

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS
AFRICA: THE CASE STUDIES OF KENYA AND NIGERIA, 1990-2008

by

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Abstract

The researcher acknowledges that Africa occupies a special position in the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America (US). Since Africa has been plagued by poverty, HIV/AIDS, authoritarianism, civil wars and other related ills, it seems to constitute a national security threat to the US. This is evidently seen by the interest that the US shows on the continent especially when it comes to issues of the potential threat of terrorism that the Western powers perceive Africa to pose. It is for this reason that this study looks at the foreign policy of the US towards Africa from the end of the Cold War, 1990 to 2008. It uses the engagement of Washington with Kenya and Nigeria to situate and interpret the US Africa policy within a wider scope. This study is underpinned by both realism and idealism as the major contending theories in the discipline of International Relations.

The US's foreign policy towards Africa is underscored by three main themes: The promotion of democracy and human rights, global peace, economic prosperity and economic security. In this regard, the key actors in the foreign policy making and execution processes in the US are the President, Secretary of State, Congress and other government departments. However, the head of state heralds more power on foreign policy issues. This argument is based on the tenures of office of three recent predecessors of President Barack Obama and their foreign policies on Africa, namely, George Bush Sr., Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

George Bush Sr. presided for two years over the post-Cold War US foreign policy towards Africa and struggled so much to shed the legacy of the policy of containment that was characteristic of the Reagan government that administered immediately before him. The history of the Gulf War mirrors George Bush's obsession with terrorism and it helps to establish continuity of father's policy by the son. In contrast, Bill Clinton's administration was more concerned about the respect of human rights as the cornerstone of the establishment and consolidation of democracy in Africa. On the other hand, the goal of the foreign policy on Africa of George W. Bush's administration was the quest for the control and manipulation of oil production and

distribution, which is tied to the war on terror following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Drawing from the experience of Abuja and Nairobi, this study asserts that the US has identified hegemonic states in Africa that could serve as launching pads for its foreign policy on the continent. The scourge of terrorism has served as a catalyst for America's interest in Kenya while oil has served as a centre of attraction in the case of Nigeria. In spite of all the criticisms levelled against the governments of both Kenya and Nigeria, the US sought to use them to spread democracy in East Africa and West Africa, respectively, with the purpose of sub-contracting the task of preserving its economic and security interests to them. This study argues that in the context of the US foreign policy liberal goals are usually stated than implemented. Support for democracy and human rights in African states is provided when such is consistent with the US national interests and national power.