arab Countries. The principles are laid down in table one in full.

Table 1.0: The principles in the Saudi Foreign Policy towards the countries outside the Gulf Council of Arab Countries

| |
|--|
| <p>Achieve comprehensive Islamic solidarity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Open new horizons for economic cooperation among Islamic countries aiming at the support of their potentials and resources on different levels.- Stand against different types and techniques of cultural overflow and intellectual invasion that threaten the Islamic World.- Work out to develop the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and support its activities to achieve more effectiveness in confronting the issues encountered by the Islamic World.- Activate the role of Islamic countries within the framework of new world order.- Provide assistance and support to Muslim minorities worldwide, and look after their rights in accordance with the principles of international law.- Introduce the real and true image of Islam and its tolerance law <i>Sharia'a</i>, and protect Islam from all the clear accusations and slanders addressed to Islam, such as; terrorism and human rights violations.- Kingdom's keenness to react with the international society through a commitment to the UN Charter concluded international agreements, and the basis of international law, which determine the framework of general conduct of civilized countries and societies.- Commitment of the Kingdom not to use power and not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. As well as, condemn violence and all means |
|--|

that negatively affect international security and peace. And emphasizes the principle of peaceful existence among the countries of the world.

- Keeness on the stability of international oil markets, and seeking to develop international trade on fair basis and through the fundamentals of free market economies.
- Form the Saudi foreign policy with moral shape through an adoption to the principle of supporting the victims of natural disasters, homeless, and refugees in many countries of the world.

Source: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: www.mofa.gov.sa

In the political domain therefore, Saudi Arabia has established diplomatic relations with many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, the kingdom maintains over 18 diplomatic Missions in Sub-Saharan Africa. It has a Department in its Ministry of Foreign affairs called the African department whose function is to foster relations with non- Arab African countries all of which happen to be located south of the Sahara. Its declared foreign policy towards Africa falls under what it calls the Islamic and International circles of its relations.

Table 1.1 Saudi Embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| - Pretoria | - Dakar | -Yaoundé |
| - Abuja | - Addis Ababa | - Asmara |
| - Libreville | - Niamey | - Kampala |
| - N'Djamena | - Djibouti | - Lusaka |
| - Accra | - Conakry | - Nairobi |

Source: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website: www.mofa.gov.sa

However, high level visits between African countries and Saudi Arabia which would signify strong relations seem to be one sided with almost all current Heads of State in Africa having visited Riyadh and on the other hand, no single official visit has been made by Saudi Monarch to any country in sub-Saharan Africa in the last three decades. The last Saudi Monarch that visited Africa was the late King Faisal in the 1970s when he visited five countries including Uganda.

Saudi Arabia plays host to the Headquarters of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in which Sub-Sahara Africa has the largest block with 20 member states. It is the largest of the three formal blocks within the OIC namely Arab, Africa and Asia. The appointment of Executives posts and hosting of OIC events are based on these blocks. As such, it interacts with these African member states of the OIC in many of the fora and events convened by the Organisation. It is the biggest shareholder in this body's development bank known as the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) which disburses considerable amount of money for development to Africa under the framework of OIC. In addition to the IDB, the Saudi Fund for Development also extends financial assistance to the African countries mainly in form of project support.

On the cultural side, Saudi Arabia through its Ministry of Information and Saudi radio broadcasts in a couple African languages; in Swahili and Hausa. It also runs English and French programmes mainly targeting African audience whose official languages are French and English. The content of the programmes broadcast is largely religious. The Saudi Government also maintains cultural centers and

offices in many African countries as indicated earlier with the main objective being to spread religious teachings and Arabic language and culture.

The Saudi interests in Africa as mentioned above being consolidating its leading position in the Muslim world by spreading and popularizing its interpretation of Islam as well as forestalling the influence of Iran on the continent. The Arab main cause however namely solidarity with Palestine was not neglected at least in the 1970s and the early part of 1980s. Saudi sought to curb the Israeli attempts to build relations with African countries. Although African countries had severed relations with Israel following its occupation of Egyptian territory, this animosity remained long after Egypt had signed a peace agreement with Israel and established full diplomatic relations with it.

This is attributed largely to the Saudi pressure and some other Arab countries on African countries to maintain this stance. Any African country that attempted to establish relations with Israel would face intense pressure from Saudi Arabia which included the ban of aid to such country. It also included a denial of entry into Saudi Arabia for any African national whose passport contained an entry visa into Israel. Some African countries however including those which are members of the OIC such as Uganda have since restored diplomatic relations with Israel and there have been exchange of visits on both sides at the highest level.

The Saudi objectives of course changed in degrees of importance as time changed but that of consolidating the Saudi position as a leader in the Muslim world remained constant. It also banked on the relationship it had cultivated with many of the African countries to ward off the mounting criticism it was facing on account of its human rights record especially in areas concerning religious tolerance, freedom of association and speech and the rights of women and migrant workers.

The role of Saudi NGOs in advancing Saudi interests in Africa

The impact of Saudi Arabia however has not been felt in Africa through its actions at the level of official foreign policy as it has been through Saudi based Non-Governmental Organisations operating in Africa. Although these organisations pose as independent NGOs, most of them receive support from the central government and their leaders are often appointed and shuffled by the King. Such Organisations include the Muslim World League (MWL) and its sister organisation the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO). These two organizations have played a significant role in advancing Saudi interests in Africa and their activities range from provision of relief assistance to establishment of social development projects especially the construction of mosques, schools, orphanage centers and boreholes. Following the visit to Africa by King Faisal, which by all standards, was historic and unprecedented, Saudi Arabia sent a clear message to the world that it wanted to build stronger relations with the African continent. Saudi NGOs then moved very fast to consolidate and benefit from the momentum of the visit.

The entry point for these Saudi NGOs in the 1970s was penetrating the education sector through Quran schools some of which had been started by early Arabs who went to Africa for trade or those schools that had been started by the people who had learnt religion from the Arab traders. Such schools were informal and had minimum facilities. Beginning with mid 1970s dramatic improvement was visible in these schools. Graduates of religious education of different nationalities from Saudi universities were dispatched to Africa to help these schools. Texts books from Saudi Arabia were distributed among Muslim schools in Africa. Local teachers that were teaching in those schools started receiving some financial assistance. In the

meantime, graduates from those schools were being sent to Saudi Arabia for further training. They would in later be sent back to teach Islam in these schools, fully remunerated by the Saudi Government.

This sustained focus on education bore fruits very fast as the Saudi interpretation of Islam started spreading in Africa of course causing some friction between the old and these new graduates who branded many of the practices in place then as innovation and alien to the true interpretation of Islam. The Saudi had laid a sufficient foundation for a face-off with the Iranians and their Shiite ideology once they tried to penetrate the African continent.

A number of factors helped them achieve their goals: Since Saudi Arabia owns the largest oil reserves in the world, it has been able to drill much of it and this has often put a lot of money at their disposal to carry out these programmes. The rise in oil prices around 1974-1980 where the cost of a barrel rose from US\$20 to US\$ 40 put enough money in their hands at a time they needed it most. They were therefore able to fund several of their foreign policy projects.

The Saudi position was further boosted by the vacuum created by the decline in Egypt's capacity which used to be another power in the Muslim world training most of the Africans in the Islamic religion at the famous Al-azhar University also contributed a great deal. Egypt had been consumed by its wars with Israel and could no longer afford the added burden of spreading Islam in Africa as had been the case before. This decline economically and otherwise was a blessing for Saudi Arabia which started to recruit manpower from Egypt to implement their agenda.

Moreover, the Iranians whose influence the Saudis feared so much were probably held back by the fierce war forced on them by Iraq. The idea of exporting

the Islamic revolution together with their Shiite ideology espoused in the early days of the revolution was not a priority anymore. These factors gave time to Saudi Arabia to consolidate its position among the African Muslims. Another factor that was to help Saudi Arabia was its alliance with the western powers and their known hatred for communism. This gave them a leeway to conduct their programmes in many African countries without being disturbed by the western powers that were very much in charge of a big majority of countries in Africa. Much as the regimes were not Muslims in those countries, they knew Saudi Arabia was not a threat to their power and after all, it concerned itself with religious education which was then of no consequence in running the affairs of the country. Most of the graduates from Saudi universities of the 1970s and early 1980s, at least in Uganda, up till now are being paid by the Saudi Government either as preachers or teachers.

According to available statistics Saudi Arabia spent more than Saudi Riyals 4 billion equivalent to about US\$ 1billion over a period from 1392H-1410H (1972 -1989) on construction of a big number of mosques, schools, universities, health as well as social centres in Africa (Saudi Ministry of Finance and National Economy, 1991) Some of these mosques in major cities and towns in Africa are given in the table below:

Table 1.2.: Mosques Constructed by Saudi Arabia in Africa

| Mosque | City/Town & Country | Cost in US \$ |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------|
| King Faisal | Ndjamena, Chad | 16m |
| King Faisal | Conakry, Guinea | 7m |
| Garou | Garou, Cameroon | 4m |
| Yaoundé | Yaoundé, Cameroon | 4.8m |

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Abuja Islamic centre | Abuja, Nigeria | 26m |
| King Khalid | Gabon | 10m |
| King Fahd | “ | |
| King Abdulaziz | “ | |
| Garoua | Cameroon | 3.75m |
| Bamako | Bmako, Mali | 2.4m |
| Zanzibar | Zanzibar, Tanzania | 2-6m |

Adopted from the information provided in the article Al-madkhal.

Two issues are worth noting here: first is that the list given above is only for big mosques and centres officially funded by the Saudi government through various agencies. There is no data for the many of the mosques donated by individual Saudis through Saudi Charity Organisations. Another issue is that other amenities such as boreholes, health centres, libraries and conference halls, when executed through Charity Organisations, are usually part and for exclusive use of an Islamic Centre comprising of a big mosque or an Islamic school as the main facility. Rarely does one come across a borehole or health centre constructed independently to cater for needs of an entire village or town.

This has, at times, posed a challenge for indigenous officials who may be working for such charity organizations when faced with accusation of discrimination. Dr. Ahmed Kisuule, the former Director of International Islamic Relief Organisation talks of the difficulty he had to convince headquarters that it was in the best interest of the organization and Saudi Arabia as a whole for relief goods to be distributed to all and sundry without discrimination on the basis of religion or creed. This was in early 1990s when an earthquake had hit parts of

western Uganda and Saudi Arabia dispatched relief goods through IIRO. Some people had complained to Saudi Arabia that Dr. Kisuule was distributing goods to non-Muslims for which he was asked to explain⁴.

Conclusion:

It is apparent from the above that the Saudi political leadership has left the Saudi Charity organizations to have a critical say in how it relates to Sub-Sahara African countries. Given the influence the religious establishment has on those organizations, it is not surprising to see that they have tended to devote significant resources in promoting religion at the expense of other social aspects which they claim to promote and which would have been beneficial to fostering good relations between Saudi Arabia and those countries. In the next chapter we will see how African countries have reacted towards such a religious oriented policy as exercised by Saudi Arabia.

⁴ Interview with Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Kisuule, Uganda's ambassador to Iran conducted in September 2009.

CHAPTER TWO:

**THE POSITION OF SUB-SAHARA AFRICAN COUNTRIES TOWARDS
THE SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY**

Introduction:

This chapter will focus on how Sub-Saharan African countries have responded to the Saudi foreign policy which is rooted in the Islamic faith towards them. It gives a rough sketch of the spread of Islam and its culture in Africa which has been, inevitably, a major determinant on how various Sub-Sahara African countries respond to the Saudi Foreign policy.

Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa:

Islam came to Sub-Saharan Africa as early as the seventh century through trade and immigration of Arab tribes to Africa but before that, historians have it that Prophet Muhammed sent some of his followers to Abyssinia, current Ethiopia, to seek refuge from persecution meted out on them by the inhabitants of Mecca who had rejected the message of the Prophet. This initial contact was later on boosted by the conquering of North Africa by Muslim forces from where some Arab tribes migrated to the Western part of Africa for trade and some of them settled their. The Eastern coastal area also witnessed the same phenomenon of Arab traders who spread Islam at the coast of Indian Ocean and penetrated in the hinterlands as far as Uganda. In the southern part of the continent, Islam is believed to have been introduced by immigrants from the Indian sub-continent (Mustafa, 1991).

All in all, Islam commands a big following in Sub-Saharan Africa and continues to register a remarkable growth. As Mazrui (1986, pp. 35-36) observes: "Between 1931 and 1951 the number of Muslims in the whole of Africa had risen from 40 million to 80 million in comparison with a Roman Catholic rise from 5 million to 15 million. ...of the total Black population estimated at the time as being 130 million in Africa south of the Sahara, 28 million were Muslims, 13million were

Catholics, 4 million were Protestants and 85 millions still followed their own indigenous religions, even though some of these traditionalists were nominally Muslim and Christian”.

The influence of Islamic culture on the Africans was so profound not only in art and architecture but also major languages in Africa such as Hausa, Fulani, Swahili are basically a mixture of African languages and Arabic the language of Islam. Up till the coming of colonialism in the 19 century, some Africans were using Arabic letters to write (International African Seminar and Lewis, 1966).

The colonial powers and the re-configuration of the African Society:

European powers that colonized Africa from the 19th century came along with Christian Missionaries who introduced the Christian faith to much of the sub-Saharan Africa. Their catchment area was naturally the indigenous faith as well as Islam. In their efforts to introduce the Christian faith and get as many converts as possible, Christian missionaries undermined other faiths. As a result, indigenous deities were almost abandoned (Mazama, 2002) and Islam though not totally wiped out was weakened and took a secondary position after being the predominant faith in many of the African countries that fell under colonialism.

In Uganda for example, particularly in the Kingdom of Buganda, the largest and most powerful kingdoms and therefore the nucleus of Uganda’s political arena, Christian missionaries worked with colonial administrators to prevent Islam from taking root in the Kingdom. Soghayroun (1981, p. 128) writes of this period that “Government and missionaries coordinated to further the spread of Christianity at the expense of Islam”. This was done through measures such as excluding

Muslims in the allocation of land that took place in 1900 and denying them access to modern education since schools were being run by missionaries (Kasozi, 1996).

Post-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa and the search for identity:

Despite the efforts by the colonial powers to curb its spread, Islam survived and in some countries it remained the predominant religion. As such, the colonial powers had no choice but to work with Muslims in countries such as Senegal, Mali, Chad, Nigeria etc. even though they made sure that they provided non-Muslim minorities with better education which would enable them assume posts that were not proportional to their numerical strength in the post-colonial administrations.

Almost all Sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia, was still under the yoke of European colonialism at the time King Abdulaziz was struggling to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. As such, no formal relations can be talked about between Saudi Arabia and Africa during that period or even before the 1950s. In fact countries which are considered weak and small today such as Oman and Yemen had greater acquaintance with Sub-Sahara African than Saudi Arabia did. Of course, interaction at individual level existed as many African Muslims would travel to Mecca for religious purposes i.e. to perform pilgrimage. It was in the early 1950s when the African States begun attaining independence starting with Ghana in 1954 that one can talk of the foreign policy directions of the African continent.

The birth of African independent states took place in a polarized world where countries had to choose which camp to belong to in order to survive in such a world i.e. the West under the leadership of the USA or East under the leadership of Soviet Union although some talked of forming a third camp of non-aligned

movement whose members were in reality aligned to either West or East in one way or the other.

As would be expected, the main concern for most of the newly independent African countries was to help fellow African countries attain their independence so as to forge a common future. Such were the aspirations of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika with support from Gamal Abd Nasser of Egypt who had turned Cairo into the centre of African liberation movements. The predominant policy of African States therefore took on the character of solidarity with fellow African states still struggling to attain their independence. The focus for this type of policy was on African political integration once all African States or a big number of them attained their independence (Khadiagala and Lyons, 2001). Some of the leaders were so obsessed with the idea of African integration that President Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika as Tanzania was known then was willing to delay the independence of his country by one year so it could get independence at the same time with fellow East African countries namely Uganda and Kenya to form regional block called the East African Community (Magaya, 2009).

From the foregoing it is clear that in the late 1950s throughout the early 1960s the foreign policies of African States were either inward looking or trying to align themselves with the two powerful camps that existed in order to guard their hard-earned independence. It is also probable that Muslim communities in most of these countries looked towards either Libya with its non-alignment posture or Egypt. This partly explains why Libya and Egypt continue to enjoy close links with Muslim groups in the rest of Africa through businesses and charity work. The telling examples of this long established relationship could be the construction of the

Gaddafi Mosque in Uganda, Voice of Africa radio networks in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan.

This situation continued until the late 1960s when most of the African States had got their independence and begun forming their individual foreign policies and sought to improve their lot both politically and economically. This coincided with the attainment of some degree of stability by the Saudi state during the reign of King Faisal who in his attempt to check the influence of Gamal Abdu Nasser of Egypt among the Muslim countries started to reach out to Muslim leaders in Africa (Niblock, 1982). His policy of Islamic solidarity received an acceptance from those countries that had a considerable percentage of Muslim populations. The growing cooperation between the OAU and the Arab League in which Saudi Arabia was an influential member must all have accounted for the initial interaction between Saudi Arabia and many African countries. Saudi Arabia was chosen on the Committee of Arab States that were to visit Africa

The steps to forge closer relations between Sub-Saharan African states and Saudi Arabia were further boosted by the establishment of the Organisation of the Islamic conference (OIC) in 1969 in the wake of an arson attack on Al-Quds Mosque in Jerusalem which acted as a rallying issue. Several African states such as Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Mali and Chad were founder members of the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference, no date). It is worth mentioning here that the force behind the formation of this Organisation was King Faisal to the chagrin of Gamal Abdu Nasser who had blocked earlier attempts in this direction.

This marked the start of fairly warm relations between Saudi Arabia and some African States especially those with Muslim leaders which were now conscious of their identity as Muslim countries.

We note that those countries which also boast of a big Muslim population have enjoyed better relations with Saudi Arabia than many of its fellow Sub-Saharan African countries. One can single out Senegal where Muslims constitute over 90 percent of the population (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, undated). Senegal is a major beneficiary of Saudi financial aid since 1973 during Leopold Sengor's time when Saudi Arabia donated US\$ 30m towards some development projects up to date. Furthermore, thanks to Saudi support, it is the only country in sub-Sahara Africa to have hosted the OIC Summit Conferences in 1991 and 2008. On both occasions, Saudi Arabia generously contributed towards preparation of those Summits. In 1991 it constructed Hotel meridian as well as a conference centre while in 2008 it made a financial contribution of Saudi Riyals 200m (equivalent to US\$ 53m). Saudi Arabia further financed, through Saudi Fund for Development, construction of projects worth Saudi Riyals 15million (equivalent to about US\$40m) (Al-Sahaly, 2007). Other countries that have received the same level of consideration by Saudi Arabia are Chad, Mali and Guinea all of which have significant Muslim populations and are founder members of the OIC.

In their book Arab Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa Mertz and Mertz (1983) rightly observe that the recipient of the top Arab donor countries (they list Saudi Arabia, Libya and Kuwait) have common political interest and religious ties to the donors. The authors further dismiss as mere rhetoric the much hyped Arab solidarity with Africa pointing out that 69% of Arab aid goes to members of the OIC. This means that this solidarity with Africa is rather selective.

One however, observes that Saudi Arabia is contented with giving Aid to Africa as a sign of warm relations. Other aspects such as high level visits remain a one-way traffic. In fact, despite the Saudi heavy investment in the organization of the OIC

Summits in Senegal, Saudi Kings the late King Fahd and King Abdullah did not attend the Summits.

Uganda's attitude towards the Saudi foreign policy in the period following independence in 1962:

Uganda like all other States in Sub-Saharan Africa had its foreign policy aligned to the super powers immediately after independence. As a former colonial power, Britain kept an eye on Uganda and for sometime had considerable influence in its foreign policy directions. Uganda for its part was focused on cementing its relations with its neighbors especially Kenya and Tanzania to secure access to the Indian Ocean the route where a big percentage of its imports pass. Regional integration and good neighborliness were therefore top on the agenda of its foreign policy priorities.

Soon the Prime Minister of the newly independent Uganda Milton Obote joined the club of the Pan-African leaning leaders: Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah and started supporting liberation movements in southern Africa.

He adopted some policies that were viewed to be anti British such as the nationalization of foreign corporations the majority of which belonged to British citizens. He further joined those leaders who were critical of British stance towards the apartheid regime in South Africa and he distinguished himself as the eloquent spokesman of the group. On the his fateful trip to Singapore to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in 1971, aware of the growing tension between him and his Chief of staff, he is said to have been reluctant to attend but his colleagues such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kawunda of Zambia pleaded with him to go to help make their case against British policies in the

Southern part of Africa. His fears were to be proven true for that is when he was removed from power in a bloodless coup led by his Army Chief of Staff Major General Idi Amin Dada.

The animosity between Obote on one hand and Britain and Israel on the other led some observers to conclude that those two countries had a heavy hand in his fall. This theory is backed by the fact that Amin's first visits as President were to those two states as Mazrui puts it "Indeed Amin's first trips abroad as president were, in part, to meet two distinguished Western women: Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir and Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. In his first year in office Amin received one Western diplomatic hug after another" (Mazrui, 2009).

Beside Britain's problems with Obote, Israel had its own grievances with him as well. They thought he was getting too closer to the Arabs and that Uganda's voting patterns in the UN had suddenly changed in favour of the Arabs. If this is true one could assume that Obote was being inspired by Egypt whose regime had espoused the socialist path that he was beginning to tread. Had he remained in power and continued with this anti Israel stance it probably would have brought him closer to Saudi Arabia as well religious differences notwithstanding.

The irony is that the person who came to power allegedly with the help of Britain and Israel in the hope that he would undo what Obote had done in respect of nationalization and pro-Arab policies proved to be even more anti-Israelis than Arabs themselves and unceremoniously sent away all foreign business people from Uganda and distributed their businesses to indigenous people.

Conclusion:

From the foregoing, we have seen that Islam had long taken root in Africa before the advent of colonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial Administrations in various African countries did a lot to reverse the spread of Islam and helped Christian missionaries to undermine Islam. We have however seen that while the missionaries were successful in weakening Islam in some countries such as Uganda, it survived in other countries and remained the predominant religion in countries such as Senegal and Mali. We found that from the time Sub-Saharan African countries gained independence they started searching for identity. This manifested itself in the desire for regional integration, the promotion of Pan-Africanism and the joining of a religious-based multilateral Organization like the OIC. We have also seen that there is a correlation between the flow of Saudi Aid to a country and the percentage of Muslims in such a country in Sub-Saharan Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

THE REIGN OF IDI AMIN 1971-1979

Introduction:

A lot has been written on Idi Amin and his regime in Uganda. Many researchers have concentrated on the negative aspects of his rule which are many even by the standards of the African continent then. True, military coups were the order of the day and democracy was unknown in many parts of Africa thanks, partly, to the cold war during which the two super powers worked to prop-up the regimes that supported them regardless of their democratic and human rights credentials, but the excesses exhibited by Idi Amin were, I think, unacceptably high. This is not to say, however, that whatever is attributed to him by researchers and commentators are true. Some of them are ridiculous while others border to racism. Allegations of cannibalism and keeping the heads of his victims in the refrigerator are examples of such exaggerations in this regard (Radu, 2003).

This chapter however will not indulge in the excesses of Idi Amin as the subject has received more than its share of attention. Works such as Kyemba (1977), Smith (1980), Melady and Malady, (1977) and Campbell (1975) can aptly give insight into this subject. The chapter will focus on Idi Amin's foreign policy especially the new element he introduced in this policy by building bridges and strengthening channels of communication between Uganda and the Arab world especially Saudi Arabia. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the policies that might have endeared Idi Amin to the Arab world especially Saudi Arabia. My contention is the majority of those policies and actions had something to do with the promotion of Islam in Uganda.

Amin's Brief cozy relations with Britain and Israel:

As said in the previous chapter, the ascendance of Idi Amin to power in 1971 caused a sigh of relief to the western camp and Israel especially to Uganda's former colonial masters in London who still maintained a considerable control over its affairs. This is so due to Amin's predecessor's change of attitude towards the West and Israel in his final days in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Obote is reported to have started getting cozy with the socialist camp following his famous declaration of the "Move to the left" and nationalization of private companies (Gitelson, 1972). Israel was uncomfortable with his growing interaction with the Middle East especially the Sudan and Egypt. According to Arye Oded a former Israeli diplomat in Kampala "After the Six Day War, Uganda's votes in the United Nations and other international forums, as with most other African countries, began to turn against Israel. Obote's relations with Israel chilled as he moved closer to the Arab countries" (Oded, 2006 p. 3-4).

Initially, Amin sought to assure Britain and Israel of his commitment to reversing his predecessor's policies. He made visits to the two countries and was rewarded with pledges of increased aid packages from both countries and continued military assistance on the part of Israel.

Amin's complete about –turn and change of foreign policy:

Amin's visit to Libya in February 1972 marked the beginning of the end of the honeymoon period of the relations with Britain and Israel. The result of the visit to Libya was the signing of a communiqué of cooperation between the two countries. Libya was also very fast on following up on the Communiqué. A ten-man high level delegation was dispatched to Uganda thereafter to concretize the

communiqué by discussing areas of cooperation between the two countries. Among the vital areas of cooperation identified by the two parties, were, the promotion of Islam through teaching, building of schools and mosques featured prominently. Other areas included trade, economic and technical assistance, air force and the Uganda army.

This change of events however came faster than many could have anticipated. The visit to Libya in the first place caught the Israelis who still considered themselves Amin's allies by surprise. They made frantic moves to salvage the friendship including their ambassador in Kampala meeting with Amin to express his government's concern about Amin's growing relationship with Libya. They also sent a trade Mission to discuss matters of mutual interest with Kampala (Otunnu, 1987). But it would appear that all these efforts came to naught as Amin was determined to move ahead with his newly found friends. Amin's intellect had already been muzzled by Qadhaffi's ideological morphine. On 25 March 1972, Amin formerly denounced "Zionist imperialism". He then ordered the evacuation of all Israeli military personnel within 72 hours, and reducing to only four diplomats in the Israeli Embassy, disconnection of Israeli military wireless and the revocation of all orders and plans that were in the pipeline with Israel and on March 30 1972 he put seal on the termination of Uganda's relationship with Israel when he gave orders to all Israeli diplomats to leave Uganda within ten days. (Oded, 2006).

On the heel of these fast changing events came the visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to Uganda in 1972, his first visit to Africa as King. Faisal also granted 6.1 million Saudi Riyals (equivalent to US\$ 1.6 million) and promised more in consideration of Amin's stance to fight Zionism and imperialism. The visit of King Faisal exacerbated his zeal to change his foreign policy. Qadhaffi's visit a year later

in 1973 signaled confirmation of Amin's allegiance to the Arab world. From this point onwards, relations between Uganda and the Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia began to flourish.

The introduction of Islamic influence in Uganda and the Saudi role:

Immediately after capturing power, Amin took some steps to help the Muslim community in Uganda stand on its feet and rise from the social abyss where colonial and neo-colonial government had left it. Those included steps such as the creation of one body that would bring the various Muslim factions under one umbrella called Uganda Muslim Supreme council. (Kasozi, 1996)⁵. With Saudi entering the scene, the promotion of Islam and the Muslim community was taken to another level to an extent that other religious groups did not only feel sidelined but they felt that Amin was moving towards Islamizing the country (Kokole,1989).

It is however worthwhile to observe that Amin had no Islamic agenda when he took over power. The motives that are often quoted are that he was either used by the British and Israeli who wanted to get rid of Obote for reasons that have been discussed in this paper or it was a reflexive action to save his skin since Obote had ordered his arrest before he left for the Conference in Singapore or both. No observer or commentator has argued that Amin had an Islamic agenda in taking over power.

⁵ Muslims had been marginalized by the colonial powers by denying them education. At independence in 1962, there were only two Muslim graduates. This prevented them from effective participation in running the affairs of their country. While other two religious denominations formed political parties; the Democratic party representing the Catholics and Uganda people's Congress Party representing protestants Muslims had no such representation. To compound things neo-colonial governments further undermined Muslims by dividing them. By creating Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Amin did not only boost the Unity of Muslims but established a body that would act as mouthpiece to promote their interests.

On contrary his actions immediately after taking over power were deemed to be against the interests of Muslims. His open support for the animist Anyanya movement in southern Sudan in their struggle against the Arab North, his visit to Israel and the composition of his cabinet that had only two Muslim Ministers out of 20 are some of the signs that Islam and Muslims were not on the priority list of his agenda in the first few months of his rule.

All this however changed after the visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Amin started taking some radical changes aimed to boost the development of the Islamic influence and to the strengthening of his newly adopted pro-Arab attachments. Some of these steps included, but by no means limited to, the expulsion of 58 white Christian missionaries in 1973 and the initiation of a programme to reorganize religion in the army ostensibly to put the leadership of various religions in African hands. Much as this seems to be an innocent action of seeking to Africanize religious leaderships, the programme directly affected non-Muslims and favoured Muslims- since it was only the Christians who had foreign missionaries in the army.

Later Amin banned all the minor Christian churches such as the Adventist Church, the Orthodox Church and others leaving only Islam, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. It is apparent that he could have tolerated these two churches because their respective followers by far outnumbered the Muslims. Amin's politicization of religion in a secular state also became evident in the membership of his Cabinet of Ministers. While in 1972 his cabinet had only two Ministers out of 20 by 1975 it was dominated by Muslims where 70% of his Ministers were Muslims. (Kokole, 1989).

The expulsion of the Asians also intensified the influence of Muslims. This is so because most of the defected Asian's property was entrusted to Muslims. In the army, religion *inter alia* became a criterion for recruitment and promotion. This saw an influx of Sudanic speaking Muslims into the army from southern Sudan. In other spheres Islam also became a basis for redistribution of State resources. (Kokole, 1989). This compelled some senior citizens to convert to Islam in order to benefit from this new state of affairs. An example of this is that of Obura (later Kassim Obura) who was commissioner of police until 1979.

Amin's efforts to increase Islamic influence in Uganda reached their climax in 1974 with its admission into the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This was at a conference, at Lahore, Pakistan. With less than 10% as Muslims at the time of its admission, Uganda's membership to the OIC has generated debate among researchers and religious leaders. This subject will however be dealt with in some detail in the next chapter while examining attempts by some quarters in Uganda to have it withdraw from this organisation and the reasons why it has remained a member state to date. My concern here is that Uganda's admission to this body opened more veins for the inflow of petro dollars into Uganda from the Arab world especially Saudi Arabia which hosts its headquarters and pays the highest contribution to its running.

This admission seems to have spurred Amin to take even bolder steps to enhance Islam in Uganda. Decreeing of Friday as a non-working day (public holiday) of the week. (Mamdani, 1983) and the introduction of Arabic programmes including news bulletin in Arabic on Radio Uganda; the government-owned and the

only radio in Uganda at the time are just a few examples of such steps⁶. I strongly believe that Saudi Arabia was heavily involved in this project more than any other Arab country for number of reasons some of which are listed below.

The interest of other Arab States that had the capacity to influence Idi Amin's policy such as Libya, Egypt and Sudan were purely political and economic revolving around the Israeli-Arab conflict, the conflict in Southern Sudan and sharing the waters of river Nile. Once Amin had made a clear position on these, as he did, it was enough to keep these states on his side. It is also reported that at some point Amin refused to receive more aid from Libya ostensibly to maintain his independence claiming it is better to be poor than being in the pocket of some body. (Gitelson, 1977).

Without any kind of political interaction prior to 1971, Saudi Arabia appeared on the scene of Uganda's foreign policy with the coming of Idi Amin and left that scene with his departure. Other Arab countries such the Sudan, Egypt and even Libya maintained varying degree of interaction to ensure their long-term interests. Libya is said to be one of the foreign powers that supplied arms to the current President of Uganda in his five-year armed struggle that brought him to power (Museveni, et la , 1997).

⁶ It will be noted Amin's decree to make Friday a public holiday was an exaggeration of the issue or perhaps a mere imitation of Saudi Arabia and a few other countries such as Kuwait, Libya and Brunei which observe Friday as a public holiday. There is nothing in the Islamic religion that justifies such an action. The Quranic injunction regarding Friday otherwise known as Juma in reference to the prayer which is offered on that day is very clear. It goes thus; "O ye who believe! When the call is heard for the prayer of the day of congregation, haste unto remembrance of Allah and leave your trading. That is better for you if ye did but know. And when the prayer is ended, then disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty, and remember Allah much, that ye may be successful" (Quran, 62:8-9).

Apparently, Saudi Arabia went an extra mile in encouraging Amin's efforts to Islamise the country and in return they (Saudis) availed all kinds of support. They even ensured that Uganda joins the Saudi-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) despite clear lack of qualifications provided for in both the old and New Charters of the OIC Charter states that for a Country to be admitted into the Organisation the majority of its citizens should be Muslims (OIC Website). This was significant for Amin as he was facing increasing isolation from clubs like the Commonwealth and regional Organizations such as the East African Community.

It is also worth noting that the Saudis while supporting Idi Amin, did not seek to entrench their radical interpretation of Islam that is characterized by fighting practices such as Maulidis (celebration of the birth of the prophet), Duwa for the dead (last funeral rites) as they are known in Uganda and other practices which the Wahhabi school of thought espoused by the Saudis. The adherents of Whhabism consider the above practices innovation in Islam but they were prevalent in Amin's Uganda and even given an official character. Oftentimes, government policies were outlined during such functions. The Saudis appear to have concentrated on a bigger picture of spreading the Islamic influence.

Those actions and many others, though would prove detrimental to Uganda Muslims after the fall of Idi Amin as we will see in the next chapter, seem to have endeared Amin to Saudi Arabia. Saudi aid started pouring into Uganda and a Saudi diplomatic Mission with full Ambassador was opened in Kampala. Similarly, Uganda opened an Embassy in Jeddah and an Army Officer Lt. Col. Musa Ayega was appointed as ambassador. Records at the Embassy which this researcher has seen show that the activities of Uganda Embassy in Saudi Arabia were being funded

by the Saudi Government. This practice went on until Idi Amin was deposed in 1979.

Saudi Arabia pledged to contribute to the construction of the National mosque at old Kampala hill which Amin had donated to Muslims. It further constructed a Muslim Teachers training College at Kibuli hill in Kampala suburbs and donated funds for the construction of 24 convert centres which would also act as dispensaries in each of the 21 districts at the time. According to Hajj Mufanjara, the former Secretary General of Uganda Muslim Supreme Council the beneficiaries of the donation, whom this researcher interviewed an agreement was signed with a Sudanese-based construction company Concorp to construct the National Mosque as well as the said centres and partial payment was made to the company but owing the war that deposed Amin the Company never fulfilled its part of the bargain⁷. Other assistance in form of budget support and developmental projects were advanced to Uganda from different sources in Saudi Arabia.

The relations between Amin and King Faisal remained warm until the latter passed away in 1975. Amin was among the few Heads of State that attended the funeral of King Faisal. This is not usually easy due to the fact that the Saudi government strictly observes the religious customs of burying the dead immediately and without elaborate ceremonies even when the dead is a King. It is therefore always close leaders and family members that participate in the funeral of Kings in Saudi Arabia.

⁷ The interview was conducted on phone on 14 April 2010.

Faisal's successors namely King Khalid and King Fahad continued their support to Uganda and eventually offered Amin political asylum in Jeddah where he died in 2002.

Conclusion:

The introduction of the Islamic element in Uganda's foreign policy by Idi Amin may have been inspired by Amin's survival instincts or it may have been a move by a shrewd leader who knew how to play existing allies to the limit and then finding potential replacements before antagonizing current friends as put by (Gitelson, 1972) or just a sincere desire by a Muslim leader to cooperate with his co-religionists. What is not in dispute however is that this action has left an indelible mark on Uganda's foreign policy landscape.

It should be pointed out that the efforts by Amin to turn Uganda into an Islamic state adversely affected the Muslim Community in the short run as we will see in the next part. Ordinary people reached a point where they could not differentiate between Amin's repressive policies and Islam despite the fact that some Muslims were equally affected by these policies. A number of prominent Muslims such as Shaban Nkutu, a former Minister in Obote's government were murdered while others such as Sheikh Abudu Obeid Kamulegeya, a prominent cleric and Hajj Aziz Kalungi Kasujja, former General Manager of the Libyan Bank were detained and put in prison without trial. They were released only after the fall of Idi Amin.

Some far-sighted Muslim Leaders such as Prince Badru Kakungulu moved very fast to ease this tension between non Muslims and Muslims by contacting leaders of other denominations and explaining to them that the Muslim community in Uganda was not part of Amin's policies nor did they approve them. In fact,

Kasozi claims that Sheikh Silman Matovu, the Head of the Muslim community in Uganda was relieved of his duties as Chief Kadhi because he confronted Amin to explain the death of Archbishop Janan Luwum who is widely believed to be murdered by Amin along with three Cabinet Ministers. Later on, the Chief Kadhi himself was to escape a suspicious motor accident after which he retired to Mombasa, Kenya (Kasozi, 1996). The tension that was building threatened to stir old memories of religious wars in Uganda and was only eased by the cooperation and understanding of decent leaders such as the Late Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga of the Catholic Church and Bishop Dunstan Nsubuga of the Anglican Church.

In the long run however, Amin's policies delivered the Muslims from the political oblivion where they had been put after their defeat during the religious wars 1880s and the coming of European colonialist who further suppressed the Muslim by denying them education. Some Muslims especially the elite among them sought to take advantage of the favourable environment without compromising the social justice in the country or abetting Amin's atrocities.

Muslims today, are a factor in Uganda's politics and no politician or political party can afford to ignore them. The joining of the OIC and the establishment of the Islamic University in Uganda are listed as some of the positive results that came out of Amin's otherwise reckless policies.

CHAPTER FOUR

POST-IDI AMIN ERA

Introduction:

Idi Amin's regime fell in 1979 after nine months of a protracted war between a joint force of Tanzanian People's Defence Forces (TPDF) and Ugandan exiles on one hand and Uganda Army on the other (Nayenga et al, 1984). He fled to Libya where according to Alistaire (undated) lived for about ten years before he finally relocated Saudi Arabia where he died in 2003.

This part of the paper will examine the relations between Uganda and the Arab world with emphasis on Saudi Arabia during post-Idi Amin era.

Relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia in the period from 1979-1985

Virtually all Arab countries had maintained good relations with Idi Amin his human rights violations and sometimes outrageously embarrassing outbursts on a number of international issues notwithstanding. He crossed the redline in his stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict when, in a letter addressed to the UN Secretary General, he expressed his admiration for Hitler for having killed the Jews during World War II (Ibingira, 1980). Arabs have always prided themselves for not being anti-Semitic. They argue that they, themselves, are Semites so they cannot be anti-themselves. However, continuing to work with a leader who had reached that level in anti-Semitic sentiments to the extent of committing soldiers to fight for him, as Libya did, cast them in a negative light, to say the least.

Having shouldered Amin's government for a better part of his reign, it was natural that relations between the Arab countries and Uganda reached their lowest in the period following the fall of Idi Amin. They had lost an ally and a promoter of their cause. A number of factors however also contributed to this state of affairs. The majority of Arabs as we know are Muslims and according to Kasozi "The

majority of exiles who “liberated” Uganda from Amin’s rule perceived that Islam was one of the factors that had brought chaos in the land of their birth” (Kasozi, 1996, p. 211). This perception on the part of the triumph Army might have contributed to the coldness with which Arab countries received the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) the government that took power in the aftermath of Amin’s fall. To compound the situation, the first person that was selected to be President was Yusuf Kironde Lule, a Christian convert from Islam. While Kasozi thinks this was a good thing for Muslims, according to him “Lule was not a denominator in the anti-Islamic attitudes either before or after his fall. Family considerations were believed to draw his sympathies to the Muslim plight” (Kasozi, 1996, p.226) Kiyimba (1990, p. 4) has a contrary view. He describes President Lule as “a man who had converted from Islam, and saw little value in Muslim life” (Kiyimba, 1990, p. 4). Whatever the case may be, the majority of Arabs must have held the latter view considering their attitude towards conversion.

The massacre of Muslims in the areas liberated by Tanzanian Forces before the fall of Kampala must have removed any doubt that the liberating forces were out to take their vengeance on Muslims (Kasozi, 1996), (Kiyimba, 1990).

Consequently, Arab countries which had Embassies in Kampala closed them and fled the raging war but some of them such as Saudi Arabia and Libya did not immediately re-open their Embassies even when the war was over and relative stability had been restored as other Embassies did. It was not until about twenty years later that Saudi Arabia re-opened its Mission in Kampala. This was so despite the fact that Uganda had maintained its Mission in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia albeit at the level of Charge d’Affaires.

Reports of massacres of Muslims especially in the western part of the country irked the Saudi authorities especially the religious establishment. Uganda was placed on the list of countries persecuting Muslims and as late as 1983 when this writer first traveled to the Arab world Uganda was still being cited as an example in mosques around Saudi Arabia and Kuwait where Muslims needed their fellow Muslims' prayers and assistance for they were being persecuted⁸.

It is true that Muslims in Uganda went through a tough period after the fall of Idi Amin. Some people including elites failed to distinguish between Amin's policies and Islam. The leadership also did little to help the situation. When on 23rd May 1979, the leader of the Muslim community then, the late Sheikh Kassim Mulumba proclaimed over the radio that the liberation meant nothing to Muslims in reference to the killings and harassment they were still facing in various parts of the country especially in the western part, President Yusuf Lule was not amused, he is reported to have responded that reports were extremely exaggerated. (Kiyimba, 1990) as if even a single Muslim deserved to die in the way they did. Another leader was even blunter while responding to criticism leveled against the government for its failure to bring the 1979 killers to justice he said "We cannot bring them back to life. Can we?" (Kiyimba, 1990 p. 14).

However, the fall of the government of President Yusufu Lule slightly after two months in office revealed the deep divisions among the liberators. This event antagonized the general population and reawakened the old social differences in Ugandan society. But it was, at the same time, a blessing in disguise for the

⁸ This researcher writer went to Kuwait to pursue a course in Arabic language in 1983. Trips would also be organized by the college during short holidays for students to visit the Holy place in Saudi Arabia. Throughout this period every Ugandan in the region would always be confronted with inquiries on how Muslims were fairing in light the widely reported persecutions.

Muslim community not because the government was anti-Muslims per se but Muslims were no longer the focus of blame and criticism for whatever had gone wrong in the country (Kasozi, 1996). Subsequent governments especially the one that followed the fall of Yusuf Lule, were more concerned about keeping themselves in power than going after the Muslims.

It would therefore appear that some Muslims especially those who had contacts in the Arab world kept the image of a persecuted Muslim community for a little longer than necessary for their selfish interests. They thronged Saudi Arabia and the gulf countries with all sorts of projects real and imaginary which always attracted donors out of sympathy and solidarity with Uganda Muslims who were being 'persecuted' by the authorities. With no diplomatic representation in Uganda, Arabs especially Saudis had no way of getting the real picture of what was happening in Uganda. The anti-Amin rhetoric that was still dominating the airwaves in Uganda and the stories of those who wanted to extract aid left many Arabs especially Saudis with no choice but to believe that Muslims were still the subject of persecution and man hunting.

The presence of Idi Amin in Saudi Arabia was also a factor as the authorities in Uganda had a near phobia for him and always viewed him as a threat.

The fact that Saudi Arabia kept Amin out of politics and did not allow him to engage in any kind of anti-Kampala activities at least not openly (The Monitor, 2003) was not acknowledged by the authorities in Kampala. Had he continued to live in Libya or Sudan, it is most likely that the situation might have been different. The security situation that Uganda experienced in the aftermath of Idi Amin would have been more complicated had Amin thrown his weight behind it.

The Saudi government, in its usual manner of handling things quietly, ignored the successive governments that took over after Idi Amin and did not bother to make any overtures to improve relations if for the sake of the Muslim community.

By acting in this manner, Saudi Arabia once again exhibited its religious stance in its relations with African states in respect of Uganda. The Islamic Affairs' department which handles Muslim minorities issues and Muslim NGO affairs in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to take interest in Uganda instead of the mainstream Department of African Affairs and Saudi charity organizations increased their activities and increased aid to the Muslim community either directly or through indigenous local Muslim NGOs⁹. Bilateral relations in other fields such the financial aid that Saudi Arabia used to extend to Uganda under Idi Amin were put on hold. In the meantime, disagreements among the various groups that constituted the government in Kampala as per Moshi Conference escalated¹⁰.

President Godfrey Binaisa that had succeeded Prof. Lule as President also faced the same accusations as his predecessor of wanting to entrench himself in power at the expense of other groups and was overthrown after only a few months in office paving a way for general elections in 1980 which propelled Milton Obote in power for the second time.

⁹ The documents that this writer has seen at the Embassy of Uganda indicate that as late as the late 1980s and early 1990s Amb. Prof. Badru Kateregga was still being summoned by the said Department in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to protest the plight of Muslims in Uganda. Prof. Kateregga's frustration is clear from the reports about such unwarranted and unsubstantiated allegations of government's involvement in Muslim affairs

¹⁰ Moshi Conference refers to the meeting that took place in the Northern Tanzanian town of Moshi among Ugandans groups that were opposed to Amin. 28 groups were represented at the meeting that formed Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) with a military wing known as Uganda National Liberation Army. This body took up power from Idi Amin but soon the body disintegrated with each group accusing the other of deviating from what they called the Moshi spirit.

Obote knew the importance of foreign relations, and given an uphill task that his government faced in achieving recovery for the country he appreciated the role of foreign countries and he did not want to take any chances in this regard. He therefore retained the foreign affairs Ministry docket in addition to that of Finance. He sought to lure the Saudis back into Uganda's affairs by inviting them to reconcile the Muslim warring factions. He also allowed Saudi NGOs such as Muslim World League (MWL) and the International Islamic relief Organisation (IIRO) to resume their activities in the country.

The former later played a leading role in the reconciliation exercise of the Muslim factions. It further acted as the de facto Saudi Embassy in Uganda always compiling situation reports which usually found their way to the Saudi Foreign Ministry through the Department of Islamic Affairs mentioned earlier in this paper. Through their NGOs, the Saudis concentrated on propagation of Islam and extending various forms of assistance to Muslims ranging from constructing mosques to sponsoring religious teachers in schools. MWL would also organize refresher courses for Islamic teachers after which they would under exams and those who passed would be put on the pay roll and start receiving monthly allowance through the office.

No high level visits by either government during the period referred to in Uganda as the Obote II period (that is from 1980-1985) were registered nor were there any cooperation in economic or cultural fields. All that is there are some projects directed especially to the Muslims carried out by NGOs from Saudi Arabia. During this period, the Saudi-based MWL was acting as an observer of the implementation of the settlement they had helped to secure among the warring Muslim factions. At the same time, Saudi universities through the MWL offices in

Kampala and through Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, especially the Islamic University in Medina continued to offer scholarships to Ugandan Muslim students to go and study Islam.

The relations during the NRM Government 1986 up to date:

The coming to power by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986 after five years of protracted war against the Obote government created some hope both within and outside that Uganda would at long last see some peace. The statement made by its leader President Yoweri Museveni that theirs was not a mere change of guards but “a fundamental change” (Museveni and Kanyogonya, 2000 p. 3) served to raise people’s expectations from the regime.

Indeed the NRM inherited a country in shambles in all spheres and they needed the cooperation and understanding of everybody if it were to reverse this state of affairs. Among the many problems it faced was a divided Muslim community whose feuds sometimes caused loss of life and destruction of property as it happened in March 1991 when four policemen and one civilian were killed when a group of Muslim youth seized a mosque at old Kampala (Mamdani, 1994) thus disrupting peace and stability ushered in by government.

Once again the handling of the Muslim community in Uganda was to shape the relations between the new NRM government and Saudi Arabia because as observed elsewhere in this paper and as Kayunga observes “major foreign objectives of many of the Arab Countries towards third World countries is to promote the spread of Islam and protect Muslim minorities against state persecution” (Mamdani, 1994, p. 344).

At first NRM government made efforts of its own to reconcile the Muslim warring factions. These included the meeting of the then External Security Chief (ESO) Col. Kahinda Otafiire of a number of Muslim interest groups to try and find a settlement for the conflict. In addition, President Yoweri Museveni appointed a reconciliation Committee which later came to be known as the Implementation Committee headed by Prof. George Kanyeihamba, the former Attorney General to look into the question of leadership among the Muslim community and advise government on the course of action.

The motive behind all these efforts apart from the disruption of peace and stability cited above was the enormous pressure that was being exerted on President Museveni by the influential Saudi-based MWL to do something about the leadership crisis within the Muslim community (cited in Mamdani, 1993).

One of the factions that were close to the World Muslim League had reportedly been accusing the government among Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that NRM was dividing the Muslims (cited in Mamdani, 1993). Apparently, these accusations were picked upon by the Saudi government because, as we observed earlier, the World Muslim League was the de facto Saudi Embassy in Kampala. So the chances of NRM ever getting the much needed financial assistance from Saudi Arabia were very slim hence the efforts by the government to see the problem solved as soon as possible. In fact, the leader of one the rival faction Sheikh Saad Luwemba is reported to have hinted on this motive of the government when he said during Eid Adhuha celebrations that “ Islam in Uganda is being mortgaged for the petro dollars” (Cited in Mamdani, 1993).

Determined to exonerate itself from the accusations that it was responsible for dividing the Muslims, the NRM government officials made trips to Saudi Arabia

and other Gulf countries and invited the relevant authorities in those countries to take part in the efforts it was making to reconcile Muslims. These countries responded by sending a high-powered delegation to the Muslim Unity Conference which met in the western town of Mbarara under the Chairmanship of Prof. George Kanyeihamba and attended by representatives of MWL, IIRO, OIC among others. (Kanyeihamba, 1998 p. 37)¹¹.

These efforts however did little to clear the name of the NRM government in the eyes of the Arab world partly due to the sudden and strange decision by the government to stop the reconciliation efforts mid-way and to ignore the recommendations of the Implementation Committee it had itself set-up under the chairmanship of Prof. George Kanyeihamba. In his narration of his experience of the exercise, Professor Kanyeihamba describes his disappointment at the indecisiveness of the government at this critical moment and predicts a number of dire consequences of this decision such as radicalization of some of the Muslim Youth some of who took up arms to fight the government and the people of Uganda (Kanyeihamba, 1998). What Prof. Kanyeihamba did not know however was that the Saudi government had found a reason to continue giving a cold shoulder to several overtures made by Uganda Government for improved relations.

Despite the fact that the NRM upgraded its representation in Riyadh way back in 1986 to the level of Ambassador, Saudi Arabia did not even move to re-open its Mission in Kampala. It continued to handle matters through its Embassy in Nairobi and informally through Muslim world League Office in Kampala. Efforts to

¹¹ This researcher, as an undergraduate student at the Islamic University in Uganda, was privileged to take part in this Conference as an Arabic Interpreter.

convince Saudi Arabia to re-open its Embassy in Kampala in the period since the coming to power by the NRM until the late 1990s were in vain.

This was disturbing to the Ugandan government which tried all means to get Saudi Arabia restore full relations. This was important for Uganda because it was aware, as we mentioned that Saudi Arabia had significant influence on other Arab countries especially members of the Gulf Cooperation council (GCC). Government agents discovered this fact when they travelled to the Arab world in their reconciliation efforts between the Muslim factions. In my conversation with Dr. Kisuule, the Assistant Director of Muslim World League Office in Kampala at the time and current Uganda's Ambassador to Iran he had this to say "the members of Uganda government travelled to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to seek support for their reconciliation efforts without informing us. When they reached Saudi Arabia however, our Head Office called us and asked us if we are aware of their Mission. We told them we had heard about it but we were not formerly informed. From then onwards, everywhere they went they were referred back to our office".¹²

Rabita office as Muslim World League is known in Kampala, was to play a central role in the reconciliation efforts. Prof. Kanyeihamba speaks highly of MWL office and its Uganda Director Dr. Kisuule during and after the unity conference. (Kanyeihamba, 1998 p. 112).

It would appear that the realization of the influence of Muslim World League compelled the government to enlist the support of its Uganda Director Dr. Kisuule to join the government. In 1997, he was appointed Uganda's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. His brief was ensure improved relations with Saudi Arabia and

¹² Interview with Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Kisuule, Uganda's ambassador to Iran conducted in September 2009.

counter the smear campaign prevalent in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region that Uganda was dividing Muslims. Ironically, As Assistant Director of Muslim World League Office in Kampala and as a strong supporter of the faction that was not recognized by government, Dr. Kisuule most likely had contributed to this campaign.

Given the above facts, whether or not Dr. Kisuule was the right choice for the job is still debatable. What is certain however that Dr. Kisuule is made some achievements while Uganda's Ambassador in Saudi Arabia in the period from 1997-2005. Notable among these, is that Saudi Arabia, finally, agreed to re-open its embassy in Kampala in 1998 at the level of Charge d'affaires and went on to upgrade it to the level of Ambassador in 2000. With the re-opening of the Embassy, the Saudi activities in Uganda increased albeit in the Islamic related fields. A modern building named after King Fahd worth US\$ 7m was built in Kampala as an endowment for the Islamic University in Uganda. The ease with which people were issued with visas led to the increase in the number of pilgrims to Mecca.

Interaction at government level, however remained minimal and efforts started by Dr. Kisuule to have president Yoweri Museveni visit Riyadh have not come to fruition up to date. No cooperation agreement has been signed despite great efforts in this direction by the Ugandan government. President Yoweri Museveni has gone out of his way to meet with Saudi prospective investors (The Monitor, 2007) including the Saudi tycoon Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal to whom he allocated 15 acre prime land in the middle of the city Kampala to construct a 5-star hotel, Saudis have not shown much enthusiasm in investing in Uganda. The Prince is reported to have sold the land instead citing the financial crisis (Anon, 2008).

The highest ranking Saudi Official that has ever visited Uganda since the fall of Idi Amin was the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Dawa and Guidance, Sheikh Saleh bin Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh who, in 2002, represented the Saudi Monarch at the opening of King Fahad Plaza. Even the choice of the representative is telling as to the terms in which Saudi Arabia viewed its relations with Uganda (Al-Omeiri, 2002).

One can venture an explanation why the relations between Uganda under the NRM government and Saudi Arabia have remained rather cold despite the efforts mentioned at least on the part of Uganda.

To begin with, Saudi Arabia was not overly excited, like many countries in the African region and in the West, by the coming into power of the NRM government. After all, the leader of the movement President Yoweri Museveni was one of those who had actively participated in fighting Idi Amin through his Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) (Golooba, 2008). Apparently, the Saudis still held the view that Amin was fought because of his religion.

President Museveni's outspoken criticism of Amin's misrule did not help the situation. Museveni never lost an opportunity to condemn Idi Amin and blame him for many of the problems that Uganda went through even in the presence of the Saudi officials as he did during the inauguration of King Fahad Plaza to which the Saudi Monarch had sent a Special Envoy to represent him. Obviously, the Saudis who provided sanctuary for Amin at the time must have been offended. Such issues should have been discussed bilaterally behind closed doors instead of raising them at functions where the Saudis officiated. After all Uganda had never requested Saudi Arabia to extradite Amin because he was never tried and convicted by any court of law despite the numerous crimes he is alleged to have committed. Government

officials occasionally lamented that if he returned to Uganda he would face trial. But it is not clear why if the authorities were keen on justice being done; they had to wait for his return (Sserwaniko, 2003).

President Yoweri Museveni's comments after the death of Idi Amin in 2003 tell it all. He is reported to have said "He thought dying in Mecca would make a difference. What will Idi Amin be remembered for. When he was killing people, did he think he was immortal?" (Etengu and Otim, 2003).

In addition, the worsening relations between Uganda and the Sudan in the late 1990s and early 2000 also contributed to the animosity between the NRM government and Arab countries Saudi Arabia included. The Islamist government in Sudan used religion to mobilise support from its fellow Arab countries. Museveni who was a strong supporter of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) partly because of his friendship with its leaders the Late Col. John Garang whom they had studied together at Dar es Salaam University in the 1960s was portrayed as part of the conspiracy in the fight against Islam in the Sudan. This view was amply hyped thanks to the big Sudanese community in the Gulf where they had significant number of journalists working in the media sector. The only three Ugandan Embassies in the Middle East then i.e. in Tripoli, Cairo and Riyadh were unable to counter this massive Sudanese campaign.

Moreover, Prince Saud Al-Faisal who has been at the helm of the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs thus having a big say in the kingdom's foreign policy happens to be a son to the late King Faisal who, as we saw elsewhere in the paper, had developed close friendship with Amin. One cannot rule out personal feelings against the enemies of the person considered to be a family friend of the Minister.

One can add the fact that Saudi Arabia with its vast oil resources and a bastion of the Western powers not least the US, a small and relatively under-developed country like Uganda was of little concern to her. Once it made sure that the Muslim community was safe and this they did through their NGOs and later through their Embassy in Kampala restoring relations with Uganda might not have been their priority.

Conclusion:

As we have seen there was slight improvement in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Uganda during the NRM government manifested in Saudi active involvement in the Muslim affairs and the re-opening of the Saudi Embassy in Kampala. Moreover, some few projects such as the King Fahad Plaza and the Islamic University in Uganda were established. Limited exchange of visits took place but not at the level of Heads of State. We have also seen that these relations were largely shaped by the way the government in Uganda handled issues concerning the Muslims be it the Muslim leadership conflict or its dealing with the SPLA.

Though the presence of Idi Amin in Saudi Arabia was not an issue on the part of the Ugandan government since no efforts were made to have him extradited, frequent reference to his sins during public functions by President Museveni was apparently a source of discomfort to Saudi authorities. With Idi Amin out the picture however, and with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPLA and the government of Sudan, one would hope that impediments in the improved relation between Uganda and Saudi Arabia will greatly be reduced and that the time is ripe for the two countries to seize the diplomatic moment and work on their relations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Chapter one of this paper gave an overview of the role played by religion in the formation of the Saudi state and in defining its society. The domestic policy that is grounded in the religious teachings was examined. Many official and semi-official agencies of a religious nature whose running is charged on public funds were discussed. The chapter went on to discuss how this policy has impacted on Saudi foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Sub-Sahara Africa in various fields were examined.

The activities of Saudi charity organizations in Africa were highlighted and it was evident that they mainly focused on religious activities. Furthermore, the projects executed by these organizations on behalf of Saudi government were also found to be directed towards Muslims communities only. This chapter also showed that whatever relations that are there they it political, economic or cultural are one sided with Saudi playing the patronizing role over Sub-Sahara African countries. In the economic field, there is no trade between the two sides to write home about. On cultural matters, Africa is also on the receiving end. While many Saudi text books have found their way into schools in Africa, no Saudi University, for example has a department of African languages or studies.

Chapter two of the paper sought to examine how Sub-Saharan countries have reacted to the Saudi foreign policy which is heavily premised on religious principals. In doing so the chapter tried to sketch the influence of Islam in Africa which would inevitably define the reaction to the Saudi foreign policy. Colonial attempts to alleviate the influence of Islam were discussed. The African journey in rediscovering its identity after the departure of the colonial powers was highlighted. While some countries were inward looking preferring regional and continental integration other countries such as Mali and Senegal looked beyond the continent and sought to cooperate with their co-religionist in the Arab world winning a bigger share of Saudi aid in the process. The chapter however showed that even in the case of these countries, no significant political, military or economic cooperation existed. An example of Senegal was given where there is much hype about good relations with Saudi Arabia. It was noted that despite these good relations, Saudi Monarchs have snubbed the only important OIC Summits held in that part of Africa.

Uganda's foreign policy after independence in 1962 was found to lean toward regional integration and Pan-Africanism. This policy earned it the wrath of Britain and Israel leading to the overthrow of the first post-independence government to usher in the era of Idi Amin who changed the landscape of Uganda's foreign policy by becoming pro-Arab causes than Arabs themselves.

Chapter three of the paper dealt with Uganda as the case study. It discussed Amin's ascendance to power in 1971 and the drastic change he caused on Uganda's foreign policy landscape. His abandonment of the regional integration considered vital due to the country land-lockedness and dependence on its neighbours in the transportation of its imports and exports and going into conflict with the other two member countries of the East African Community i.e. Kenya and Tanzania was one of the examples of this change in foreign

policy. His attempts to Islamize Uganda which were occasioned by brutality and gross violation of human rights were discussed at length.

The efforts to turn Uganda into an Islamic country and his turning against Israel endeared him to Arab countries especially Libya and Saudi Arabia. While many countries were distancing themselves from Amin's regime due to many atrocities and human rights abuses, Saudi Arabia consolidated its cooperation with him and shouldered his regime up to the end. Eventually, it granted him political asylum ignoring the outcry of the international community of the need for him to face justice. Amin's regime and his closeness to Saudi Arabia is perhaps the best testimony of the extent to which religion dictates Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Africa. Before Idi Amin there were no relations whatsoever between Uganda and Saudi Arabia. Within a year of his coming to power however, Uganda relations with Saudi Arabia improved tremendously and Uganda was among the few countries in Sub-Sahara Africa to be visited by King Faisal in 1973. The only thing that had changed in Uganda then was the fact that Uganda had got a Muslim leader who was committed to advancing the cause of Islam in his country.

Chapter four examined the relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia during the period from the fall of Idi Amin up to date. Sincere efforts by successive Ugandan governments have been ignored by Saudi Arabia. It has instead preferred to concern itself with Muslim affairs acting as a mediator in the perennial leadership crisis among the Muslim community in Uganda through the powerful Muslim World League.

A number of reasons for the cold-relations between Uganda and Saudi Arabia were given. These included religious reasons, reasons connected to Idi Amin leaving in Saudi Arabia and the fact that Saudi policies have hardly changed in many years since the person at the apex of the Foreign Ministry in that country has been there for over 30 years. Throughout the paper, religion has come out clearly as the main factor determining Saudi relations with

Sub-Saharan Africa. The example of Uganda where relations suddenly flourished following Idi Amin's take over and going cold immediately after his fall from power for over 30 years now brought out this element quite clearly.

My argument however, is that this state of affairs is not helpful for either side. There is a lot to gain for both sides if relations were broader and deeper than they are now. It is in this context that I think the following observations and recommendations are pertinent and deserve a consideration by policy makers in both Saudi Arabia and Sub-Saharan in general and Uganda in particular:

- Focusing on Muslims and Muslim affairs on the part of Saudi Arabia in its dealing with African countries may, in the long run, be counterproductive. At best, such a policy casts Saudi Arabia as an archaic theocratic state while it would like to be viewed as a modern state actively playing its rightful role in the international community. At worst, with the proliferation of terrorist groups claiming to advance the cause of Islam, such a policy may give a pretext to those who accuse Saudi Arabia of abetting the actions of such groups.
- Even if the objective of Saudi Arabia was to spread the message of Islam, it is difficult to see how this can be achieved by excluding the would-be converts to the religion. It is known that the spread of Islam in Africa, at least in Eastern part, was not by conquering but through traders who through interaction with the local people managed to attract converts to Islam. If those early traders had kept to themselves, most likely today there would be no Islam in East Africa.
- In light of the growing importance of Africa as a destination for investment, it is in the interest of Saudi Arabia to utilize its proximity, the historical and cultural bonds with Africa and take advantage of this instead of leaving China and India to come all the way from Far East to exploit these emerging opportunities.

- The discovery of oil deposits in a number of Sub-Saharan countries such as Uganda means that these countries may soon be members of the Organisation of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC) beside Saudi Arabia. Building meaningful relations with these countries can therefore; help in maintaining stability of oil prices a commodity that is the lifeline of the Saudi economy.
- With raising food prices around the world Saudi Arabia will, no doubt, face the challenge of ensuring food security for its growing population. With no chance of ever being self-sufficient as far as food production is concerned, Saudi Arabia needs Sub-Saharan Africa where large tracks of arable land lie unutilized due to lack of capital and infrastructure. Investing in agriculture in Africa by Saudi Arabia would be beneficial to both Africans and Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia may also be better advised to consider forging cooperation in military and security matters with Sub-Sahara African countries if to secure the trade route on the Indian Ocean and fight the rising threat of terrorist groups in Somalia and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa. These two issues are of concern to Saudi Arabia whose cargo ships have been seized in the area by pirates while terrorist groups are connected to it.
- On the other hand, African countries need to take responsibilities of their citizens and cater for their welfare without discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnic group. It is this marginalization on the part of African governments for Muslim communities which has led Muslims to pay more allegiance to Saudi Arabia than they do their own countries.
- African countries also need to address issues of governance, peace and stability in order to earn the respect and confidence of other countries including Saudi Arabia and attract investments from them.
- There is also need for Sub-Saharan African countries to set their priorities and engage the Saudis in meaningful relations basing on those priorities instead of accepting whatever is thrown to them.

- Integration efforts by the various economic blocks such as The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The Southern African Development Community (SADC), The East African Community (EAC) and The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) should be accelerated in order to create viable markets that would be attractive to the business community in Saudi Arabia and act as an incentive for them to do business. Such blocks could also consider concluding cooperation agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC (TPS-OIC) where Saudi Arabia plays a vital role to leverage on the facilities offered by those entities in the area of trade and trade finance.
- Sub-Saharan African countries need to carry out, individually or collectively, massive promotion campaign to showcase their potential in the areas of tourism, trade and investment. The perception of the Saudis and the people in the Gulf of Africans is that of malnourished, poor and savage people. This perception needs to change if meaningful interaction is to take place.
- Infrastructure development, legislative reform and balanced agricultural policies in Sub-Saharan Africa should be given a priority for it to be able to create a conducive environment for doing business. The high cost of doing business in many of Sub-Saharan African owing to lack of infrastructure and amenities such as electricity, water and roads does not encourage investors and business people from the Gulf region to do business in Africa.
- Sub-Saharan Africa should help its relatively skilled human resource by providing tailor-made training and send them to the Gulf thereby reducing unemployment levels and benefiting from remittances sent by such people. The Gulf region especially Saudi Arabia is one the regions that that import labour on a large scale due to the numerous

development projects. Asian countries such Philippines with little in common with the Gulf people are currently taking advantage of this to the maximum.

- Finally, there ought to be mechanisms at government level such as permanent Commissions to follow-up and propose ways of improving the relations between Sub-Saharan countries and Saudi Arabia instead of depending on Saudi Charity organizations to make such follow-ups. Government to government interface is crucial if relations between the two sides are to be taken to another level.

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