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# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S POST-1990 FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS WEST AFRICA: THE CASE STUDY OF GHANA

## Abstract

*This explorative study uses Ghana as a test case to critique the post-Cold War foreign policy of the United States of America (hereafter referred to as the US) towards West Africa. It does this by contemporaneously locating the US relationship with Ghana within a historical and regional context. History is crucial in this regard, because the past provides a sound basis for understanding the present and the future. To add, in International Politics, theory holds sway and history is used as a laboratory. In this article, the researchers propose Afrocentricity as an alternative theoretical paradigm crucial in understanding US foreign policy towards Africa in general. As shall be seen, such a paradigm remains critical in highlighting the peculiarity of the US relationship with Ghana. It is envisaged that a deeper understanding of the US foreign policy towards Ghana is achievable when its analysis and interpretation is located within a broader regional (West Africa) and continental (Africa) context. The two central questions that are grappled with in this article are: (i) Why does the US view Ghana as an indispensable political ally in West Africa? (ii) To what extent did Barack Obama's presidency alter the US's foreign policy towards Ghana, West Africa and Africa? To realise the purpose of this study, the researchers rely methodologically on interdisciplinary critical discourse and conversations in their widest form. The critical analysis for this article concludes that the agenda for democratic consolidation and access to oil resources feature as the key drivers of the US foreign policy towards Ghana and West Africa at large. While the US's role in the democratisation of Ghana and other African states is observable, it can be argued that this principle has been merely used as a tool for international morality to justify American imperialism. Oil in West Africa's Ghana is important for the US, both as an economic resource and a strategic energy source during wartime periods. Overall, the "differential" foreign policy towards individual African states is also a significant observation, which dispels the myth of a universal US foreign policy framework.*

**Keywords:** Africa; Afrocentricity; democracy; foreign policy; Ghana; oil; security; United States of America; West Africa.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Afrika; Afrosentrisiteit; demokrasie; buitelandse beleid; Ghana; olie; sekuriteit; Verenigde State van Amerika; Wes-Afrika.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that the United States of America (hereafter referred to as the US) and Britain are traditional Western allies. As such, it is difficult to analyse one of these countries' engagement in Ghana and West Africa without making a reference to the other. On the other hand, the independence of Ghana from Britain in the year 1957 has afforded Accra (the administrative capital of Ghana) a rare opportunity to interact directly with other global players, including the US (Gebe 2008:161–178). Over and above the existing forms of relations between colonies and their metropolises during the colonial era, the engagement between Ghana and Britain, or the US, during this period and beyond, reflected a slave-master relationship. This position should also be understood within the context that, prior to independence, Ghana conducted its international relations through the tutelage of its colonial power, Britain. Since the US never had a colony in Africa, she, for quite some time, relied heavily on London's (the administrative capital of Britain) advice regarding engagement in Ghana and West Africa.

It should be added that, during the independence era, Ghana was not able to effectively alter the structure of its political economy in such a manner that it enabled her to make independent and sustainable policy initiatives and interventions without the influence of the donor community (including Britain and the US). Contextually, the fact that the diplomatic relations between Ghana and the US were established during the independence era, does not suggest that relations between Washington DC (the US administrative capital) and Accra were non-existent during the colonial era. Trade, personal and non-official relations between the Americans and Ghanaians date back to before the establishment of the US between the years 1775 and 1783 (US 2015). However, the engagement of Ghana with the US also manifested itself into a slave-master affair, and it was in fact an extension of the US engagement with Britain. This implies that, during the colonial era, the US mainly dealt with Ghana through Britain.

Flowing from the above, this article seeks to use Afrocentricity as a theoretical lens to analyse the relationship between the US and Ghana in the post-Cold War era. This analysis is done within the context of the US foreign policy (with a regional focus on West Africa), since it largely frames its relationship with those administrations that are either small or weak compared to Washington DC. However, in order to make sense of the current issues informing the relations between the US and Ghana, historical events will be used as reference points to justify the essence and context of the Washington DC praxis with Accra. It is important to point out that the focus of this article does not go beyond the year 2016; the watershed moment which marked the end of Barack Obama's second and last term as the President of the US. It should also be noted that the research findings show that the affair between the US and

Ghana is largely defined through the parameters of Washington DC, due to the unequal power relations between the two countries.

The following section represents an exposition of the article's conceptual and theoretical framework.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION**

Goldstein and Pevehouse (2011:78) explain foreign policy as the strategy that a government uses in its interactions in the international arena. In this article the word "engagement" is used interchangeably with "foreign policy" and it simply denotes the nature of practice and conduct of a country's international affairs in the political, security and socio-economic arena with the intent to protect and preserve its national interests.

Equally important, it is noted that the theories of Realism and Idealism have been overused in the field of International Relations, as compared to the emerging theory of Afrocentricity. This premise should be understood within the context that the roots of the academic discipline of International Relations are traced to the US (McGowan and Nel 2006). While these researchers use Afrocentricity (read as a version of post-colonial theory) in this article, Realism [and Marxism] and Idealism are presented as popular theories in the field of International Relations (Raphala 2017). This should be understood within the context that Afrocentricity – as articulated by Molefi Kete Asante, Ama Mazama, Danjuma Sinue Modupe and Adisa A Alkebulan – admits and embraces the progressive ideas of other frameworks, including Realism and Idealism, while aiming for African development. Adding his voice to the foregoing analysis, Syed H Alatas (as cited by Chilisa 2012:24) concurs that, "no society can develop by inventing everything on its own. When something is found effective and useful, it is desirable that it should be adapted and assimilated, whether it be an artefact or an attitude of mind."

The usefulness of the three theories (Realism, Idealism and Marxism) in the study of foreign policy is documented. But it is quite impossible to indicate which one is more important than the other. While Marxism (also read as economic nationalism) remains an authoritative school of thought in the social sciences, it is argued that its influence on International Relations scholarship have been diluted by Realism. This should be understood within the context of the general belief that Karl Marx had followed realist principles way before critical realism gained the required recognition of a theory within the academic circles (Ehrbar 2013). To this end, post-1990 administrations of George Bush Sr., Bill Clinton, George W Bush Jr. and Obama may have used the aspects of either Realism or Idealism, or the combination of both, in conceiving and executing their various foreign policies towards Africa.

Contextually, Milam (1992) considers Marxism as an off-shoot of Afrocentric research. The alleged repose between Marxism and Afrocentric research downplays the reality that the former (Marxism) has been conceptualised within the European setup and, as such, it tends to simplify or overlook the economic ramifications of White supremacy on non-Whites in Africa and elsewhere (Milam 1992). In challenging and dismissing the universalisation of the fundamental principles of Realism and Idealism, Dunn (2004:149) has unequivocally observed that, "African experiences indicate a far more complicated picture of current international relations". In other words, scholarship on matters that have a bearing on Africa cannot be complete without it benefiting from the lens of African evidence (Dunn 2004).

Categorically, Asante, as cited by Modupe (2003:62–63), conceptualised and explained three elements of the Afrocentric framework as follows:

- Grounding is the process of learning that is centred on the Africans; their history, culture and continent.
- Orientation, "is having and pursuing intellectual interest in the African and the formation of a psychological identity direction, based upon that interest, in the direction toward Africa".
- Perspective denotes self-awareness of viewing and affecting the world in a manner that prioritise the African interests and which is suggestive of the quality, kind and amount of the above mentioned two elements.

Overall, Afrocentricity is used in this article as a mode of analysis which is predominantly African. Its main elements (grounding, orientation and perspective) constitute the analytical categories of Afrocentricity. In contrast, the precepts of main International Relational theories (Realism, Idealism and Marxism) are predominantly Western (Chilisa 2012). In this context, the Afrocentric nature of this article forces it to assume a position that rejects the binary standing of knowledge as either subjective or objective and empirical or non-empirical (Shai 2017). As such, it is believed that the history, cultural value systems and the overall awareness of these authors (as Africans) cannot be detached from the texture and content of the article's findings. To add, empirical and non-empirical data are understood more as complementarities (and not competitors) in the Afrocentric context (Maserumule 2011).

In consideration of all of the above, the next section of this article locates the influence and position of Obama on the overall US foreign policy towards West Africa in the midst of the political legacies of his post-Cold War predecessors.

### 3. **OBAMANIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR US ENGAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA**

The notion of *Obamania* is used in this article to refer to the psychological condition that protrudes a blend of obsession and admiration of US President Obama (MacMillan Dictionary 2015). This condition has caught the imagination of people in the US, Africa and elsewhere in the world since the year 2008 when Obama was elected for the first time as the President of the US. Since Obama is an African American, it is reiterated that there has been widespread speculation and expectation, especially among the Africans and people of African ancestry in the US, Africa and elsewhere in the world, that his presidency would usher in an era of extremely pro-Africa engagement by Washington DC in West Africa, and Africa in general.

However, Obama has scored very low in contrast to his predecessors (especially Bill Clinton and George W Bush, Jr) in terms of prioritisation and commitment to West Africa (Mogotsi 2013). The negative rating of Obama's engagement in West Africa does not ignore the reality that Ghana and West Africa was the destination of his first state visit to Africa as the President of the US. It is worth noting that this has had a resultant significance in cementing the relations between Washington DC and Accra. Mogotsi (2013) uses the analogy of Henry Kissinger's series of state visits to Beijing (the administrative capital of the People's Republic of China) in the 1970s as a means to restore the US-China relations, to underscore the need for Obama to make more than two trips to West Africa if the relations between his government and those of the West African states are to be strengthened.

Nevertheless, it is safe to state that, under Obama's administration, there have not been any substantive changes insofar as his engagement with West Africa is concerned. In a lengthy analysis of the "US Africa policy under Barack Obama", Burns (2010:10) invokes Chris Alden's conviction that the relationship between the US and Africa has been characterised, "in the main by indifference and neglect, punctuated by flurries of interest and action". On the other hand, White (2010:27) rightly claims that, "Obama had not stated that his policy in Africa would be a complete rupture with that of his predecessor". As such, Obama's foreign policy towards West Africa and Africa at large is reflexive of the influence of the legacy of his predecessors. In the same tone, Manyaka's (2015) frank observation is that there seem to be no substantive changes in US foreign policy towards Africa, irrespective of who is the American President.

Like Clinton and Bush, Obama's administration has retained the strategy of using pivotal states to engage in various regions of Africa. In the case of West Africa, however, there is a perception that Obama shifted from Nigeria to other West African countries as pivot states. The foundation of this perception is the fact that Obama visited Ghana in 2009, shortly after being inaugurated as the

President of the US. In this regard, Ghana's Parliament had an exceptional chance to be addressed by the first African-American President in the entire history of the US. During his second visit to Africa, Obama's first stop was in Senegal (West Africa) before proceeding to Tanzania (East Africa) and South Africa (Southern Africa). The 2009 visit to Ghana and the subsequent 2013 visit to Senegal in West Africa were largely and wrongly described by the media and others as the snubbing of Nigeria (Louw-Vaudran 2013).

Nigeria is far bigger than both Ghana and Senegal in geographic, economic and all material respect. In this context, the World Bank (WB), as cited by Louw-Vaudran (2013), has it in good authority that, "Senegal's gross domestic product (GDP), for example is \$14 billion against Nigeria's \$244 billion". Equally important, the size of Ghana's GDP is approximately \$38 billion (WB 2015). This rating positions them far below Nigeria. Therefore, logic expects that the leader of a global superpower would honour and acknowledge the strategic significance of its regional and continental counterpart in its foreign policy towards West Africa (and Africa by extension) through a courtesy state visit. This should be understood within the context that Nigeria is the powerhouse of West Africa and the largest economy in Africa. In defiance of the obvious, this article does not suggest that the size of the GDP of a particular country is the only criterion that drives Heads of State and Government in deciding to visit a certain state (i.e. Ghana/Senegal) at the expense of the other (i.e. Nigeria). In this context, this article's primary argument is to emphasise the essential influence of the external economic environment in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies (Reynolds 1995:103–129). In relation to this, Kornegay (2008:5) concluded that there is, "a perception that both the Democratic and Republican Parties continue to view Africa through a humanitarian lens rather than a more strategic prism". The foregoing resonates with the scholarship in International Relations, which agrees that, inasmuch as tangible elements of power influences foreign policy processes, the influence of the intangible attributes of nation states cannot be wholly dismissed in this regard (Roskin *et al.* 2010:338–339).

Revisiting the debate about the resemblance in terms of the approaches of the successive American administrations in the post-Cold War era, it is observed that Clinton has mainly expressed the US foreign policy through soft persuasion. In contrast, George W Bush Jr's approach was underpinned by harsh rhetoric. On the other hand, the approach of Obama's presidency reveals the branding of US foreign policy through a mix of both harsh and soft words. Unlike his predecessors, the art of combining both hard and soft rhetoric in facilitating US's international relations has enabled the Obama administration to fairly confront authoritarianism and other injustices in Africa, and also to commend the pace of democratisation in countries, such as Ghana, Tanzania and Senegal. The foregoing analysis demonstrates that Obama's foreign policy towards Ghana and West Africa in general, reflects a cauldron of both changes and continuities.

Regardless of this, the next section of this article briefly explores how the US engagement in Nigeria and Senegal impacted on Washington DC's relations with Accra.

#### **4. A CROSS COUNTRY ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA VIS-A-VIS GHANA AND SENEGAL: EMERGING ISSUES FOR THE US-AFRICA POLICY**

It is the well-considered view of these authors that the US foreign policy towards West Africa and Africa as a whole is complex and multi-faceted (IGD 2013). It cannot be framed through a simple analysis of it being driven by the national interests of the US. While the national interests of the US underpin its international relations with African states, it is safe to posit that the approach for espousing US foreign policy towards Africa is largely influenced by issues that are normally external to its domestic policy framework, i.e. internal political developments in the targeted country for a particular foreign policy (Clarke and White 1989:163–183).

The visits to Ghana in 2009 and Senegal in 2013 do not present sufficient evidence of the reorientation of US foreign policy in West Africa from Nigeria to either Ghana or Senegal. For political, economic and strategic reasons, Nigeria remains the most important partner of the US in West Africa. This position is supported and succinctly captured by Morris (2006:229) who wrote that, "Nigeria dwarfs its neighbours by almost any conceivable measure of economic, geographic, or strategic significance. Since the Clinton administration, it has been called one of the four 'anchors for regional engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa'." However, Nigeria is sensitive to being viewed as the sub-imperial client of the US in West Africa and Africa at large.

Despite challenges relating to its security and, to a certain extent, political and economic quagmire, Nigeria is the largest source of African oil imports to the US. In fact, Nigeria supplies 8% of the petroleum imports to the US (White 2010:13). This role is emblematic of the significance of Nigeria to the economic and energy security of the US. It is arguable that, while Nigeria tops the African countries' list of oil exporters to the US, its contribution to the economic and energy security of the US is minimal if compared with the Middle East countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and countries from other regions, including Canada, Mexico and Venezuela (US Energy Information Administration 2015). This is not far from the truth, but the realities in the international economic and political system are that even the contribution of the smallest producers and exporters of oil cannot be down played.

It is worth stating very briefly that Obama's then Secretary of State (Hillary Clinton) was an official guest to Abuja (Nigeria's administrative capital) in the year 2010, and again in 2012. Secretaries of State under the Bush administration

have also honoured Nigeria with an official visit (Olipohunda 2012; White 2010:14). However, it is emphasised that presidential visits symbolises the strong relations between the countries involved. It must also be pointed out that state visits by senior government officials, including the Secretary of State, are equally important. The foregoing corroborates the fact that, even though Obama has not visited Nigeria, irrespective of its political, economic and strategic significance for the realisation of US foreign policy goals, there are observable indications of the close relationship between Washington DC and Abuja. Hence, Obama is not running the US alone. In dealing with international relations he normally functions with other multiple players such as the Vice-President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, National Security Council (NSC), Presidential Advisor, Congress, etc. (Stokes 2014). This list attests the extent to which US foreign policy is a huge machinery.

According to Stokes (2014), the US President normally only pays attention to crisis situations in foreign affairs, because most of his time is consumed by domestic issues ranging from taxation, health and other matters (IGD 2013:5-6). In other words, the US President has very limited time to think about the world beyond the shores of the US; except in situations of war that threatens the strategic interests of his country (Cooper 2014). It is for this reason, that Obama had not given the amount of attention to Nigeria, West Africa and Africa, as many analysts expected. Mogotsi (2013:11) articulates this odd situation by writing that, "Obama during his first presidential term, paid only a cursory and perfunctory attention to African issues, hardly beyond the narrow and narrow-minded dictates of the national security imperatives of the US hegemonic military-industrial-Wall street complex".

Nonetheless, it is not less accurate to aver that the US diplomatic practice is professionalised in such a manner that it is conducive for stability in foreign policy processes in either the presence or absence of a particular President. In the words of Cooper (2014), "the NSC is the gatekeeper for the President". He further alludes that, "the President is the ultimate decider on foreign policy issues, but mostly chooses not to". The over-reliance of any US President on the NSC in deciding the pattern, content and direction of Washington DC's policy towards a particular country should be understood within the context that countries are not judged equally.

The critical study of this article concluded that there is no sound basis to regard Obama's visit to Ghana and Senegal as constituting the demotion of the centrality of Nigeria to US's engagement in West Africa and Africa at large. For the American policy makers, Nigeria does not compete with either Ghana or Senegal for a space on the map of the foreign policy of the US in West Africa and Africa. However, each of these countries has a particular role to play towards the enhancement of the national interests of the US. To this end, the value and essence of each of the African countries under review towards

the US is not competitive, but complementary. For instance, Senegal feeds into the US agenda for the promotion of democracy around the world. Hence, Senegal is widely regarded as the oldest majority-ruled state in West Africa; a region that has been historically bedevilled by political and economic instabilities (Moss 2012).

In addition, fundamental freedoms relatively find expression in the daily lives of the Senegalese. This is what largely attracts the US about Senegal and, apparently, both Washington DC and Dakar (Senegal's capital and largest city) have shared wants. The shared wants between the US and Senegal include the desire for, "free people, free markets etc." (Mason and Flynn 2013). In spite of this, the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), as cited by Turse (2013), reports that Senegal is vulnerable to extremist tendencies and activities, and this unusual situation has the potential to render it unstable. Senegal's vulnerability to extremism can best be understood when located within the context of the anti-American sentiments among those who disapprove of its lengthy military cooperation with the US (Turse 2013).

Contextually, the decision of the Obama administration not to include Abuja in his presidential visits to West Africa and Africa has been largely interpreted in terms of Nigeria's poor record of economic and corporate governance and its compromised political and security landscape (Turse 2013). While it is true that Nigeria is faced with a terrorist conundrum and rampant corruption, and its political environment is poisoned, "with local militias waging attacks against foreign oil companies", an analysis that punches this situation above its weight in regard to Washington DC's geo-strategic calculations is deficient of truth (Dolan 2009:3). Notwithstanding the normal diplomatic ties between Washington DC and Abuja, the US is still closely and discreetly related to Nigeria at a bilateral level and openly through the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional, continental and international cooperation frameworks (Mason and Flynn 2013). The following section turns attention to the primary test case of this article, namely Ghana.

## **5. GHANA'S MACRO DOMESTIC POLICY FRAMEWORK: A MAGNET OF US PRAXIS WITH WEST AFRICA**

The US enjoys very close and warm bilateral and economic relations with Ghana. Both countries derive benefits from their partnership, though at an unequal footing. It is obvious that the unequal power relations between Washington DC and Accra puts the US at a more advantageous position compared to Ghana, in terms of the different types and levels of engagement. This is to say that the context and essence of the cooperation is largely framed according to the official prescripts of the US foreign policy, namely, the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law; the enhancement of the security of the US; and the

bolstering of US's economic prosperity. These pillars have served as the guiding principles of US foreign policy in Africa and elsewhere since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to date.

While Ghana is not necessarily a pivotal state in terms of the US foreign policy towards West Africa and Africa, it is not far-fetched to state that Accra still has a complementary and spectacular role to play in this regard. Despite this, Mudimbe (2014) maintains that, "the US goes to Ghana as a focal point for West-African regional issues". Politically, Ghana is widely considered as a stable and vibrant democracy in West Africa. This position is informed by the fact that in 1992 Ghana has successfully transformed from a one-party state to a dual party state (Shai 2016). Since then, to date, Ghana has been able to conduct five successive general elections which were largely described as credible, transparent and peaceful by both domestic and international observers. Between such cycles of elections, political power was transferred about two times to different political parties.

Recognising that democratisation is not an end on its own, but a means towards an end, these authors' conviction is that Ghana's road towards democracy is remarkable and, therefore, it is inevitable for the US to partner with her. In other words, Ghana stands for principles that the US advocates. Like the US, Ghana has embraced a dual party electoral model since its return to political pluralism in the year 1992 (USAID 2012:14–22). The commonality in terms of electoral model in both Ghana and the US has laid a fertile ground for reciprocal cooperation between the two countries. Still, liberal democracy as espoused by the US and, to a larger extent, Ghana has proven to be insufficiently accountable to the people. Hence, leaders tend to be more loyal to the political parties that deployed them into public office, rather than the electorate (Matlosa 2015). Notwithstanding the efforts of the American non-governmental sector in Ghana, the United States Information Service (USIS), Democracy and Human Rights Funds (DHRF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have established themselves as the primary external actors for the building of democracy (Hearn 1999:7).

Contextually, Mudimbe (2014) further maintains that the US sees Ghana as a beacon of democracy in Africa. Equally important, Ghana is viewed as an island of stability in an ocean of instability. A case in point is the insecurities unleashed by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The compromised security landscape has become a vantage point from which the US sees West Africa as turbulent. As such, the US hopes that Ghana will spread democracy in West Africa and other parts of Africa. For its part, the US had a lot of influence in the democratisation of Ghana, West Africa and Africa. As a self-proclaimed vanguard of democracy in the world, the US is usually involved in elections' monitoring in Africa by either deploying its electoral observers, and/or training domestic electoral observers. Owing to the supportive role of the US on the

terrain of elections in Africa, the electoral commissions of Ghana (and South Africa) are ranked as Africa's best performing in the world (Finca 2013). Despite the isolated incidents of electoral violence and other challenges, not mentioned here, both Ghana and South Africa generally do well in logistical considerations related to electoral processes. Indeed, it is hard to deny that election observation, conflict management, voter and civic education have become the tenets for the political culture of Ghana.

Meanwhile, Michelle Gavin, as cited by Cook (2009:2), has noted that Obama's trip to Accra was an affirmation and confirmation of the state of [positive] governance and thriving democracy in Ghana. It is argued that, although Ghana's strides towards democratisation are commendable, the conditions on the ground indicate that the governance of Ghana represents a rule by the elite with limited benefits for the majority (Roskin *et al.* 2010:102–103). This should be understood within the context that the US is only committed to a limited form of democracy (Shai and Iroanya 2014). This entails a system that is only concerned about the political dimension of democracy, and normally benefits the ruling political and business elites to the marginalisation of the masses. While the system unleashes limited benefits to the masses, it fosters maximum benefits through the collusion of the local political leadership and business elites with their international counterparts. If the current level of socio-economic development in Ghana is anything to go by, it can be safely contended that the mighty Kwame Nkrumah's assertion that, "Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else shall be added unto you" does not have a sound practical and theoretical basis for the launching of real socio-economic development and sustainable development (Pooe 2014:299). Hence, there cannot be durable peace in Africa and any country in the world unless there is economic justice. Taking the argument to another level, there cannot be any sustainable development in an environment which is not peaceful. As has been illustrated during the Arab Spring in the year 2011, there is a close link between peace, security, development and stability (Matheba 2011; Poopedi 2014).

Experiences regarding the democratic transition of several African states, including Ghana, Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa, among others, have proven that Western democracy does not dovetail with the political, social and material conditions of the African continent. Besides other arguments advanced in this article, Western democracy negates ideals and practices that are inherent in the African communities, such as *ubuntu* (humanity), for one (Mokoena 2011). It is within this context that even African countries, such as Ghana, which are usually paraded by the US as the best functioning models of democracy, are also bedevilled by challenges of weak governance institutions (Netshifhefhe 2015).

Economically, the US finds comfort in having a sound affair with Ghana, one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. According to Cook (2009:9), in the year 2008 the economy of Ghana grew by 7,3 %. This notable economic

growth can be partly attributed to the discovery of crude oil reserves in Ghana during 2007. While there are certain advantages in the fact that Ghana's oil was discovered offshore, it is also a challenge for the middle income economy, given that the extraction of oil from the sea is expensive and also requires technical know-how and infrastructure that is scarce in Ghana and Africa as a whole. The US pretty much knows Ghana's skills gap and underdeveloped industrial infrastructure. As such, Washington DC is courting Accra to prepare itself to fill the skills gap in Ghana's extractive sector and eventually process its natural resources, including the recently discovered oil. The US oil companies, Kosmos Energy and Anadarko, are already making remarkable strides with the exploration and development of oil reserves in Ghana (Ayelazuno 2013:1–8; McCaskie 2008:316–322). This is not an emerging practice on the part of the US.

In fact, when it comes to Africa, the US has supported development for decades, and continues to do so. This argument finds solace in the fact that various private-public-partnerships and trade agreements, such as African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), have helped provide good relations of mutual interest (Magolobela 2014). The foregoing does not imply any intention to disregard the fact that AGOA has had very minimal impact in favour of Ghana. Instead, AGOA and other trade agreements that Accra is a beneficiary of, have jointly ushered in increasing economic growth, but this economic growth has less meaning for the Ghanaians, because it has not been translated into meaningful socio-economic development. Although Ajayi (*Sunday Times* 2015:18) instructively charges that, "Ghana has halved poverty and hunger", the reality is that the gap between the rich and poor among the Ghanaians is stubbornly widening. Yet, Benyi (2015) cautions that the situation is not as bad as is the case in South Africa. To this end, Obama's Power Africa is commendable to a certain extent, but it is also an indirect acknowledgement that the people of this initiative's targeted country beneficiaries (including Ghana) have no reliable access to electricity at the turn of more than five decades of independence from colonial rule.

This article contends that the US targeted beneficiary for Power Africa is not the African people. This electrification programme is meant to fortify American business in Africa and, equally, stimulate trade between the US and those countries that are destined to benefit. This can be understood within the context that programmes intended to support American economic interests in Africa have the potential to have both positive and negative spill-over effects towards Africans. Thus, African people would have access to electricity, but the fast-tracked industrialisation would also harness challenges of climate change and related environmental ills for the continent.

Accra is also still heavily dependent on foreign aid; a time bomb that constitutes an imminent threat to the economic sovereignty of Ghana. Broadly speaking, IGD (2013) problematises the notion of the West (the US in particular)

to put an emphasis on aid, instead of renewed trade and investment in its dealings with Ghana and other African states. For IGD (2013), at the heart of the problem is the sad reality that Africa, “has never fully decolonised”.

Washington DC is also quick to even court more African states, due to China’s forays into Africa. That Ghana is already pursuing greater economic cooperation and trade ties with China is a thorny issue for the US foreign policy practitioners (Cook 2009:12). Putting this discourse into a social constructivist perspective, Moss (2012) cautions that, “US and Chinese interests only rarely conflict, and both countries stand to benefit from a more prosperous and stable Africa”. To diffuse the infiltration of China in West Africa, the US has housed its African Global Competitiveness Initiative (AGCT) in Ghana. Cook (2009:15) posits that the main purpose of AGCT is to, “provide trade, investment, business information and technical assistance to African and US public and private sector business, trade and policy entities”. In locating the thesis of US interests being rattled by Beijing, Jordan (2013) strongly advised and opined that, “Western concerns about possible Chinese, Indian or Russian exploitation of Africa’s resources and people would be treated less cynically if they had established a better record on the African continent”.

## **6. MILITARY COOPERATION**

The US enjoys closer military cooperation with Ghana. For example, the US Army conducts war games with the Ghanaian Army in the latter’s territorial jurisdiction. While the US military exercises in Ghana can be viewed as the tentacles of US neo-colonial tendencies, it is important to highlight that Ghana is one of the few African states that are receptive to the idea of an Africa Command (AFRICOM). The narrative of US neo-colonial tendencies in Ghana does not disregard the fact that such actions are done with the consent of the host government. However, it should be noted that Ghana’s over-dependence on US foreign aid has a potential to weaken Accra’s capacity and willingness to resist some of the foreign policy pressures unleashed by Washington DC. For the government of Ghana, the idea of AFRICOM has good intentions and potential benefits for both the US and Africa. But its vision has been frustrated by anti-American sentiments veering across the globe. The foregoing expression should be understood within the context that, at an individual level, the Ghanaian Army is well-equipped with US manufactured weaponry. Hence, Ghana, along with Nigeria, has been very instrumental in showing leadership in the context of ECOWAS and the African Union’s (AU) efforts to find solutions to violent conflicts in countries, such as the Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It is argued that, even though Ghana has played a crucial role in establishing an environment of peace and security in West Africa, the solutions to such conflicts would not last long. The short term value of Ghana’s

contribution to conflict resolution in West Africa and other parts of Africa can be attributed to the fact that its approach has been militaristic (in the main), an approach that is preferable to the US's spirit and letter of AFRICOM. While military solutions provide short term solutions to challenges of violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere, it is the contention of these authors that there is a need for a paradigm shift to entail aggressive measures to address the non-military aspects of violent conflicts. For the US, it (Washington DC) has bolstered the establishment of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana. This centre is essential for inculcating professionalism within the military of Ghana, and to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Ghanaian soldiers prior to deployment in international peacekeeping missions and the Economic Community of West African States Standby Force (ECOWASBRIG) (Cook 2009:15).

Emphatically, Washington DC's choice of Accra as the beneficiary for its military and police support should be understood within the context that the US view Ghana as an island of stability in an ocean of instability. The Americans see West Africa as a turbulent region. A case in point is the Boko Haram activities in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. That Boko Haram has also pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Syria (ISS) is a bitter pill for American foreign policy practitioners (Schneider 2015:8–21). On the other hand, Cook (2009:15) adds that, "military and police assistance centres on helping Ghana to counter its growing use as a key cocaine transshipment point in the region". Given the stability of Ghana, the US can rely on Accra to fight the encroachment of Boko Haram in West Africa, where the national interests of the US are already under siege. The authors of this article submit that the securitisation of US foreign policy towards Africa and the West African region in particular, demonstrates Washington DC's desperate desire to protect its oil based economic interests in the Gulf of Guinea. The former US Under-Secretary of State for African Affairs, Walter Kansteiner, as cited by Morris (2006:226), puts the unfolding argument into a proper perspective, "African oil is of national strategic interest to us, and it will increase and become more important as we go forward".

## **7. CONCLUSION**

From an Afrocentric perspective it is clear that Washington DC and Accra have developed closer bilateral relations since Ghana's return to majority rule in 1992. However, their formal relations date back to the year 1957 when Ghana became the first African state to gain independence from colonial rule. Their relations cut across the military, political and socio-economic spectrum. However, the relationship between them is asymmetrical, due to the unequal power relations between Ghana and the US. The unequal power relations between the two countries have allowed the US to dictate terms on the nature and direction of

its relations with Ghana. While the US derived a lot of economic and strategic benefits from engaging with Ghana, it has not been able to bridge the wider gap between promise and action. Hence, its democracy support initiatives in Ghana had limited impact when compared to its goals in the area; that of access to natural resources and the enhancement of the security of its national interests, which are largely economic.

In the final analysis, the perceived consolidation of democracy and the discovery of oil in Ghana served as an impetus for Washington DC's concerted engagement with Accra. This should be understood within the context of the US's commitment to a limited form of democracy (i.e. political). Despite this, Nigeria remains the pivotal state for US engagement in West Africa. Abuja is far bigger than Ghana in all material aspects and, consequently, in its strategic significance to the US. As such, Ghana simply serves as a complementary and referent ally for West African issues. That being the case, it has been observed that US foreign policy has many angles of influence; one being the political party in power. The foregoing observation does not in any way imply that the periodic change from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party as ruling party (*vice versa*) has had, over time, any real effect on US foreign policy towards West Africa and Africa at large. Furthermore, the findings of this research illustrated that, irrespective of whoever is in power, there has always been close collaboration between Ghana and the US during the major part of the post-Cold War era. Thus, successive Presidents, irrespective of being Republican or Democrat, will favour access to the natural resources of Ghana, the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa and Africa at large. Lastly, the foreign policies espoused by varying US administrations with regard to Ghana and West Africa are identical to a certain extent. They seek to contain the infiltration of the Chinese within their spheres of influence and beyond.

The findings of this article make a significant contribution to International History and Politics, particularly on the role and place of "political legacies" as they relate to US foreign policy towards Ghana and West Africa. Also, the issue of political rhetoric is path-breaking. Lastly, but not least, it is observed that Afrocentricity has a rich potential to paint a qualitatively new picture of US foreign policy towards individual African states, including Ghana. Yet, the mainstream theories of International Relations (Realism, Idealism and Marxism) remain relevant in explaining the phenomena of foreign policy.

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1 (\*) True identity of the respondent has been withheld for ethical reasons.

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