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US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA IN A POST - COLD WAR ERA



Alka Mudgal

Abs tract:- *The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of cold war caused the earlier bipolar world to be unipolar. The change resulted in a substantial shift in US interests from Africa to formerly Soviet states of Eastern Europe which was evidenced by drastic reduction in US bilateral aid to Africa.*

After the end of the cold war, US main concern was to establish its hegemony. With the focus on democratization, human rights and neo-liberal economic reforms, United States was prepared to cut off ties with those African states which were not abiding by these conditions. Democracy and human rights were not new to the US foreign policy. Provisions of Section 116 of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act prohibited the President from providing development aid to the government of any country which is involved in a violation of internationally recognized human rights. The 1976 Congressional Foreign Assistance Act has also been an indicator of US' respect for human rights and fundamental freedom across the world.

Keyw ords: democratization , Democracy and human rights , US foreign policy , fundamental freedom .

INTRODUCTION

In conformity with such Acts and other democracy and human rights legislations, President Bush agreed to the Congressional freezing of \$25 million in military aid to the Kenya. Aid to Kenya was subsequently withheld by the US and other donors in 1991 forcing Moi regime to allow multipartism. Other African countries which fell victim to the Congressional legislation included Cameroon, Sudan, Malawi, Togo and Zaire.

The Bush administration was also involved in peace initiatives in the countries like Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Zaire and Ethiopia. The efforts of Bush Administration on the issues of human rights and democracy were furthered by the President Bill Clinton. The cancellation of elections and killings of innocent people by the Sani Abacha regime in Nigeria led Clinton Administration to discontinue \$ 450,000 aid for military trainings and \$11 million grants. United States, the European Community, the commonwealth countries and some members of the UN also imposed sanctions against the Sani Abacha regime following the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa, a human rights activist. With an eye on the crude oil resources of the country, however, US refrained from imposing strict economic sanctions against Nigeria.

The decline in US interests in Africa marked a low point in US-Africa relations. Adjusting to changed scenario with the end of the cold war and to meet the challenges posed by budgetary constraints, the Clinton Administration's Africa policy was one of retrenchment and timidity. In the very first year of resuming office, Clinton Administration withdrew forces sent to Somalia by the President George H.W. Bush after the killing of US soldiers in a fire fight with a warlord militia in October 1993. Somalia debacle prevented Clinton Administration from intervening in Rwanda genocide in 1994.

Post cold war era witnessed a sharp decline in US military aid to Africa. In the interest of, the Clinton Administration replaced the term 'Security Assistance' with 'Assistance for Promoting Peace and Building Democracy'. US focus was now on the peace building military training in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) and the individual African states. This new concept by the Clinton Administration, under the name of African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), was meant to prepare African countries' military personnel for future peace keeping missions in troubled spots in the continent. What thus emerged within the US foreign policy making establishment was the inclusion of democracy and human rights even on matters pertaining to security.

In order to promote its peace building initiatives in Africa, the Clinton Administration endorsed the de-nuclearization of Africa and played an active role in drafting the final text of the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty. Despite the fact, it cannot be denied that by the end of 1990s, numbers of peace corps volunteers in the region had declined. In fact, during his second term, Clinton adopted 'Trade, Not Aid' policy. Clinton Administration's main emphasis was, therefore, on establishing and maintaining commercial ties with Africa.

Clinton visited several African nations like South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Senegal and Botswana which were regarded by the US to be democratic market oriented economies. His trip was boosted with the passage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) enacted in 2000. AGOA's importance grew in 1990s due to the support of business community that could benefit from this programme, particularly American oil companies. The Act imposes certain restrictions on African companies and requires them to comply with IMF rules which include privatization of their assets through divestment and WTO

rules such as tariff cuts, removal of import restrictions and adoption of investments deregulations to allow foreign investors to acquire ownership over natural resources. Evidently, the discriminatory nature of Act which aims at providing US investors a clear advantage at the cost of interests of African countries has come under criticism.

Post 9/11 US policy towards Africa

The terrorist attack on WTC on September 11, 2001 forced America to change its foreign policy. President Bush declared 'war on terror' and security became the prime determinant in the US foreign policy. Factors like presence of Al-Qaeda in East Africa, Sahel and West Africa, combination of weak and failing states in the region, widespread poverty and slow economic growth etc. could no longer be ignored. Bush Administration, recognizing the necessity of development in the region, merged development with its security agenda in order to effectively broaden its 'war on terror'. Weak or failed African states with significant Islamic population were given priority.

Besides 9/11, however, growing interest of China and India in Africa and its natural resources has also been instrumental in renewed US interest in Africa. The neo realists, who dominated Bush administration and US foreign policy in post 9/11, were not only willing to secure vital energy reserves but also wanted to counter the expanding influence of China and India in the region. This move became more important for US because of its growing reliance on African oil and its desire to lessen its dependence on the Middle East oil. This resulted in the militarization of US foreign policy.

These concerns led directly to an increased US military role in the region. As early as October 2002, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was launched; 1800 US soldiers were based in Djibouti in order to deter and counter the threats in Somalia and Kenya and to provide technical assistance to local armies in their counter-terrorism struggle. Besides this US adopted border patrol strategy for revival of failed states as well as to combat terrorism. An example of this is the 'Pan-Sahel Initiatives', a US border security project joint with various African states. Under this programme, US government provides equipment and training to the participatory states to help them in protecting their borders. The programme has had a major focus on the Kenyan-Somalia border, as Kenyans faced numerous attacks from the failed states since the 1990s. In other words, the 'Pan-Sahel Initiatives' has been a programme to enhance border capabilities throughout the region against arms-smuggling, drug-trafficking and the movement of transnational terrorists in the Northern African countries like Mali, Niger and Chad. These efforts were enhanced in 2005 with the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) by US' Defence Department and Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiatives (TSC0TI) of its State Department. Thereafter, in 2008, most of these activities were transferred to the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), the new military command established in 2007 by US in order to consolidate all of the counter terrorism activities in the region.

Sub-Saharan African oil production increased from

5 to 7 percent of world production between 2001 and 2007, and now accounts for roughly one fifth of US oil imports (which becomes a quarter, if North Africa included).

Growing US dependence on oil imports from Africa led it to re-evaluate African security issues. USA was more worried about its continuous flow of oil and given the fact that Africa's oil rich states, grouped around the Gulf of Guinea, were among the least stable and poorly governed states in the continent, ensuring stability and improving governance became the focus of US policy which led to increased diplomatic presence and foreign aid in countries like Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria as well as increased technical cooperation of US navies to the local navies.

Clinton's 'Trade, Not Aid' program was reversed by Bush-II Administration. In addition, the Clinton Administration's argument of a connection between security and development gathered traction because the state collapse in Afghanistan led to the emergence of Taliban and establishment of Al-Qaeda base there. The theory that promoting economic development and state building in the low income world would support the US security interests also got strength with particular reference to Africa, where a number of states were at the verge of collapse. The link between development and security got an added momentum in Washington in 2000 when a militant Islamic faction claimed power in the collapsed state of Somalia.

Linking development to security helped in gaining political support for foreign aid to the region, which grew from \$ 2.5 billion in fiscal year 2000 to \$7.5 billion in 2007. In fiscal year 2008, five Sub-Saharan African States were among the 15 leading recipients of US foreign aid. They included Kenya (\$ 599 million), South Africa (\$574 million), Nigeria (\$486 million), Ethiopia (\$455 million) and Sudan (\$ 392 million). By comparison, only Ethiopia had been in this select group ten years earlier. During this period, Africa's share of total US aid increased from 13.3 to 28.6 percent, though US continued to provide a lower percentage of its overall aid to Africa.

Roughly one third of total aid to Africa in 2007 was for humanitarian assistance and another fifth was for the President's Emergency Programme for AIDS relief (PEPFAR). The Bush Administration also created a new aid agency, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to reward low income countries which promoted sound economic policies and good governance; the ambitious spending targets set for the MCC by the Administration were never fully implemented because of Congressional reticence and the annual disbursements never exceeded the 100-150 million dollars range.

Lacunae in Bush's Africa Policy -Different components of the US foreign policy during Bush regime reflected lack of coordination viz. anti-terrorism and military security cooperation focused primarily on North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn region whereas PEPFAR's Africa focus was on Southern and East Africa. Further, the energy policy focused on the Gulf of Guinea in Central Africa as against AGOA which primarily benefited Southern Africa with the exception of Nigeria. Thus, US relationship with individual African countries varied according to the policies of specific agencies.

Critics argue that the growing US military presence and foreign aid during Bush administration were designed to serve the interest of US multinational corporations and that the increase in foreign aid was motivated by the 'war on terror' rather than economic development or poverty alleviation. A linkage between security and development had been asserted in US policy for years but under the Bush administration, it was used for expanding the role of military in the region.

US concern for security enhanced the role of Defence Department in US policy towards Africa. Under Bush administration, weakness of US-Africa policy was organizational proliferation and institutional fragmentation. Virtually every federal agency was involved in some African activities. New actors displaced the traditional pre-eminence of the State Department and USAID in the making of policy towards Africa. Moreover, USAID continued to suffer the shortage of adequate resources including professional staff and consequently lost institutional capacity. US Administration failed to address the organizational and personnel issues which undermined the effectiveness of US diplomacy.

Despite the successful mediation of American diplomats in the 2005 peace agreement between the Khartoum Government and SPLA in Sudan as well as their role in helping to end the Liberian civil war, Bush Administration paid very little attention to the civil war in Congo, Somalia and Cote d'Ivoire. The main policy objectives regarding military intervention revolved around the old Clinton Administration policy of avoiding casualties.

Obama Administration: A New Approach for Africa?

Barack Obama was elected as 44th President of the United States in November 2008 and was inaugurated as US President on 20th January 2009. His roots in Kenya made Africans hopeful about US relations with Africa. In his speech in Accra (Ghana) in 2009, Obama stated that 'Africa's future is upto Africans' which reminded the Carter Administration's call of 'Solution of African Problems by Africans'. However, rhetoric differed from the reality as Obama continued Africa policy of the Bush Administration. Obama's policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa emphasized US national security concerns. By contrast, on non-military fronts (humanitarian aid and human rights), Obama continued policy of George Bush. President Bush constructed a process, inherited by Obama which led to the end of Sudanese civil war and the independence of South Sudan. Bush also pushed through a multi-billion dollar AIDS treatment programme for 12 African countries, which is believed to be the largest health programme in his first term, notwithstanding the great cost. However, he cut global AIDS funding by \$ 210 million in his 2013 budget proposal. Besides this, Obama decided to expand his predecessors policy of AFRICOM. At his speech in Ghana, a first African nation where Obama visited in 2009, Obama insisted that US' Africa Command aimed at confronting common challenges to the security of Africa, America and the world. Much of the funding for AFRICOM, however, is concentrated in counter terrorism programme and in security assistance for countries like Nigeria which are strategically

important for US.

In the Department of Defence Budget, Obama proposed \$278 million in the fiscal year 2010 and \$296.2 million in fiscal year 2011 for AFRICOM operations. Obama Administration proposed increase in the spending on military programme in Africa which include capacity building and military training in the individual African nations, as well as regional initiatives such as the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance programme (ACOTA) which succeeded ACRI in 2004, and provides Peace Support Operations training to African troops. Under this programme, US is working to enhance the capacity of African military to respond to African problems. The Obama administration has supported the aid for trade initiatives and increased funding for the MCC, a US programme established by Bush Administration in 2004. Obama Administration has also expressed its commitment to AGOA, which was signed by Bill Clinton.

Data from the US International Trade Commission indicates that under AGOA, exports of energy related products like oil and natural resources from Africa to US have increased whereas exports of manufactured goods have declined. Petroleum products comprise about 90 percent of exports from Africa to the US. AGOA's main selling point was that it would help African countries in developing their textile industry. However, after showing an initial increase after 2000, African textile exports to the US have fallen sharply during recent years. In fact, US trade policy continues to depress African farmers as they do not receive sufficient prices for their crops such as cotton. Small scale African producers have to compete with American cotton growers for sales to India and China. American subsidies to cotton farmers which run in the billions of dollars annually have harmed millions of African cotton growers through providing a flow of cheap cotton in Asia.

In post cold war era, there has been expansion of neo liberal policies of the west. Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) is an example of that. In order to qualify for IMF and World Bank loans, African countries are required to comply with restrictions stipulated by SAP, characterized by reduction of government spending on health, education and social programmes; privatization and deregulation of state owned enterprises; devaluation of currency to increase earning for exports; opening the markets to foreign goods and removal of restrictions on foreign investments; lowering of wages and elimination of laws and regulations protecting labour. These initiatives have weakened African economies and social programmes resulting in increase in poverty.

Although SAP was instituted under the Reagan administration, it was not until the 1990s under the Clinton Administration that (with the help of WTO and increased military funding) IMF and World Bank proved most devastating to Africa. Today, Africa's IMF and World Bank debt is over \$ 300 billion. 1990s saw escalating trade liberalization which resulted in record loss of jobs and a destruction of livelihood. In 1997, in response to the public outcry for debt relief to alleviate the devastating policies of the SAP, the IMF and the World Bank instituted the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiatives (HIPC) to reduce the

debt levels in Africa. HIPC, however, miserably failed to achieve the aim as countries are still required to follow SAP to qualify for HIPC. Expansion of these neo-liberal policies of the West in the post cold war era has, therefore, harmed the developing world including Africa.

In post cold war era, particularly after 9/11, US policies remain situated within the broader approaches to energy and security which the new administration has also not significantly altered. United States is overseeing recruitment and training of African forces to fight Shabab, the extremist Islamic organization in Somalia and conducting counter terrorism training in Mali, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon, Central African Republic, Zambia, Mauritania and Malawi in order to safeguard its interests in Africa. This militarization of Africa has come under severe criticism as it undermines the sovereignty of African nations.

Several programmes for like PEPFAR have been a good beginning. The demand to review AGOA, however, also needs to be considered by US Administration to benefit both the US and African nations equally. United States' aid to these African nations should not be guided by purely security interests. The problems related to development, poverty, unemployment in African countries also need to be appropriately addressed. Holistic approach towards Africa will help USA in winning the trust and cooperation of these nations. However after recent attack on the Westgate mall in Kenya by Al-Qaeda militants, US officials emphasized the need of enhancing US engagement with the African Continent.

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