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EMMANUEL ELUKE

Dnepropetrovsk National University, Ukraine

THE ENERGY POLICY OF THE US TOWARDS CENTRAL AFRICA AFTER 2001

Abstract:

The article «The Energy Policy of the US toward Central Africa After 2001» has many justifications. Academically, it should provide researchers of policy analysis a frame of reading Central Africa relations with the US in regards of the US energy security. It should also provide students of Central African affairs, especially in relation to the US the lenses through which to read ongoing events (human rights, civil unrest, terrorism) in the sub-region and how the US policy is influencing these events in the area. This work is also policy relevant because it should provide policy makers enough information and choices in formulating and conducting foreign policy decisions toward the US.

The article aims to trace the US energy policy changes and subsequent US interest in the energy resources of Central Africa. Equally, to analyze the US foreign policy with regards to the US energy security toward Central Africa. In addition to the above, the article aims to concede the Central Africa's energy resources for the development of the US global power.

The foreign policy of the US towards Central Africa is influenced by its energy security in the sub-region. The US engage more with countries that produce oil than countries that are not oil producing nations. The US invest more in countries that can produce and sell oil and invest less in countries that have little to offer to the United States.

With regards of the US energy policy toward Central Africa, it is clear that the US has been increasing to secure energy in the region confronting other powers like China, Russia and India as shown by the high increased in the US import of the energy resources in Central Africa. Also, the US is willing to co-operate with undemocratic and authoritarian governments in Central Africa like Cameroon, Congo, Angola, Equatorial Guinea and others just to protect its energy interest in the sub-region. However, the US energy policy toward Central Africa has also let to the increase in US investment in the energy sector of Central Africa. Equally, the Central African region has been provided financial, economic and social assistance from the US. Overall, the US energy policy has let to the development of the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

Keywords:

US, Energy Policy, Central Africa

JEL Classification: F50, F59

Cameroon and Central Africa play a strategic role in U.S. and global energy security. Central Africa is a critical supplier of new source production to global and U.S. oil supply. It is a natural gas supplier, with enormous potential to meet increased future demand in a carbon constrained world. Central Africa remains open to foreign investment and is one of the few continents that has not dramatically reduced access to investment in recent years. If the region meets its potential, it may increase its production dramatically over the next two decades, serving as a pillar of global energy security by providing a major source of diverse oil and gas supply. The risk of instability in many of Central Africa's key energy producers is high and rising, posing a threat to the stability of these nations and their neighbors, as well as U.S. investment in this region.

«The Energy Policy of the US toward Central Africa» will analyze the growing US interest toward the energy resources in Central Africa and how the US energy security has influenced US policy toward Central Africa. However, D. Fikreyesus (Professor in the Political Science department at Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA) wrote about Oil and U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Africa [11, p. 24]. In his work, he stated how the US showed more interest in African energy sector only after 2001. Also, S. Bössner and G. Stang (European Union Researchers) studied the «Energy Partnership between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa »[10]. In their work, they demonstrated how the EU is dependent in African supplies of gas and oil to meet its needs, confronting other countries like the US and China in the region. A.A. Ajab[former Deputy Director and Head of Training at the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning-IDEP]wrote about Developing a sustainable economy in Cameroon and the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline[9, p. 35].

Until now, authors have simply noted a 'rivalry' between France and the US in the energy politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. Others have underscored the growing interest Sub-Saharan Africa has for the US. Yet other authors have studied the Gulf of Guinea as a strategic pivot of great power rivalry and interest especially for the US. For example, R. Rozoff (Graduate in European literature. Investigative journalist ; Manager of the organization Stop NATO international) studied the «Militarization Of Energy Policy: U.S. Africa Command And the Gulf Of Guinea»[3]. The US is fast replacing France and the EU in Cameroon as the emporium in Central Africa, and that Washington envisages Cameroon and Central Africa as an important region in its energy policy after.

The aim of the article is to analyze the energy politics of the US toward Central Africa from 2009 to present.

While administration of G. Bush (Jr) identified Central Africa's rising potential and associated rising risks (civil wars, sea pirates, and terrorism) early in its first year of office, the Sub-Saharan African region was not really important. Diplomatic engagement with energy producers atrophied, and no significant sums of new resources were deployed to address the challenges associated with rising revenues and eroding capacity of governments to manage them. In the meantime, there have been dramatic changes in the global energy market since 2001 – an explosion in global demand, led by developing Asia; a 340 percent increase in nominal prices, followed by a sharp downturn in the fourth quarter of 2008 with the potential to trigger sudden budgetary contractions within African producing countries; a vast increase in the number of African countries undergoing hydrocarbon exploration and development activities, and a historic intensification of competition for

access among China, India, Russia, and other emerging energy powers, with extensive help in many cases from their governments. This made the US to be more interested in Central Africa.

Upon taking office, President Barack Obama committed to supporting strong, open, and accountable governments and sustainable development in Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa. In his speech before the Ghanaian Parliament in July 2009, the President asserted that Africa is a fundamental part of our interconnected world, and called for a partnership with Africa that is «grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect» [12]. The National Security Strategy, released in May 2010, reinforces this vision, and calls for partnership with African nations as they grow their economies and strengthen their democratic institutions and governance[4]. In June 2012, the President approved a Presidential Policy Directive that outlines his vision with respect to U.S. policy toward sub-Saharan Africa. In July 2013, President Barack Obama announced the launch of Trade Africa, an initiative to encourage greater regional integration and to increase trade and investment between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa by aligning U.S. assistance with governmental and private sector engagements. Trade Africa initially focused on the East African Community, with the intention of expanding over time within Central Africa[10]. The 2015 National Security Strategy stated that the US will advance an international order that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges by building upon the success of the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit by investing in Africa's economic, agricultural, health, governance, and security capacity[8].

The largest of American investment in Central Africa is the Chad - Cameroon Pipeline project in the Gulf of Guinea. The Chad through Cameroon oil pipeline cost about \$3.5 billion USD, financed by the World Bank and run by Exxon Mobil. Inaugurated in 2004, the pipeline moves oil (255, 000 barrel per day) from the Chadian region of Doba to the Cameroonian marine town of Kribi for export[2]. This project has reinforced American oil interest in the region, making the Gulf of Guinea one of the busiest areas of the continent.

«Traditionally of French influence, the Gulf of Guinea and its hinterland (Chad, CAR, Niger and the Great Lakes region) is the more becoming an area of American interests» [9]. A greater part of this interest is covered by the pipeline project which could have a far-reaching proportion. This proportion can be explained in the following way: «the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and its future extension to Niger, CAR, Sudan and Libya reinforces the geostrategic dimension of this zone» [9, p. 15]. This vital interest, with the potential of the region has heightened American presence and the need for security measures. Therefore, while the Horn of Africa remains a «center for fight against terrorism», the Gulf of Guinea, at the center of which is Cameroon stands out as the «center for economic interests» [9,p.28].

In October 2007, U.S. oil imports from Africa for the first time surpassed those from the Middle East. U.S. interest in Africa, particularly in West African oil, has increased considerably in the last decade [11]. According to 2011 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) data, Africa (including Sub-Saharan and North Africa) accounted for almost 12 percent of U.S. oil imports [11]. Proximity to the United States, high quality, and low sulfur content make African oil an attractive source of energy to the United States, and it should be even more so in the future. Even though overall U.S. oil imports have been declining, imports from Africa have been increasing and expect to increase in the near

future [11]. The rising U.S. interest in African, including Central Africa, oil has come with a concern for some scholars, policy makers, and human rights advocates, who have argued that oil is reshaping the relationship between the United States and African oil states [11, p. 56]. This concern has come from previous U.S. engagements in Middle Eastern oil states. As seen in the Middle East, when the United States has economic and security interests in a country or region, it has frequently compromised the democracy and human rights agenda for its other priorities. This has been true of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East, Caspian Sea and the Central African regions from the end of World War II until 2001.

As global competition for energy rises and new energy discoveries are made and infrastructure built in Africa, this continent has become increasingly important to U.S. energy security. In light of recent evolutions in geopolitical realities, such as growing energy demand from emerging economies such as China and India and the U.S. desire to decrease its oil dependency on unpredictable Middle Eastern countries because of political crisis, civil unrest and terrorism in the Middle East, attention has shifted to Africa as an energy supplier. In 2007, African oil accounted for 19% of U.S. oil imports, and in 2008 – 24% of U.S. import. African oil imports were from sub-Saharan Africa [12, p. 66]. Sub-Saharan Africa is also a substantial supplier of natural gas. Keeping up relationships with top energy-resource exporting countries in Africa has long been a top priority for U.S. administrations and continues to be one today. Some African producers of oil are relatively stable and taking further measures to secure them is not necessary. There are a number of more uncertain states however, as well as oil producing states whose governments should be pressured to reform. Another important aspect of energy security strategy as it relates to Africa and the rest of the world is efforts by the U.S. government to decrease dependence on foreign oil. The largest source of U.S. oil imports in Africa is Nigeria, providing 8% of U.S. petroleum imports, a country whose security is unsure [12, p. 69]. Experts have warned of growing security threats in the region including guerrilla movements and extremist. Although some have pointed out the possibility of U.S. programs emerging to support maritime security off the coast of Nigeria, any further military action could have negative consequences and enflame anti-Americanism.

The economies of Central Africa are among the world's most rapidly growing. An increasing number of African governments and regional organizations are taking a lead role in addressing the security and political challenges within their borders and beyond and are increasingly influential players in international scene. The African Union serves as an important leader on political, diplomatic, and peacekeeping issues across the continent.

While the continent has made important gains on democracy and institution building, those gains are fragile. There are still too many countries where the transition to democracy is uneven and slow, and leaders who resist relinquishing power. In many countries, corruption is endemic, and state institutions remain weak. In addition to eroding the legitimacy of governments, these factors impede local business activity and foreign investment. Despite having much of the world's arable land and many of its richest fisheries, the agricultural sectors, many Central African states are underperforming, and poverty still cripples the lives of too many. Transnational security challenges pose threats to regional stability, economic growth, and U.S. interests.

The overall reaction of the Central African countries including Cameroon has been very positive with regards of the US energy policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has profited a lot from the various types of economic and financial support from the US including the US investment in Sub-Saharan Africa particularly in the development of the energy resources in the region. In addition to the above, On June 30, 2013, President Obama launched Power Africa, an innovative private sector-led initiative aimed at doubling electricity access in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 600 million people currently lack access to electricity. Power Africa set an ambitious initial goal of adding more than 10,000 megawatts (MW) of new, cleaner electricity generation capacity and increasing electricity access by at least 20 million household and business connections[6].

It is abundantly clear that the United States has a tendency to work with friendly authoritarian governments to secure its energy needs. With the growing interest in African oil, will U.S. foreign policy towards countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon suggest that the United States might be more likely to work with authoritarian governments to secure its energy interests. These regimes do a lot in suppressing democracy and human rights which the US try to promote. Corruption is also very high in these countries. The reopening of its embassy in the authoritarian state of Equatorial Guinea in 2002 after it was closed for eight years reflects a shift in U.S. foreign policy priorities. This policy was made based on oil interests. The reopening of the embassy conceded with the rise in oil production. However, the US foreign policy towards Central Africa has helped a lot in bringing an increase on investment from U.S. companies, economic, financial and social aid to Central Africa. It is also very important for Cameroon and other Central Africa countries to have a cordial relationship with the US in order to get more political, financial, social and economic assistance from the United States which helps in the development of Central Africa.

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