

Postulates on United States Foreign Policy Toward Ghana: An Exegesis

by

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Abstract

Employing the Critical Analysis Approach, this paper examines the postulates on United States foreign policy toward Ghana. Consequently, the paper entails a substantive evaluation of suggestions and assumptions on the existence, fact, or truth of United States government policy instruments towards Ghana as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or belief that have been made by various observers. The major findings delineated after the analysis reveal that while the existing postulates on United States foreign policy toward Ghana offer plenty of information that is valuable for getting a basic understanding of the topic, they are, nonetheless, simple case studies which are neither theoretically nor methodologically grounded.

Introduction

A laborious search in the United States National Archives, the Library of Congress, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Library, the United States Department of State Library, Washington Metropolitan Area university libraries, and the Internet yielded a relatively small number of works on United States foreign policy toward Ghana and none that compares the policy instruments of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama towards the country. The available works comprise general treatises of United States policy instruments towards the country or look at certain aspects of Ghana within the context of West Africa. This paper provides a critical analysis of the available postulates on the topic. It is therefore imperative to say something about the Critical Analysis Approach before embarking on the analysis of the postulates for those readers who may not be familiar with the method.

The Critical Analysis Approach can be generally defined as a systematic method of engaging in a detailed examination of the elements or structure of an intellectual debate, typically as a basis for discussion or interpretations of the merits and faults of competing postulates on the issue. Nonetheless, as Richard Nordquist points out, “performing a critical analysis does *not* necessarily involve finding fault with a work. On the contrary, a thoughtful critical analysis may help us understand the interaction of the particular elements that contribute to a work’s power and effectiveness” (2017:1).

Elisabetta LeJeune (2017) suggests some very essential questions that can guide a researcher in doing a systematic critical analysis. These questions have been paraphrased here as follows: (a) How are the competing arguments organized? What audiences are the proponents of the competing postulates targeting? What assumptions do the proponents have about the audiences? What kind of language and imagery do the competing proponents use?

The Analysis

Sheryl Gay Stolberg in her article titled “Bush Confronts Hard Questions in Ghana” (2008) gives a brief account of Bush’s trip to Ghana and characterizes and equates him to Santa Claus: i.e. a benevolent leader from a distant land showering Ghanaians with American foreign aid and, as a result, generating smiles and warm welcomes wherever he went. Stolberg also points out that Bush was soon confronted with skepticism about American military policy and his AIDS initiative. President Bush was compelled to call a news conference to address the widespread suspicion that the United States planned to establish military bases in Ghana as it expanded its strategic role on the continent of Africa. With Ghanaian President John Kufuor by his side, Bush said at the news conference: “I know there’s rumor in Ghana, all Bush is coming to do is to try to convince you to put a big military base here. That is baloney, as they say in Texas that’s bull” (Stolberg, 2008). President Bush went on to add that it does not mean that the United States wouldn’t develop some kind of office in Ghana and that the decision to launch any kind of military base hasn’t been finalized (Stolberg, 2008).

Also, the editor of *Dilemma X* magazine (2012) states that Ghana’s capital city named its new highway after US President George Walker Bush. The question the editor asks is if Obama’s engagement in Ghana would merit naming a project after him. The author also discusses in depth how Bush has done great things for humankind, of which most Americans are unaware. Furthermore, the author asserts that many Americans do not know that Ghana, back in February of 2012, named one its capital city’s express highways in honor of a Republican President George W. Bush for his contribution toward the establishment of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

Judy Yizhou in her article titled “Bush vs. Obama” (2012) argues that Obama, who has African heritage, took office as African people positively received an American President everywhere as a welcomed opportunity for change. African people were hopeful that one of their own, an African son, would do even more than his predecessor for the continent. According to Yizhou, this was, however, an unrealistic expectation, but one rooted in Obama’s poetic oratory and lofty promises.

Additionally, Yizhou contends that in Obama’s first trip to Ghana, which only lasted no more than 20 hours, he spoke about an increasingly interdependent world. Also, according to the author, Obama told the Ghanaian parliament that it echoes far beyond Africa’s shores. During the same speech, he promised to commit \$63 billion to help Africa combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, as well as to eradicate polio. Obama declared: “We won’t confront illness in isolation; we will invest in public health that promotes wellness and focus on the health of children and mothers” (Yizhou, 2012).

In spite of everything, a quick glance by Yizhou at the figures from the fact sheet of Obama’s accomplishment in Africa South of the Sahara shows a mere \$6.8 billion spent on African-related projects. According to Yizhou, that is approximately ten percent of what President Obama promised in his Ghana speech. More significantly, out of the 6.8 billion, less than \$1 billion was spent on public health. Some of the successes emphasized by Yizhou include holding meetings with African heads of state and youth leaders, strengthening democratic institutions, advancing peace and security, supporting African Union missions in some parts of troubled areas in Africa, launching the feed the future initiative, and a new trade and investment partnership. Equally, as elucidated by Yizhou, Bush is perceived as a hero in Africa. She points out that in January of 2003, Bush announced the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that would provide \$15 billion to African nations over a five-year span. According to the author, it was then the largest single effort by any nation targeting a specific disease.

Yizhou further points out that Bush also launched the President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI), with the aim of stamping out malaria-related deaths by 50 percent in 15 target nations of Africa South of the Sahara. In addition to this health initiative, for which Bush continues to advocate even after leaving office, he also pushed the G8 nations to demand the multilateral debt relief initiative (MDR), which encouraged the IMF, the World Bank and the United States to reduce the debt burdens of highly indebted poor nations.

Yet again, Yizhou recognizes that during Bush’s time in power, aid to Ghana and other African nations increased to \$5.7 billion a year by the waning days of his administration. Nonetheless, as Yizhou points out, some critics still accused Bush of ignoring Africa’s concerns and left the continent marginalized in a system of global apartheid.

On the contrary, compared to Obama, Yizhou argues that Bush had a visible and solid impact in areas of health, economic and security issues in Ghana in particular and the African continent in general. As also pointed out by Yizhou, PEPFAR and PMI, both initiated by Bush, are the only two public health-related programs mentioned in Obama's Africa strategy document.

Nicolas Cook in his work titled *Ghana: Background and US Relations* (2009) posits a powerful argument for the strong historical ties between United States and independent Ghana based on shared interests and values. Cook points out that Obama's trip to Ghana in 2009 follows an early 2008 trip by Bush to Ghana, during which in 2006 he signed a \$547 million challenge corporation (MCC) compact. According to Cook, the aim of Bush's 2008 trip back to Ghana was to personally review MCC and other United States aid programs in Ghana and other African nations. Also, according to Cook, during this trip, Bush held talks with the Ghanaian president John A. Kufuor and other African leaders on the potential for continued United States-African partnership to sustain "democratic reform, respect for human rights, free trade, open investment regimes and economic opportunity across Africa" (Cook, 2009).

Similarly, in his visit to Ghana, as stated by Cook, Obama concentrated on improved health projections for Ghana. This resulted from its designation in 2008 as a President's malaria initiative focus country and a prospective candidate for education improvement resulting from Ghana's participation in the President's Expanded Education Initiative and trade growth efforts under United States' Africa Global Competitiveness Initiative (AGCI). The AGCI West Africa trade hub, which promotes intra-African and United States-African trade is based in Ghana, which also hosts the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) regional development program. As Cook points out, apart from development cooperation, Ghana is widely seen as a key United States counterpart in West Africa and as an African "success story" in light of its successful transition to democracy and attainment of substantial economic gains.

Conversely, Cook goes on to say that Obama's visit to Ghana was meant to indicate his particular interest in emphasizing the importance of good governance for making progress in development and stability. According to Cook, Obama chose Ghana for his first presidential visit in Africa South of the Sahara because "Ghana is truly an admirable example of a place where governance is getting stronger, a thriving democracy," a status exemplified by the election of 2008. The election was laudable, despite the narrow margin between the two run-off contestants and in contrast to many political crises in other African nations. In Ghana, political power was transferred peacefully to a new government that continued to pursue a development agenda and bolster the rule of law.

Additionally, George Katito in his article, “Continuity, Little Change, US-Africa policy under Obama Administration” (2009), maintains that the Obama Administration’s public engagements with Ghana and other African nations suggest a shift in tone at the rhetorical level. According to Katito, the most obvious has been one toward a tougher, more critical stance on the negative aspects of African political culture, including poor governance and rampant corruption. In his speech to an African audience in Ghana revealed in the article, Obama conveyed a blunt critique of out of control corruption across Africa and persistent disrespect for the rule of law.

Similarly, in the same speech, as illustrated by Katito, Obama condemned and ridiculed the lack of African rulers’ willingness to accept full responsibility for their role in helping to debilitate the development of their various nations, and the need for leaders to take charge of the trajectories of their nations’ development. So far, whether Obama’s shift to tough love, according to Katito, would translate into a significant change to the substance of United States-Ghanaian policy remains to be seen. Contrary to the high expectations within Africa that the Obama presidency would signal a new age of United States-African relations, the reality gave the impression to continuity rather than change. What appeared to be new is a new stronger rhetoric rather than a substantive change from that of Bush’s Administration.

In Abdul Karim Bangura’s edited book, *Assessing George W. Bush’s Africa Policy and Suggestions for Barack Obama and African leaders* (2009), Ivor Agyman Duah argues presciently and powerfully about Ghana and United States relations with the laser focus on the millennium challenge account initiated by the Bush Administration. According to Agyman Duah, Ghana had been a major millennium success story in every possible way. He asserts that even though the millennium challenge corporation did not fund ostentatious programs such as those of the USAID, it was funding the main engines for economic development, such as infrastructure, transportation, and agriculture. Also, the MCA fostered effective governance. It pushed for a people-centered government, a government ruling justly and investing in their people, of which Ghana became the biggest beneficiary with \$547 million. These funds supposedly went into critical areas in the Ghanaian economy to help reduce poverty and generate growth.

According to Agyman Duah, the objective of MCA was to stimulate new thinking and development. Furthermore, Duah points out that the MCA posed challenges, especially sustainability, which could only be guaranteed if successor governments in the United States and Ghana agreed to continue the policy. Most important was the question of whether Ghana was able to gain from the MCA, as well as have an external monitoring and evaluation on its governance record.

Also, in the book titled *The United States and West Africa*, edited by Alusine Jalloh and Toyin Falola (2008), a chapter by Kwame Essien examines Ghana's relations with the United States with a focus on the complex, historical and contemporary relations with African Americans in Ghana and their contributions to "Nation Building" since 1985 and beyond. This chapter presents the most comprehensive analysis of the African American and Ghanaian relationships by investigating the social, cultural, political and economic bonds that have in recent times drawn Ghanaians and African Americans into increasingly closer ties.

As illustrated by Essien, in spite of the fact that there were apprehensions between African American expatriates and local Ghanaians, a small population of Americans, many of them of African American descent, have settled permanently in Ghana. Furthermore, as explained by Essien, both African Americans and Ghanaians were more conscious of the similarities in their struggles for freedom and independence in America as well as in Africa.

Furthermore, Brett D. Schaefer and Anthony B. Kim's article, "President Bush's Trip to Africa: Solidifying US Partnerships with the Region" (2008), argues that Bush's 2008 trip to Ghana marked the culmination of efforts to create a new beginning of relationships between Ghana and the United States based on trade and developmental programs. As pointed out by the authors, the Bush Administration showed incomparable or unrivaled attention and devotion to Ghana and other African nations that have never been done before by an American President. The authors also contend that Ghana and other African nations no longer sit on the periphery of United States foreign policy interests and that the Bush administration increasing engagement and closer ties with Ghana was the recognition of Africa's importance to United States national security. As explained by the authors, Africa is no longer a distant region whose chronic economic problems and instability can be overlooked by the United States policy makers.

Additionally, Schaefer and Kim express the view that the United States needs to expand and ensure America's access to Ghana's energy, prevent the spread of terrorism, and address the spread of disease in the continent. Also, according to the authors, Bush paid more attention to Ghana and other African nations than any other president in United States history, thereby reshaping the structure of United States policy toward Ghana, stressing partnerships and collaboration that can create a proven outcome.

Similarly, in the July 2014 issue of *African Business*, Sherelle Jacobs scrutinizes the outcome of the large-scale trade delegation led by the United States Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker to Ghana and Nigeria. Jacobs points out that the United States economic relations with Africa symbolize a courageous new beginning. The visit by the Secretary with 20 other heads of United States energy companies to Ghana and Nigeria was a new remarkable start of something special. According to Jacobs, even though the United States has made great trade concessions to Ghana and other African nations, its companies with few exceptions have been slow to take advantage of the opportunities of what modern Ghana has to offer.

Also, as described by Jacobs, the United States delegation led by Secretary Penny Pritzker highlighted the Obama Administration's wish to strengthen United States economic ties with Ghana and other African nations, particularly in the energy sector. Obama saw a potential enormous opportunity in Ghana for American companies. As a result, he called the African continent as a whole the World's next great economic success story. Again, as argued by Jacobs, Obama was truly dedicated to broadening the relationship between the United States and all other African nations, thereby developing a new level of mutual understanding and respect based on shared commitment to democratic principles, social progress, and economic growth. Nonetheless, the results were paltry.

By the same token, Stephen Hayes expresses similar sentiments in the June 9, 2014 edition of *World Report*. In this article, Hayes describes Obama's high-risk African leaders' summit in which all but a few of the heads of state of the 54 nations were expected to attend the summit. As explicated by Hayes, this will go down as the largest such gathering ever organized by a United States President by bringing together African leaders and chief executive officers from African nations and the United States to talk about improving their business relationships.

The overarching objective of the summit was ostensibly to bring Africa and the United States closer together economically and politically. Even though United States ties to Ghana and other African nations were stronger than ever, the summit was expected to help spur even more trade and investment. According to Hayes, the summit represented a fundamental shift in strategy by the Obama Administration from the first term strategy in which Obama was adamant that he would only work with African leaders that were democratically elected.

Also, in a March 2014 issue of *Modern Ghana*, USAID mission Director in Ghana, James A. Bever, issued a stern warning to Ghanaian political leaders that they should not in any way, shape, or form consider financial aid from the United States as a give-away, or simply put, "our money is not Father Christmas." According to Bever, the cash the Obama Administration was doling out to Ghana's government belonged to the American tax payers; as a result, the administration expected to see dividend any time such aid was given to Ghana. Bever added that the purpose of such assistance is to encourage trade as well as help produce more healthy and educated Ghanaians.

For the past several years, explained Bever, the Obama Administration gave approximately \$45 million to support three main areas of Ghana's economy which include assisting to sustain offshore fisheries along Ghana's coastal areas which has been disappearing in recent times. Also, according to Bever, this American investment had paid dividends and yielded positive results.

Equally vital is the Feed the Future Project, which is one of the interventions that aim to spur sustainable and broadly shared economic growth in the Northern part of Ghana. This project, asserted Bever, has helped small farmers, especially women, to improve their production. As illustrated by Bever, fair and ethical investments are crucial to Ghana's economic transformation.

Conclusion

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the existing postulates on United States foreign policy toward Ghana offer plenty of information that is valuable for getting a basic understanding of the topic. Nonetheless, it is equally obvious that these perspectives are simple case analyses, which are neither theoretically nor methodologically grounded. They also do not provide a systematic comparison of Bush and Obama's policy instruments towards Ghana. Thus, there is an urgent need for a study that will fill these critical gaps, thereby contributing to the epistemology of the topic. This is the next project on which I intend to work.

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