

## Foreign Policy and state behaviour: How US Foreign Policy to Africa changed during Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump Administrations

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*Foreign policy has been defined as a set of principles, decisions and means, adopted and followed by a nation for securing her interest in international relations. In posture and practice, the US edifies a perfect realist state and its leaders have embraced realism as a theory of choice in exercising US foreign policy and relations with other continents such as Africa. By understanding state's foreign policy, we can predict their behavior and how to engage with them*

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The United States (US) is by any account a dominant super power whose foreign Policy has global influence. Historically, the US was discovered by foreign immigrants and plunderers. It acquired its independence in 1776 after a bloody revolution against British rule. The federalist triumphantly christened the new Country as 'the land of the free' and adopted 'E Pluribus Unum' a latin word meaning 'Out of many-One' as a national motto.

At independence, the US adopted a Bald Eagle and a Bison (North American Buffalo) as its national symbol-signifying strength, power and dominance. Since then, this historical triumph has translated into how America views and relates with other Countries and Continents. The bald eagle clenches in its talons an Olive branch and thirteen sharp arrows, perhaps reminding the entire world of America's power -the US is ready to deploy its power to achieve its interests.

Realism scholars such as Machiavelli have argued that states' foreign policies are solely a product of the international system—merely a reaction to external conditions and other actors. Realism operates on the assumption of anarchy—the absence of an overarching government in the international system—as one of the most important external conditions that affect foreign policies. In an anarchic world, states must look out for their own interests<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Muscat, 'A Comparative Analysis of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administration's Foreign Policy in the Context of the War on terror: A cases study-Pakistan', A dissertation presented to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in International Relations, May, 2013

Realists consider the state as the principal and rational actor in foreign policy, which seeks to maximise its own national interests and objectives since they believe that world politics exist in an international anarchy. What drives realist foreign policy is its focus and responsibility to ensure national security and state survival, as well as its struggle for power. Realists and Neorealists alike emphasise that the international system is anarchic and therefore because of this, states act the way they do in order to ensure their own survival<sup>2</sup>.

As suggested by former US Secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, this has been the dominant view, taken by the US foreign policy relations with other Countries and continents such as Africa<sup>3</sup>. A country's foreign policy is determined by internal and external factors. Internal factors include; history, national values, geography, national capacity and political organisation. External factors include; international environment, internal organizations, world opinion and reaction of states to other states

#### *Quick historical overview of U.S. Foreign Policy*

US's foreign policy has been largely influenced by its history. During the pre-World War I, the US pursued an isolationist foreign policy. The world was Eurocentric and Britain, France and German dominated global affairs. The US was protected by Oceans and technologies of the day did not directly threaten its vital interest. The US was sparsely populated and focused on its own internal destiny of building its democratic institutions and economy. The US had trading partners, but did not exert influence globally.

The two world wars (1914-1945) ended US's period of isolation. At the end of the Second World War, the US remained as the last standing global power. Europe and Japan were physically, financially and emotionally destroyed. German lost its industrial and military power foreign territories abroad. Russia was financially destroyed and suffered severe losses of life. China, India and most of Asia were isolated peasant, colonial or post-colonial states with insignificant global influence. The US therefore took over this vacuum. It strengthened and asserted its global hegemony as a super power.

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<sup>2</sup> Waltz, K.N. (1979). 'Theory of International Politics.'

<http://www.popularsocialscience.com/2013/11/06/neorealism-in-international-relations-kenneth-waltz/>; accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2018 at 11:00am

<sup>3</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, 'Continuity and change in American Foreign Policy, 1977

The years that followed the Soviet Union emerged as a superpower challenger to the U.S. In most of the world, America enjoyed an almost universal hegemony. When the Cold war ended (Fall of the Iron Curtain) in the 1990's, America remained as the world's only superpower. America enjoyed world hegemony. It became de-factor world's police and protector of the so called liberal world order. The US had financial and military power. Pax-Americana came into full flourishing replacing the Pax Britanica as the dominant world paradigm. The role of the United States was generally viewed as one of global leadership and significant engagement in international affairs. The US and its leaders have continue to pursue this view in shaping their foreign policy positions to other Countries

### ***Extent of Change in US Foreign Policy to Africa during Presidents Bush and Obama Administrations***

In order to understand the differences between Foreign Policy Approach of the two regimes, a comparative foreign policy analysis approach is used<sup>4</sup>. This is done by identifying foreign policy decision making processes related to the momentous events as well as patterns in day to day interactions of the United States and Africa during the two Presidential administrations. The general posture of the US towards Africa and the world during the two administrations and the key policy instruments which characterized US foreign policy and presence on the African Continent between 2000 and 2015 are identified.

### ***President George Bush's Administration foreign policy towards Africa***

President George's Bush's foreign policy was dominated with security and war on terror. When Bush took office before the 9/11 attacks, his foreign policy was to be based on various assumptions of classical realism. This thought assumes that the state is the main actor in foreign policy, and therefore the U.S policy would focus mainly on state-to-state relations. Classical realists also focus on the managing of relations with major powers since they are considered to be the main threats to the international system. In the case of U.S foreign policy of Bush prior to the attacks, he made it clear that the refurbishing of alliances would be a top priority in order to manage great-power relationships<sup>5</sup>.

President Bush was to pursue symmetrical relations with other countries based on the view that oceans no longer protected the US from engaging overseas. However, the September 11

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey. S. Lantis and Ryan Beasley: Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis: Available at <http://politics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-398>

<sup>5</sup> McCormick, J.M. (2010) '*American Foreign Policy & Process*' (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) p.206-207 - Europe and Asia were to be his top foreign policy priorities since they both carry American allies as well as potential rivals.

attacks changed dramatically President Bush's foreign policy. The Bush administration developed a neo conservative foreign policy, focusing on regime change. He pursued an offensive realistic approach using pre-emptive force, conventional and unconventional warfare to secure American security and interests. He divided the world as into a coalition of the willing and an axis of evil. In the war on terror President Bush asserted 'You were either with us or against us'. The Bush administration linked the war with spread of democracy as defined by America's foreign policy doctrine. America would pursue and defend its self and its interests anywhere in the world, including using war.

#### *President Bush's key foreign policy instruments for Africa*

In pursuit of the war against terror, the Bush administration established an **Africa Command** as part of the US Military force based in Djibouti to oversee Counter terrorism and security operations in Africa. Support to African governments to establish anti terror-capabilities, including training and military equipment to African governments. The US facilitated legislative reforms supporting Counter terrorism. The administration mobilised a coalition of other countries to **counter Piracy** and its threats to maritime traffic off the Coast of Somalia.

President Bush continued supporting the **Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA)**. This was a trade arrangement through which African states were eligible to export a variety of goods duty free to the US. AGOA had started during President Clinton's administration.

In 2003, Bush established the **President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR)** through which African governments were supported to fight against Aids<sup>6</sup>. In 2004 the administration established the **Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)** as an innovative and independent U.S. foreign aid agency that is helping lead the fight against global<sup>7</sup> poverty.

#### *President Obama's Administration foreign policy for Africa*

As a democrat, President Obama came into office with a neo liberal perspective with his commitments to ending war and seeking for negotiated settlements through for multilateral systems such as the UN. President Obama promised to use diplomatic engagement, internationalism and soft power. Wanted to appease an international community feeling alienated by Bush policy. Obama wanted to pursue a liberal international order as core to

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pepfar.gov/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mcc.gov/about>

America's foreign policy. Promised military disengagement from wars overseas, but use of special operations, clandestine operations and drones to target terrorist leaders and security threats.

However, he was pulled back by America's realistic and neo realistic values of US foreign policy. Neorealism or structural realism as supported by writers such as Waltz emphasise that the international system is anarchic and therefore because of this, states act the way they do in order to ensure their own survival. He argues that although states are obliged to look after themselves and regard other states as potential threats, they are not inherently aggressive<sup>8</sup>.

Obama justified his American interventionist foreign policy with a neo-realistic argument that global peace was best achieved if there is a balance of power where great powers manage the international system. President Obama approved a troop surge of US military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. His administration facilitated the throw of foreign regimes in the North Africa and Middle East through the famous Arab Spring. The regime authorized drone strikes on suspected terrorist targets in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. America's perceived actions against the Muslim world fueled an insurrection of religious fundamentalist groups such as ISIL and Alshabab in Iraq, Syria, North Africa and Somalia.

### ***Obama's Key Foreign Policy instruments to Africa***

President Obama's administration was a continuation of US foreign policy towards Africa. The administration supported anti-terrorism measures in Africa. Obama authorized drone strikes in Somalia and parts of Central Africa. The administration deployed a small American Military tactical forces and equipment to help African states to combat terror. American Special Forces were deployed in Countries such as Uganda in pursuit of rebel leader Joseph Kony in Sudan and Central Africa republic

Obama continued support for previous foreign policy instruments such as AGOA, PEPFAR and MCC. In compliment to these, Obama's administration established the Power Africa initiative aimed at supporting African states generate enough power. Also promoted US policy to support for Renewable energy –such as solar and wind.

With the two Presidents coming from two different political ideological backgrounds, Bush being a Republican and Obama a Democrat, it was expected that there would be a shift in U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid in Waltz

foreign and Africa policy from one administration to the other. Yet the evidence as supported by various scholars<sup>9</sup> and actions show that in substance there was little change in the foreign policy area with regards to the War on Terror and the fight against terrorism. There was no fundamental change in US national interests. What changed was the style and how to go about such policies.

To assert U.S. foreign policy interests in the world and continuity, explains the motives of such style and consequent U.S. foreign policy behaviour and outcomes of both administrations with regards to Africa. Perhaps, the desire to defend America's vital interest and global power aggressively contributed towards the election of President Donald Trump as new President for the United States in 2016.

### **President Donald Trump's Foreign Policy approach**

Since coming to power in 2016, President Trump adopted a neoclassical realism foreign policy approach towards the world. Neoclassical realism is a combination of both classical realist and neorealist approaches. It departs from neorealism by claiming that states respond to the international system when they conduct foreign policy. Neoclassical realists put forward that domestic political processes act as a transmission belt 'between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military and foreign economic policies states select, on the other.' Therefore, the international political outcomes usually reflect the actual distribution among states<sup>10</sup>

According to President Trump, the US was gradually losing its dominant position international system to new emerging powers such as China and Russia. This power needed to be reclaimed.

### ***President Trump's foreign policy approach***

The tenor of President Trump's Foreign policy is to protect the homeland, the American people and the American way of life. He has vowed to promote American prosperity, preserve peace through strength and advance American influence

*According to President Trump, a nation that does not protect prosperity at home cannot protect its interests abroad. A nation that is not prepared to win a war is a nation not capable of preventing a war. A nation that is not proud of its history cannot be confident in its future. And a nation that is not certain of its values cannot summon the will to defend them." Donald J. Trump, December 18, 2017*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid in Caroline Muscat

<sup>10</sup> Lobell, S.E., Ripsman, N.M. and Taliaferro, J.W. (2009). 'Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy.'

The theme of the National Security as espoused in Trump's Foreign policy towards other states is "principled realism" of an "ever-competitive world," where the question of "how we advance our goals is more critical than ever."

*Trump's Foreign policy strategies and position towards Africa and the world*

President Trump's strategy aims to create a 'New Global Order' where the US goes from dominance to leadership. As he declared in 2015-'**From now onwards it will be America First!**' His foreign policy has focused on dividing and conquering of other states by withdrawal from major multilateral arrangements such as TPP, NAFTA and seeking bilateral engagement based on strength and interest. The regime has played off China against Russia and India and Japan against China.

US foreign policy undermines and seeks to out-compete emerging power centers such as China and the EU through various actions such as tariffs seeking to "Make America Great Again".

US defense strategy and Military organization has been structured to patrol the world with the goal of preventing the emergence of regional hegemonies throughout the world. President Trump uses flexing military muscle and threats for war such as was the case with North Korean to advance American interest. The administration uses coercive means such as sanctions as a foreign policy tool towards other states such as Iran, North Korea and Yemen.

According to Haas, President Trump's policies have contributed the rise of nativism, nationalism and Isolationism from global affairs. The United States is now engaged in a great foreign policy debate between a besieged traditional internationalism and an energized new isolationism<sup>11</sup>. President Trump's domestic policy position has taken a radical view towards immigrants from other parts of the world as a threat to US security.

Based on this, Trump's view of the world, Africa has largely remained off the American Foreign Policy radar. Since his administration came to power in 2016, there has been no

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Haas Trump's No Isolationist. Is That a Good Thing?

<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-01-13/richard-haas-on-trump-s-foreign-policy-and-america-first>

concrete plan for Africa. It was no wonder that in early 2018, President Trump referred to Africa as a 'shit hole'.

In Conclusion, foreign policy is largely driven by national interests. National interests can be categorized into core, important and peripheral. For the US, securing US global dominance is a vital interest. An assessment of the different regimes shows that policy of securing the US core interest never changed. Peripheral interests such as US's position on population control and aid to poor people could have changed because of the different political ideologies between the conservative republicans and the liberal democrats. However, it is evident that the vital and important interest remained at the core. Perhaps, the different instruments used by the two administrations such as AGOA, PEPFAR, MCC and Power Africa were used as tools to generate support and alliance from the African continent in regards to protecting US vital interests such as the war on terrorism, Nuclear weapons proliferation, access to natural resources and securing US's influence in the United Nations Security Council. It is no wonder that in 2016 President Trump switched to pursue this American realistic view aggressively.



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