

The Shadowy Dealings of the Chagoury Brothers in American Politics

Jason Higgins

Summary: The Chagoury brothers, Gilbert and Roger, two Nigerian businessmen, have for the last several years been quiet and major financial supporters of the Clinton Foundation with Gilbert appearing near the top of the donor list in 2008 as a \$1 million to \$5 million contributor¹. The relationship between the Clintons and the Chagoury brothers are close enough that in 2013 former U.S. President Bill Clinton attended the opening of the first phase of one of their giant real estate projects in Lagos called the "Dubai of Africa" Elko Atlantic². Given both the amount of money and the extent of relations with well-connected American political players, it is obvious that the Chagoury brothers have an influence within the greater American political spectrum.

Take Away: Gilbert and Ronald Chagoury are at the head of a financial empire in Nigeria. The Chagoury brothers, originating from Miziara in northern Lebanon, grew up in Nigeria where their parents (Ramez and Alice) had emigrated in the 1940s. The two businessmen have, however, kept strong ties with Lebanon, investing millions of dollars in infrastructure projects and several hospitals in the country. Their company, Chagoury Group, covers areas as diverse as milling, mineral water, construction, and hostelry. Today this group is represented by investments, not only in Africa, but also in Europe and America. Gilbert Chagoury has also served as Ambassador of Saint Lucia (Caribbean) to the United Nations in Geneva and the Vatican³.

However, they have also been embroiled in more nefarious dealings. Gilbert Chagoury was a one-time adviser to the late Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha. Years after Abacha's death, top Nigerian anti-corruption prosecutor says that Chagoury was a kingpin in the corruption that defined Abacha's regime. Chagoury was among the last of the all-powerful middlemen who served the heads of oil-rich African states. Chagoury was also the gatekeeper to Abacha's presidency⁴.

The Lebanese brothers played a prominent role in helping the Abacha family stash billions of stolen state cash in foreign banks. The money — estimated at more than \$4 billion — was concealed in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, and the Isle of Jersey in the names of dozens of individuals and companies. Investigators argue that it was Chagoury who vouched for

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/bribe/2010/01/nigeria-chasing-the-ghosts-of-a-corrupt-regime.html>

² <http://www.ulcm.org/news/emigration-news/2013/02/27/chagoury-brothers-launch-eko-atlantic-in-nigeria>

³ <http://www.ulcm.org/news/emigration-news/2013/02/27/chagoury-brothers-launch-eko-atlantic-in-nigeria>

⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/bribe/2010/01/nigeria-chasing-the-ghosts-of-a-corrupt-regime.html>

Abacha's sons at banks where the source of their assets might otherwise have been questioned. Indeed, Chagoury's Swiss attorney, Luc Argand, said his client served as a reference for Abacha's sons at Credit Suisse.

In 2000, Chagoury was convicted in Geneva, Switzerland, of laundering money and aiding a criminal organization in connection with the billions of dollars stolen from Nigeria during the Abacha years. Chagoury denies any involvement in the Halliburton bribery case, but his name surfaced in notes taken by one of the indictees⁵.

Sani Abacha was a military ruler of Nigeria from 1993 to 1998. During that time, he dissolved all civilian democratic institutions at national and state levels and replaced government and elected officials with military officers. A provisional ruling council of senior army officers, of which he was chairman, was formed. Unofficial political parties and any form of political opposition were suppressed including the pro-democracy movement of the National Democratic Coalition. The new and as yet unimplemented constitution crafted in 1989 was abandoned.

Abacha's regime enforced its rule through the arrest, imprisonment and execution of dissenters, press censorship and the development of a police state. Amongst the more notable individuals detained by the regime were Chief Abiola, the would-be head of state who died in prison in July 1998; former head of state Olusegun Obasanjo and environmentalist and journalist Ken Saro-Wiwa who was executed in 1995 despite intense international demand for his release. Saro-Wiwa, who objected to the government's oil policies, was killed with eight other Ogoni colleagues from Nigeria's oil rich region. Abacha's control of the army was maintained by purging army officers. A former vice president and army officer, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, was also to die, in prison, in 1997.

Conservative identifiers: The connections the Clintons have with the Chagoury brothers could prove detrimental during this current presidential election. This is especially true given that these connections go back many years. Chagoury has been a supporter of Bill and Hillary Clinton since the 1990s (when Abacha was in power); funding their election campaigns and continuing as a major donor to the Clinton Foundation.

What is even more damaging is the accusation being roundly reported in the African press about how the Chagoury brothers used their ties with the Clinton Family to moderate FBI and CIA recommendations for the U.S. to label Boko Haram a terror group in order to continue without a hitch his international business in Nigeria at the expense of innocent human lives wasted by the terror group.

U.S. Senator David Vitter (R-La.) is pushing the U.S. State Department to turn over former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's records from her private email domain related to the State Department's decision against designating Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization

⁵ <http://scannewsnigeria.com/featured-post/tinubu-takes-the-notorious-chagoury-brothers-to-buhari-for-a-closed-door/>

⁶ <http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=414&lang=en>

(FTO). Vitter has previously questioned Secretary Clinton's ties to foreign donors including a major Nigerian land developer, Gilbert Chagoury, as to whether he had any influence over the decision against designating Boko Haram an FTO⁷.

Boko Haram started in Nigeria but is now Cameroon's problem too. Boko Haram is the nickname given to the Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad. Since pledging allegiance to Daesh (also known as the Islamic State) on 7 March 2015, the group has begun to be referred to in its own and Daesh's propaganda as the Islamic State's West Africa Province.

Initially, Boko Haram mainly attacked prisons and police stations and robbed banks. However, over the course of 2011 and 2012, the group became more indiscriminate in its violence with a spate of bombings. From early 2013, the group began to spread into northern Cameroon as well as some border areas of Chad and Niger. In February, Boko Haram, or splinter group Ansaru, kidnapped French tourists from Cameroon's Far North Region.

Boko Haram launched one of its most high-profile attacks by kidnapping the traditional ruler of the Cameroonian town of Kolofata and the Deputy Prime Minister's wife. In August 2014, Boko Haram had overrun and declared an emirate in Gwoza, a Local Government Area (LGA) on the Cameroonian border. By now, the jihadists control a territory estimated to be the size of Rwanda⁸.

This situation has started to gain notice in the United States. A conservative group is suing the State Department in an effort to find out whether the agency's refusal to place Boko Haram on the terrorist watch list while Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State had anything to do with the fact that a high-level Nigerian official was a major Clinton Foundation donor and close friend of the former president.

Citizens United, a conservative nonprofit organization, brought the case to court after the State Department ignored its request for records about the Chagoury Group, the sprawling Nigerian company headed by a Clinton friend and financial supporter of Clinton causes⁹.

Analytical conclusion: These connections with the Chagoury brothers could prove damaging to Hillary Clinton and her presidential prospects. Even worse, the allegations brought about by these connections may provide a more powerful weapon than previous scandals. Conservative media has not been blind to this. Nor has it vociferously followed the scandal. One might intuit that this connection to the Chagoury brothers, and by extension the questions regarding the jihadi group Boko Haram, is being saved for the eve of the election when it will have the greatest impact.

⁷ <http://www.reportsafrique.com/gilbert-chagoury-the-lebanese-who-has-done-more-evil-to-nigeria-than-good/>

⁸ <http://newafricanmagazine.com/inside-boko-haram/>

⁹ <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/state-department-ignores-lawsuit-over-records-linking-boko-haram-and-clinton-foundation/article/2565784>

However, while conservatives right now might be enticed to capitalize on this by touting it as loudly as possible, in light of recent investigative results, they might want to be cautious in jumping behind such charges. There is a possibility that two things might happen:

One: It will be broken loudly and heavily across conservative media outlets and touted heavily by the Trump campaign somewhere around early to mid-October where it will have time to foment while denying the Democrats time to mount a strong response in time for people to go to the polls.

Two: Given that the more recent scandals have been played off by the Clinton campaign as straw-grasping, expect that the Chagoury scandal will need to be both well-researched and far more focused. The corruption surrounding the Chagoury brothers, and continued investigations by Nigerian officials must center on their relations to the former Nigerian dictator together with some of their other questionable dealings.

What conservatives should be concerned with is that this potential debacle is not lost on Clinton and more than likely a defense is being developed for an immediate response. That response being that these are once again generalized accusations from the 'Right Wing Conspiracy'. This means that in the remaining months to elections, conservatives need to be developing information — not just requesting records from the State Department but also continuing to scrutinize the findings being uncovered in Nigeria where that government is continuing to investigate the Chagourys.

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