

**National Role Conceptions and United States Foreign Policy: A  
Nigerian Perspective**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the theory and practice of American foreign policy and how Nigeria, from the lens of the author perceives it. The paper establishes that Nigeria's perception of the US and its role conceptions in the world is a combination of awe, admiration and envy: there are similarities in the national character of the two nations; and the "African giant" aspires to become a global power in the future and considers the American standards as its benchmark for that. The experience and impressions of the author before, during and after a recent Fulbright Fellowship at the Walker Institute/Department of Political Science of the University of South Carolina are freely used to evaluate the real import of American actions in the global system. The paper submits that US *behavior* in the world is, because of certain carelessness on the part of the nation, understood to be altruistic, overbearing, and yet discriminatory. It thus recommends, among other things, that the American nation requires much soft landing after Iraq and image damage control for the country to regain the confidence of the world. The method of analysis is descriptive and analytical, and the data are largely drawn from participation-observation and some secondary literature.

**Keywords/Phrases: Foreign Policy, Roles, Role Conceptions, Perception**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has a high opinion of the United States of America (US). Nigeria has respect for the US part because of the latter's high level of economic, military and technological development and as a result of its stable democracy, economic prosperity, unrivaled successes in the global system and of course its superpower capacity. Incidentally Nigeria itself aspires for these same attributes and achievements at home, at the regional, continental and global levels (Akinterinwa, 2001; King, 1996; Okon, 1998), which have partly informed its role perceptions, conceptions, and actual roles performed in the African continent since independence (Folarin, 2010). Thus Nigeria's disposition toward America is a combination of awe, admiration and envy. More importantly Nigeria and the US share some national characteristics and moreover America is the greatest buyer of Nigeria's crude. Among the common features are religious and ethnic plurality, federalism, presidentialism, and a huge population.

The US too considers Nigeria geostrategically important in its African policy. As the most populous black nation in the world that has played pertinent roles in African development and integration, Nigeria naturally commands respect and influence that

offer hopes to get Africa and the black world on America's side. Also because of its size Nigeria offers a huge market. Again its very good Bonny Light oil is highly prized by the American nation. Moreover, in fighting international crime, fraud, narcotics and conflicts in Africa, the US considers Nigeria as a great partner. Aside these Nigeria has over the years enjoyed enormous technical, material and economic assistance from the US (Ate, 2000: 173-180).

It is not surprising therefore that Nigeria and the US enjoy a robust relationship. There have been strains and stresses in the relations, the most recent being the attempted terrorist bombing during Christmas of 2009 of a passenger plane in Detroit by a 23 year-old Nigeria-born Britain-based Omar Farouk Abdumutallab; but these are not significant enough to write off the landmarks that earned the two countries mutual respect. However, the problematic is not the focus of this piece. The paper focuses on how Nigeria sees the US role conceptions and actual roles in the world, particularly its African policy. The paper critically examines the US foreign policy by two prisms: as a Nigerian and how Nigeria officially sees it; and as a visiting fellow in the US with first hand information and experience of US foreign policy. The paper particularly addresses the following: Nigeria's official position informed by the opinion and impressions of Nigerians on US policy in the world, the character of US-Nigeria relations, and personal impressions of US global roles and foreign policy before coming as a fellow, and new impressions after the fellowship and recommendations.

### **National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy: Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

National role conceptions (NRCs) refer to a set of identified roles or tasks a state has set out for itself to play in the international system, which is supposed to be in tandem with its national interest. They are the articulation of a definite course of action to be undertaken in the external environment of a state put together by policymakers in the pursuit of foreign policy (Holsti, 1967), and which are informed by a number of factors of which the most critical are perceptions of national leaders, interpretations of the same

policymakers, and the expectations of both the domestic and international publics (Folarin, 2010; Adigbua, 2005; Wish, 1980).

The understanding of states as organic actors with legitimate roles to occupy in the massive “social club” or international community, ascribes to the state a human attribute, allows for the predictability of state behavior in any given situation, and gives every state its own distinct image. Hence, the “national role theory” becomes a more attractive instrument of analysis than hitherto known analytical frameworks as political realism, national interest, and liberal-idealism, among others. The national role theory, adapted from ‘role theory’ in Social Psychology, in which leading lights such as Biddle ( ) espouse the inevitability of persons and their specific roles (concordant or discordant) in social groups, enhances the understanding that states have role types depending on their ideology, political experience, historical heritage, philosophical foundation, socio-economic strengths, leadership quality, people’s choices; and the manifestations of role conflict and role strain in a complex international system.

Nigeria and the US are major players in their own rights. Nigeria’s African policy is driven by role conceptions beginning from the eve of independence when its founding fathers identified the definitive “manifest destiny” of Nigeria to provide positive leadership for Africa against the backdrop of national cultural, economic, geo-strategic, mineral, military and demographical endowments. Nigeria’s role conceptions are clouded by leaders’ perceptions, preferences and interpretations which overshadow the expectations of the citizens or involve their inputs and opinions (Folarin, 2010: 224-365). The American foreign policy is also role conception-driven, with the enormous natural and invented power of the American nation engendering an exceptionalist principle that has always shaped its foreign policy. The politics of role conception is however, not too different from that of Nigeria’s, as it is also characterized by clique clannishness and elitism (Rosati, 2006). The national role theory is an appropriate framework to explain Nigeria’s perception of US foreign policy, and for the understanding of the peculiar character and attitude of the two nations in international politics.

### **Nigeria and the US: Similarities of Statehood**

Nigeria shares a number of national attributes with the US. First both are former colonies of Great Britain with similar colonial experience that prompted a passionate commitment to anti-colonial movement during and after colonization (Obi, 2000, Alstyne, 1960). Second both countries conceived ambitious national roles and assumed shortly after independence a role of protecting their continent and fighting the cause of development and integration, which is sometimes misunderstood as attempt to establish hegemony over other states. However, this proactive attitude translated into action has naturally placed both countries in a leadership position. Third Nigeria and the US are multinational states. While America has almost the whole of the races and ethnic nationalities in the world represented as citizens in the US, Nigeria is a country of 140 million people with 250 ethnic nationalities. The socio-ethnic composition of the two states has significantly reflected in the foreign policies of both countries. It is pertinent to note that in the case of Nigeria elements of some of the ethnic groups like Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani and Ejjagham can also be found in neighboring countries such as Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon respectively; and in far away countries as Brazil and Cuba. As such Nigeria has a policy of good neighborliness embedded in the first of its foreign policy concentric circles (Bukarambe, 2000, Saliu, 1999 Akinyemi, 2005), and maintains a seamless relationship with Brazil and other nations which, by the fortune of the Atlantic slave trade, found Nigerian elements ferried to the “New World”.

Fourth, Nigeria is a multifaith society like the US. The major religions in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam, and Animism. However, each religion is made up of numerous denominations and tens of sects, which has made the religious environment enormously charged and intensely competitive (Marshall, 1993). The intense religious atmosphere probably accounts for the recent rating of Nigeria and the US as two of world’s most religious countries (*Nigerian Tribune*, April 15 2007:1).

Fifth the political structure of Nigeria is federal like that of the US’. Nigeria is made up of 36 states and Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory just as Washington D.C. is US’ capital. There is a three-tier system with the local government as the least and grassroots

government. The implication of this is that power is properly distributed in such a way that the center or federal government can have more time devoted to the demands of foreign policy making and implementation. Similarly both America and Nigeria practice the presidential system of government in which the Chief Executive or President has the prevalent grounds in foreign policy issues (Rosati, 2007, Fawole, 2004).

Again the two countries have a long-range policy objective of becoming or remaining a superpower. While the US has been a superpower for sixty three years and is probably the only superpower in a new world order, Nigeria has a long way to go in sustaining its continental leadership and becoming a global power. Nigeria's leaders from independence have however not minced words in affirming the ambitious policy. One time Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Olu Adeniji affirms:

With the reduction of the strategic and ideological interests of the major powers in the developing countries, regional peace and security issues as well as regional economic and social development will become essentially the task of countries in the region. In an eventual multi-polar world, the role of regional powers will become more vital and Nigeria must seek to remain one of the major powers, if not the major power from Africa (2000:21-22).

Also both countries are big democracies although Nigeria's democratic experience is experimental, nascent and stabilizing with lots of lessons, inspiration and assistance drawn from the US. Moreover oil is another thing that brings both countries together. The US is a small producer of oil, while Nigeria is world's sixth largest producer of oil. Both need each other, one as the indispensable seller and the other as the biggest buyer of oil.

The similarities of national character and the issues that bring the two countries together identified above have bonded Nigeria and US and made the former to be full of hope that its aspiration to become a power of global reckoning would see the light of the day someday. Indeed Nigeria and its people see themselves as the 'USA of Africa' and a potential world power given its enormous human, material and natural resources.

### **Nigeria-US Relations**

There are four main underlying factors in Nigeria-US relations namely, mutual respect and interdependence, oil, democracy and development assistance. There are two schools

of thought across scholarship in terms of assistance from the US. A school of thought from Nigeria led by Aka (2005) argues that development cannot come through external assistance but from within a nation. The school argues that what results from any so called development-oriented assistance from the US or Industrialized North can only create structural imbalances in the relationship with the developing world.

However, the second school finds expression in the argument of Stephen Ellis in “How to Rebuild Africa” (2005) and another American scholar Robert Kagan in “The Benevolent Empire” (1998), both of whom stress the unique place of American assistance for “a vast portion of the world’s population.” The external support thesis is enhanced by some thinking in leadership quarters that foreign support reinforces rather than detracts or compromises self-development. According to this view, countries have ultimate ownership and responsibility for their own self-development, but external assistance is not necessarily contrary to this goal. As former President Obasanjo argued during a spring 2001 interview, although Nigerian democracy “is essentially our own,” “development partners” such as the United States can contribute to bringing about the “democracy dividend” that will make Nigerian democracy more firm. Obasanjo characterized the “democracy dividend” as an opportunity for “getting resources to deal with essential quality of life enhancement in *our own* society . . . .” (Cited in Aka, 2005). This definition connotes the usefulness of external support given that, as is often the case in Africa, the resources needed to enhance quality of life cannot be entirely generated at home.

The tradition of American foreign policy encompasses both moral idealism and raw self-interests (Love, 2007; Holsti and Rosenau, 1988; Thompson, 1968). However, it is important to stress that American policy makers believe that pragmatism more than either idealism or realism characterizes their foreign policy. In other words, they consider what is most practicable *per* time in taking decisions or action on issues of international concern. One important issue about Nigeria that America considers expedient to intervene in and assist the former on is democratization. From 1993 to date, America has supported the move for a more democratically stable Nigeria with the belief that the

success of Nigeria's experience will enhance the democratization process in Africa (Ate, 2000:144).

The US' primary economic interest in Nigeria is oil. As a voracious consumer of the country's low-sulfur petroleum, America recognizes Nigeria's worth as the largest fine oil producer in Africa and the sixth largest in the OPEC. Since 1974 Nigeria has been one of the largest exporters of crude oil to the United States. Nigeria sells 40% of its oil to the States. Nigeria's crude oil exports as well as related products make up about 10% of total annual US oil imports. Other Nigerian products to the US market are timber, rubber, hides and skin and textiles (Ate, 2005: 143). Securing the US' supply of Nigerian oil was one of the bases for then-Vice President George Bush's visit to Nigeria in 1982. American companies such as Shell, Exxon Mobil, and Chevron have substantial investments in the lucrative Nigerian oil industry, which, along with other Western oil companies, they dominate. However, the recent growing insecurity in the oil producing Niger Delta is a major concern to the US. Apart from the fact that the enormous oil interests of the US there are threatened by the activities of the militant organizations who engage in acts of violence like abduction and killing of expatriates, and destruction of the oil facilities of the multinational companies, the security problems of the Delta may defeat the object of making Nigeria and Africa safe for democracy and capitalist investment.

Another of the United States' interests in Nigeria is to maintain ties with the nation once described as "the most African country" in the world. Nigeria's vast human and natural resources, though poorly managed, offer lots of promises for the US. The country also plays a leadership role in Africa, particularly in West Africa, that advances other U.S. interests. Under General Abacha, Nigeria led a peacekeeping mission as part of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that helped to stabilize long-time U.S. allies Liberia and Sierra Leone. Paradoxically, Nigeria was able, through ECOMOG, to restore democracy in Liberia and to reinstate a sacked civilian president in Sierra Leone while leaving its own citizens under the darkness of military rule (Omach, 2000). Nigeria's intervention in regional stability arguably



contributes to the American goal of making the world safe for democracy. As former U.S. Secretary of State Albright noted, Nigeria is “potentially a very valuable partner for us in promoting peace, democracy, and the rule of law throughout West Africa” (Aka, 2005: 8).

A third U.S. interest is the maintenance of American cultural-historical linkages to Nigeria. A great number of Americans trace their roots to Africa. Many of those Americans, including entertainer-scholar Paul B. Robeson (1898–1976), trace those origins to Nigeria (Aka, 2005: 10).

Also America needs Nigeria’s help in its campaign against international drugs/narcotics trafficking. The economic hardships in Nigeria, beginning in the 1980s, resulted in the emergence of a significant drug-dependent culture and in the conversion of Nigerian borders into a major route for the trafficking of cocaine and heroin into the United States. In its 1997 report on international drug trafficking, the State Department noted that “Nigeria is the hub of African narcotics trafficking, and Nigerian poly-crime organizations continue to expand their role in narcotics trafficking worldwide.” Nigeria-U.S. cooperation on drug trafficking dates back to 1987 when the two countries signed a mutual law enforcement agreement followed by a special anti-drug *Memorandum of Understanding*. The US also looks to Nigeria to help reduce the number of American victims of advance fee fraudsters (419). According to an estimate, “Americans lose \$2 billion annually to white collar crime syndicates based in Nigeria” (Aka, 2005: 16).

Nigeria’s primary interest in relating with the US is informed by the fact that it sees the US as a steady buyer of its oil. Although Nigeria’s share of the U.S. market has fluctuated over the years, the United States remains a primary purchaser of Nigerian crude oil. Second, as earlier mentioned Nigeria values the US because it draws inspiration from it as one of the most powerful countries in the world, and because the two countries share similar demographic features such as ethnic, economic, and religious complexities. Third, like many developing countries, Nigeria seeks to tap into American “technological capabilities” for its manpower development needs. Tens of thousands of

Nigerians have flocked to the United States in search of higher education, and in more recent times for greener pastures. There has been the emigration of Nigeria's intellectual manpower, political asylum seekers between 1993 and 1998 and victims of the violent ethnic conflict of recent years.

Those Nigerians who come to America for education refuse to return to Nigeria because of the unfavorable political and economic conditions in their home country. These émigré Nigerian-Americans include Philip Emeagwali, whose mathematical genius President Clinton praised during his address to a joint assembly of the Nigerian National Assembly on August 26, 2000 (*The Guardian*, August 27 2000:1-2). Immigration policies such as the visa lottery compound this "brain drain" since many of the Nigerians who win these lotteries are educated individuals whose talents the country needs. As former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (African Affairs) Leonard H. Robinson Jr. noted on the eve of President Clinton's 2000 visit to Nigeria, "one of the most important things the United States can do is to help the Obasanjo government reverse the trend that has sent the best and brightest Nigerians fleeing to the U.S. and elsewhere" (*The Guardian*, August 26 2000:1).

The mutuality of needs, respect, assistance to stabilize democracy in Nigeria so as to gain Africa for democracy, other forms of assistance, and oil, have decimated US-Nigeria relations for ages. It is important to state that these factors also underlie Nigeria's official opinion of the US. Generally, America is held in high esteem by the Nigerian government except during the Sani Abacha regime when Nigeria was isolated for its full martial laws and unpopular domestic policies. However, mixed reactions from Nigeria sometimes meet America's intervention and foreign policy in the world.

### **State of the World and Role of the US**

The issues bogging down the global system in the last ten years include democracy, terrorism, national and regional security, ethnic and religious conflicts, child soldiering, poverty, narcotics, human trafficking, HIV-AIDS, environmental degradation, global warming, etc. Since the end of the Cold War democracy has become more embraced by

nations of the world. Military dictatorship, monarchical absolutism and socialist tyranny collapsed in the face of popular clamor for representative government. Even in Africa, which had been the hub of military autocracy for three decades democracy became a fashionable system of government.

Terrorism has from 1978 been a source of international concern, with the West being the most disturbed as it has been the major target. Terrorism took a more dangerous dimension from 1997 with the Lockerbie plane bombing by suspected Libya-sponsored terrorists. Other tragic incidents occurred, including the bombing of US embassies in some countries in the Horn of Africa and Asia, attacks on pubs and recreation centers in some parts of the world that had people of American and European extraction, and abduction of Americans and Europeans used as bargaining chips and to demand ransom. The international system witnessed a most unprecedented form of terrorism in 2001 by the attacks of the US on September 11. Suicide bombers flying hijacked passenger airliners ran into the World Trade Center in New York and The Pentagon in Washington D.C. wreaking the most devastating havoc in America's national history. Terror became the most common means of fighting by the minority and acts of terror have been replicated through the Al-Qaeda network across the world, including Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, and Somalia.

Ethnic genocide and sectarian violence on domestic and international scale have also been another albatross to global peace order. The Rwandan genocide in 1994, which started as a minor ethno-political crisis in 1993 had been rooted in the Hutu-Tutsi animosity from independence arising from the divide and rule tactic of the Belgian colonialists. The Hutu "Power" bloc because of advantaged population size had taken over from the Belgians in 1960 and soon commenced a hate campaign to dismember the Tutsi considered as Belgian collaborators during colonialism. Between 1962 and 1975, intermittent ethnic cleansing by the Hutu occurred but by 1994 it had degenerated to full scale genocide with over 800,000 people killed and more than a million persons displaced within just 100 days (Gerard, 1997). The Somalian crisis which occurred before the Rwandan conflict had opened a floodgate of ethnic genocides in Africa. Other cases were

the Liberian crisis from 1990, Sierra Leonean conflict of the 1990s, Ivorian crisis from 2004, Congo crisis from 1997, and Darfur (Sudan) genocide from 2003. For the Somalia crisis, barring the losses it considered “huge” the US played active role; however, for what it called fear of having another Somalia episode in its hands, the US looked away from the Rwandan genocide and did not play its traditional peace enforcement role to stop the tragedy. It is pertinent to note that the selective nature of American intervention in Africa has elicited racial slurs and popular opinions about America’s custom of keeping away from where it has little investments.

In terms of religious conflict, Nigeria offers a critical example. Shortly after the “resolution” of the “June 12 1993” election crisis by the swearing-in in 1999 of a Christian president from the Southwestern Yoruba ethnic group, governors of the predominantly Moslem North orchestrated the establishment of the Islamic legal and moral code Sharia in their states one after the other meant to embarrass and destabilize the power at the center. The Islamic law ignored the principles governing the Christian community in the Northern states thus creating a major ethno-religious crisis. The whole of the North soon went up in flames with massive killing of Christians and arson unleashed upon the Christian community. There were reprisals in the Southern cities of Ibadan, Sagamu, Osogbo and Lagos that are predominantly Christian. Another theater of ethno-religious war has been Iraq. From the time of Saddam Hussein up till the intervention of America and allies in 1991 and the 2003 deposition of Hussein and invasion of Baghdad Sunnis and Shiites have been daggers-drawn while the South had carried out calculated extermination of Northern Kurds (Folarin, 1998).

In very recent times the Kenya election crisis resulting in an explosive civil strife and negative economic implications for the Great Lakes region has attracted world attention. The erstwhile sedate Kenyan political environment with a booming tourist industry was thrown into a major quagmire by the rigging of the Presidential elections in December 2006 to favor the incumbent Mwai Kibaki upstaging the leading candidate in the polls, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement. The political crisis is already taking

an ethnic dimension with the Kikuyu, Luo and Kallenji rallying around parties having their ethnic elements in their leadership (*The Guardian*, January 29 2008).

It is pertinent to note that 90% of the concerns identified above emanate from developing countries that are struggling for stability, peace and economic leverage. This view is emphasized by Feinberg (1983) that since the years immediately after World War II the Third World has been the chief locus of international relations.

It was this problematic situation in the developing world that Soviet Union and the US capitalized on to pursue their “ideological expansionist” policy, for as Feinberg contends

The United States and the Soviet Union, separated by forbidding distances and restrained by the fear of mutual destruction, concentrated their competition in “third areas.” With its political instabilities and localized wars, the developing world has provided a fertile, alternative battleground where the Great Powers could wage a shadow proxy war, where each could seek to spread its own influence and deny or disrupt its opponent’s ambitions. (1983:15).

America’s interventionist policy is legendary. Leaders in the circles of Conservatives, Realists and Neo-Cons strongly hold that the nation has the role or obligation to safeguard the world for democracy, freedom and good governance. This American sentiment, reminiscent of the popular legendary movie character “Voltron” the Defender of the World, was once expressed by Kissinger when he lamented the eroding power of the nation viz:

We are sliding toward a world of out of control, with our relative military power declining, with our economic lifeline increasingly vulnerable to blackmail, with hostile radical forces growing in every continent, and with the number of countries willing to stake their future on our friendship dwindling Kissinger (1980).

After the Cold War, the US seemed to have the leeway to win the world for democracy. By the demise of Soviet Union and considerable shrinking of Soviet power, America emerged as the only superpower in the world. Thus, America had more roles to play in actualizing its long-range interest of securing the world for democracy and capitalism. The policy of containment hitherto characterizing its foreign policy would now give way to restructuring of the global political, economic and ideological systems. Incidentally, it was from this period that the new challenges earlier identified would constitute the foreign policy crises of the US.

Today, Obama's Washington's attention is directed toward the rumblings emanating from the Middle East (the rise of Iran as a Nuclear Power, the challenge of pulling out of Iraq, the complicated Afghan war, the proliferation of terror activities, the falling of Pakistan into Al-Qaeda's hands), Central America (problem of Haiti, the Mexico drug war, the influx of Latinos into the US), Southern Africa (the problem of Robert Mugabe), the Horn of Africa (Sudan/Darfur conflict, Somalian crisis, election crisis in Kenya), West Africa (resurgence of military coups, Niger Delta crisis), Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia (challenge of North Korea). The US had resolved from the era of Reagan to enlarge its capacity to influence events and to make more effective use of the full range of its moral, political, scientific, economic, and military resources in the pursuit of its national interests; and to increase military spending in order to stiffen its resolve, augment its capabilities, and make its threats and blandishments more credible (Haig, 1981).

In the 1990s the resolve was made more manifest by the President Bush administration, Bush, a Neo-Con was Vice President to Reagan in the 80s. America played a major role in Saddam Hussein's successes in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) as Hussein was considered a liberal Moslem that could check the excesses of the extremist Islamic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Ironically, in 1991 America led the UN-backed allies in the Operation Desert Storm to force Saddam Hussein's forces out of occupied Kuwait. After the war, the US commenced a full scale campaign on dismantling the vestiges of Soviet political and military traditions in Iraq and removal of Saddam Hussein. To justify this campaign it alleged that Iraq was producing outlawed weapons of mass destruction, which prompted a UN Inspection Team to be sponsored for investigation. After initial frustrations from the Iraqi authorities the UN team was allowed to investigate the allegations. The Bush administration also stopped the Hussein highhandedness in Kurd occupied Northern Iraq which it designated No Fly Zone for the Iraqi authorities because of alleged organized killings of the Kurds by the Sunni led administration (Stock, 1992, Onigbinde, 1998, Folarin, 1998).

After Bush, President Clinton reverted to diplomacy like the Carter administration in the Middle East. However, in the heat of the Monica Lewinsky scandal in the White House, Clinton changed from diplomacy to war in Iraq in the mid 1990s re-enacting the bombardments that characterized the Bush era. There was a view then that the sudden militant disposition to the Gulf Region was to divert attention from the legitimacy crisis at home (Kagan, 1998).

The terrorist attacks on the US of September 11 2001 were to change the whole concept and approach by the US to local and international security. Apart from tightening loose ends in the country including the establishment of the Homeland Security Department, intensifying of border and airport checks, and banning of certain items on flights; the US considered its future security inadequate in the face of global insecurity engendered by terrorism. Malken (2002) argues that the US by the lax in its immigration laws, had accommodated all manner of unscrutinized elements whose missions were never ascertained and as such had exposed itself to friends and foes and made itself vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Hence the President George W. Bush administration began to drive an aggressive policy aimed at securing the borders while still opening its doors; and became overly committed to fighting terror and securing the world (Moskowitz and Lantis, 2006). By this, the administration that initially had a policy of minimal internationalism was induced by 9/11 to come out full-blown into international politics. 9/11 earned America international sympathy, increased the President's support base, made a hero of him, justified unilateral and sometimes arbitrary interventions internationally, and created an Imperial Presidency that assumed 90% political power with little recourse to constitutionalism (Rosati, 2007, Puchala, 2005).

In fighting terrorism, the Bush administration identified Afghanistan's Taleban regime as harboring Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda terrorist group that claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. Other nations identified included Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, and a number of groups in several other countries, which were accused of belonging in the Al-Qaeda network (Clarke, 2004). The war in Afghanistan was intense and constituted the climax of what Bush had said two days after the attacks about "whether we bring them to justice or bring justice to them, justice must be done"

(Folarin, 2004: 21, *The Guardian*, Sept 12, 2001: 1). The Taleban was sacked, Osama was sent into the “holes” and terrorism abated in the meantime.

After Kabul, Bush resumed the old campaign to dethrone dictatorships that had the tendency to be terrorism friendly, particularly in the Middle East. Iraq came into the picture and by 2003 Baghdad and Saddam had been felled. The trial of Saddam went side by side with the war in Iraq. The consequence of the invasion of and protracted crisis in Iraq is the intense crisis of confidence for the United States as many nations of the world and the UN seem not to fully grasp the genuine intentions behind America’s huge military budget and occupation of Iraq. This is particularly more so because of the spate of violence and resort to suicide bombings in the country. According to some international public opinions, Iraq has become more disorganized, politically more distraught and anarchical than Bush met it (Packer, 2005).

President Bush also declared Tehran and North Korea global security risks because of the possession and threat of development of nuclear capacity. The US also fears that Iran’s extremist religious leadership is potentially terror-friendly; hence the Bush campaign for global condemnation of the Iranian and Korean nuclear threats.

In terms of conflict resolution the US has also been involved. America instigated the UN intervention in Liberia and led the peacekeeping troops in Somalia. Other places where America intervened unilaterally or jointly included Kosovo, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The case of Rwanda was a very sore point for America as it refused to intervene. Incidentally the Rwandan genocide turned out to be the worst genocide in human history. A school of thought suggests that Rwanda like some countries with high intensity conflict do not enjoy American intervention because they do not fall within the range of what Ripley and Lindsay (1993:18-22) call ”strategic policy”, but such nations may be within America’s “structural policy” which constitutes program of assistance for rebuilding crisis-ridden countries (Scott, 1996: 3). The failure to act in Rwanda brought much unpopularity to the US.

### **Perception of US Roles in the World**



The general Nigerian perception of the United States and US foreign policy rubs on individual perception of the American foreign policy. Young men growing up with Hollywood movies particularly cowboy films, because there is the argument that every society tells its own story by its arts, got ideas that the American society could be violent. American epics and movies depicting heroism also demonstrate the extent to which, for the sake of saving one small group or just an individual, a detachment of American soldiers could sack a whole city, a big group or an entire nation. Hence most Nigerians grow up with the opinion that like the American thinking demonstrated in motion pictures, American foreign policy was “cowboy” like the roles of Reagan in the Iran-Iraq war, and Bush 1 and 11 in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated. Similarly, people sometimes ascribe the occupation of Iraq, or invasion of Vietnam in the past or summary destruction of whole groups as the American tendencies as depicted in their films to stretch the elastic ends of their hard power.

Interestingly, ordinary citizens of Nigeria believe that the US is a paradise of sorts and uncritically accept the intervention of America anywhere in the world. They even express willingness to have the US intervene in any small national crisis in Nigeria and support the stationing of the proposed US Africom (African Command) in Nigeria. Such liberal minded people, who are about 65% of those whose expressed views of America were accessible, regard America as the Messiah in a world of anarchy and tens of millions of those who belong to this group dream of living in the States, working there and earning American citizenship. The group is a large one and is still growing. No wonder a survey done in 2007 seeking to know the level of confidence of peoples around the world in American internationalism shows that in Nigeria 65% believes so much that America takes into account interests of other countries in taking international decisions, while 28 % respondents has little confidence in American policy. The percentage that has confidence in US foreign policy in Nigeria surpasses that of even America that has only 59% (The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007).

However, the academia and media in Nigeria are often critical and suspicious of every American role in the world, particularly in Africa. Nigerian intellectuals and journalists often describe US’ presence in Iraq as a crude “invasion”, “occupation” and undue

interference”. They reject American intervention in the domestic affairs of states including roles for democratization, development assistance and management of ethnic or religious crisis, arguing that they are internal problems that can best be handled by the locals who best understand them. Those who share the view argue that most of the regions/countries where America intervenes do not require such intervention and reliance on US aid would only lead to a compromise of national sovereignty and consolidation of subtle American imperialism in the process, which has intensified from the end of the Cold War.

However one’s personal perception of the American society entirely changed during the Study of the United States Institute on American Foreign Policy Fellowship that took eighteen Fulbright Fellows from seventeen countries of the world to the Walker Institute of International and Area Studies (WIIAS), of the University of South Carolina. At the Walker Institute, Fellows engaged in a month-long intensive study of US foreign policy. After that, the rest of the program was devoted to visiting important cultural, political, economic, and national security points of interest, and interact intensively with the shapers, makers and implementers of American foreign policy in Washington DC and six other states of the US. Building on the foundation provided by the four-week residence, Fellows interacted with important governmental officials and non-governmental actors, visited governmental and private offices, and got to acquire a better sense of American culture.

While gaining new, sharper and deeper insights and knowledge of US foreign policy, the special privileges to rub minds with 21 American scholars and foreign policy technocrats in The Pentagon, National Security Council, National Intelligence Committee, Capitol Hill, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), US Mission to the UN, Center for a New American Security, Department of State, Brookings Institution, US Army, etc., equipped the scholars with the knowledge of the real feeling of America about the world.

Again the hospitality of Columbia (capital of the State of South Carolina) and the accessibility of its people with no sign of racial discrimination erased the “Nigerian

opinion” earlier had that America was that legendary “wild, wild West” or a “cowboy” nation. Life moved much peaceably slowly in South Carolina like other places in the South, with the exception of “fast” Georgia, thus contrasting sharply with the impression created by the very ambitious and aggressively pursued US foreign policy that had given the erroneous impression that Americans were arrogant, imperialistic and unfriendly people.

A personal understanding of the American presence in Iraq is that the original motive was to rescue the nation from state terror and ethno-religious oppression, but that the motive soon paled into oblivion and became consumed in the war-plan of an overexcited camp of the Neo-Cons whose roadmap of occupation ignored acceptability by the Iraqis and a rational timeframe. Hence, the good plans of Mr. Bush are misunderstood because they were probably hijacked and certainly mis-implemented. This explains the huge military and administrative spending, and the crossroads in Iraq.

### **Recommendations**

The controversy surrounding the United States policy in the Middle East imposes a huge responsibility on America to convince the greater part of the world about its genuine intentions in the universe. While the SUSI Fellows have had the special privileges to know what America really is and that they have a good disposition to the world, the majority that is ignorant of this fact still believes that the nation is just an over-ambitious and arrogant one that is interested in safeguarding the world only to fester its own economic and political nests and keep it bound to the ideology of capitalist democracy. With the “Iraqigate” and other controversial foreign policies America needs lots of image laundering to earn back the confidence of not only its many friends in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world, not only its increasing camp of enemies, but also that of Americans whose cynicism towards US foreign policy is growing.

Second, America needs to be able to urgently answer the question of what its fate is in Iraq, and what would become of that country after their exit, and in the face of growing suicide bombing, and religious violence. There are five difficult options the US now has: immediate withdrawal, phased withdrawal, total withdrawal, partial withdrawal, no

withdrawal. An immediate withdrawal has its own side-effect of Iraqi civil war immediately America withdraws. A phased withdrawal portends a grave danger of deepening of the terrorism and sectarian violence because of likely America's prolonged stay. The fifth, no withdrawal is an obvious explosive that will explode upon both Iraq and America sooner or later. I posed this pertinent question before top American foreign policy bureaucrats at the NSC, Pentagon, and to then US Ambassador to the UN, and member of Congress, Joe Wilson. Ambassador Khalilzad had a brilliant suggestion: urgently calling all stakeholders in the crisis together to a roundtable and putting it across to them what exactly they desire in the immediate and in future. Their own recommendation represents their own desire, which will douse tension and possibly engender ceasefire, and which would ultimately be what America would do.

America's non-intervention in Rwanda is yet unforgotten. Many Africans still think that if Rwanda were in Europe or Middle East or were at least an oil-producing area, America would have probably swiftly responded to stop the genocide that ended up in 800,000 deaths. The US had rationalized its non-intervention by the Somalian experience in which US lost many of its troops to Somalian rebels and militia groups. After the Rwandan problem, President Clinton had later apologized and promised "Never Again" to allow such scale of murder occur in human history. However, Africa felt disappointed that as Liberia boiled from 1990 through 1994 to late 1990s and as Sierra Leone experienced civil strife caused by the "blood diamond" in which the West played significant role to save their investment in the diamond trade and destabilization of the growing democracy, the United States government barely showed interest. Also, the mere verbal engagement and warning to military interventionists in Nigeria during the June 12 election crisis, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Togo, Ivory Coast, and Darfur (Sudan) without concrete action, remind Africans of Rwanda and seeming contradiction in the US' avowed commitment to stabilizing emerging democracies. To redress this, the US should no longer appear selective in intervening in crisis areas. US would not be countermanding the universal principle of non-interference if the cause is to save humanity.

In order not to be seen as curbing crisis somewhere and creating it elsewhere, the US should thread softly in the Somalia-Eritrea crisis. America should not be seen as taking

sides with one country against another, particularly in a poverty-ridden and crisis-torn continent of Africa. Rather than use one country as a base to strike another like in the case of Eritrea and Somalia, thus appearing to be killing a fly with a sledgehammer, the US can bring permanent solution to the crisis and make its positive economic presence felt in Somalia in such a way that the economically frustrated people of Somalia would not become the ready tools in the hands of Al-Qaeda.

On the issue of Africom, the US would have to position the minds of Africans properly to accept this. Enlightened people of the continent understand that Africom is not a reincarnation of the colonial forces of occupation; they however are apprehensive of the tendencies to become a subtle tool of monitoring and compelling African nations to do America's bidding. US-Africom is probably supposed to be a standby force for rapid response to crisis in African nations to avoid a situation in which slow response would again compel reasoning that America is unconcerned about African problems. This must however be made intelligible to ordinary Africans who have lost faith in Western intervention.

Lastly, part of the problem of US policy toward Africa is that the continent, despite its huge geographical and demographic size, is seen as just one "nation". Thus the many economic, social and political problems are genuinely largely unknown. Just like the US relates with some countries like China, India, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, France, Holland, Britain as individual units, African countries should not be lumped together into one single unit. It is true that this would impose huge burdens on America, but it is also true that the problems of Africa are too enormous to be ignored; particularly when cognizance is taken of the fact that the same continent has been a land of opportunities from which many Western nations are benefiting.

## **Conclusion**

American foreign policy in the world is in the last five years misunderstood. There is the accusation about the occupation of Iraq and treatment with impunity of perceived friends of terror. It is also true that the US pursues its national interest with all resources at its disposal including military means; but that is same for all other nations of the world

because international politics itself is the struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1967). One thing is however clear: America is bent on building a world that is secure, which other nations think it is doing from its own perspective and on its own terms; these have been the source of the misunderstanding.

Against this backdrop it is expedient for the US to make more friends and the best way to do so is to carry everyone along in its commitment to building a secure world. The opportunity of the Summer Fellowship has opened one's eyes to the soft power, benevolence, friendship and humility of America; not all about self interest and arrogance that had been the opinion before coming to America. However, how many people of the world would know this? The only means is by projecting the great sides through its foreign policy. This is more expedient for America to regain global confidence.

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