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Oil as the Fundamental Determinant of United States Foreign Policy Towards The Middle East.

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Abstract

This paper aims at ascertaining the fundamental determinant of United States 'foreign policy towards the Middle East. Utilizing John Hobson 's Economic Theory of Imperialism; Secondary sources of information gathering as well as Content Analysis, the paper reveals that contrary to U.S. orchestrated' Democratization Mission' and the likes, the quest to ensure steady access to the supply of her highly needed Oil (Petroleum) and at favourable price, is the main determinant of America's actions and inactions in the Oil-rich Middle East region. It recommends among others, that the people of Middle East countries should carry their destiny in their own hands instead of succumbing to the prevailing America's national interest (Oil) driven interventions in their politico-economic affairs which merely engenders neo-colonial condition favourable to the U.S. oil interest in the region.

Introduction

In our international political system where no nation is an Island onto itself, foreign policy is basically a set of principles and rules that guides a country in her relation with other countries. Americans like to think of their country as the goddess of liberty, holding high the torch of freedom as a beacon light to all the peoples of the world. This belief according to Palmer and Perkins (1996) shaped the foreign policy of the United States of America.

Using the Middle-East as a case in point, this paper asserts that contrary to the much orchestration of the United States as selfless agent of globalization of democracy and the likes, she (the U.S.) in her external relations never engage in 'Charity Begins Abroad' nor 'Father Christmas benevolence' or 'Bazaar Jamboree". Rather, masquerading under the smokescreen of democratization of the world, whether during the bi-polar epoch or contemporary uni-polarity, the real driving force of the actions and inactions

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of the global Leviathan (the U.S.) is her 'National Interest', which in the case of the Oil-rich Middle East region, is ensuring steady access to her greatly required Oil (Petroleum) and at favourable price. Adopting John Hobson's Economic Theory of Imperialism, Secondary Sources of information and Content Analysis, this paper therefore buttresses this reality and proffers necessary panacea for the leaders and people of the Middle East.

Theoretical Framework

The analytical perspective with which this paper is viewed is in line with John Hobson's 'Economic theory of Imperialism'. Quoting Hobson, Chikendu (2004:27) notes that "the dominant motive for imperialism was the quest for markets, as well as opportunities for higher return on investments". Thus, imperialism is logically a function of capitalism. In this case, progress in industrialization led to more productivities, need for imports of more raw materials, and more profitable foreign outlets for capital, all of which conspired to stimulate owners of capital to persuade their state or home government to help them in securing new markets overseas. In the end, the capitalist states forcefully and otherwise went all out to establish protectorates, colonies and spheres of influence overseas.

So, Hobson, like Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin and the likes, exposed the economic taproot of imperialism-be it classical colonialism or contemporary post colonial or neo colonial epoch. In tandem with this Hobsonian postulation of economic motive of foreign direct and indirect involvement in the political economy of other nations (especially the Third World), Chinweizu (1978:481) asserts that:

By now, it ought to be plain that the fundamental conflict between the West and the rest of us is not over ideology-Democracy, Communism, Marxism, or any of the many bogeys the West brandishes to keep our eyes away from the real issues..., the conflict has been over the control and use of the resources of the non-western peoples. Consider what would happen to the prosperity of the West, and hence to their military, economic and political dominance, if the Copper of Zambia and Chile were no longer available to them, if the diamonds of Africa and South America, Zaire's Uranium... were no longer as cheaply available to the West as now, if there were no cheap Oil from the Middle East and Venezuela to fuel their planes, cars, tanks, B-52 bombers and to lubricate their rifles and big guns. The consequent diminution of their prosperity is what they will not tolerate.

It is therefore in line with the foregoing exposition of economic taproot of imperialism that one can understand and explain why the United States of America would spend enormous human and material resources in liberating Oil-rich Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's Iraq invasion and annexation; America's subsequent regime-change/war against anti-West Saddam's Oil-rich Iraq; America's engineered NATO backed rebel conquest cum ousting of anti-West/nationalistic Gaddaffi regime of Oil-rich Libya; the U. S. contradictory or double-standard protectionism for the age-long pro-US, monarchical regimes of the Oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Bahrain—their bloody crackdown on pro-democracy peaceful demonstrators notwithstanding, etc.

Oil and America's Actions and Inactions in the Middle East

David S. et al (1979:4) aptly noted that "There is no universally accepted definition of the territory of the Middle East. However, Chandra (1994:253) avers that "the central state actors or core members of the region are Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and Iran". He further notes that "the thirteen peripheral states of the Middle East are Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and Cyprus" (Chandra, 1994:261).

Although the term 'Middle East' was first coined as recently as 1902 by the American naval historian A. T. Mahan, the region has been one of the most significant throughout world history. Religion-wise, it is the source or birth place of three of the great religions of the world Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Geographically, the Middle East is a trijunction or meeting point of three continents-Asia, Africa and Europe. It is also called the gateway of Asia, Africa and the back door of Europe. It commands three seas-the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. It is situated at the international crossroads. All naval and airways pass through this area. The straits of Bosphoras and Dardanelles connect the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and the Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.

However, the Middle East is more cherished and valued in the world for its vast resources, particularly black gold - OIL (Petroleum) which is sine-qua-non for meaningful socio-economic cum technological development. According to Chandra (1994:251):

Petroleum is the lifeblood of modern technology, and the Middle East is sailing in the Sea of petroleum. The vast supply of Oil has rendered this region a vital strategic end in itself. The region contains about half of the world's oil reserve.

The ever-growing energy demand of United States especially as a super power and heartland of international politics, have made oil central in her foreign policy towards the Middle East. Ebel (2005:1) reveals the strategic place which oil occupies in the overall life of the Americans when he states thus:

Oil is a strategic commodity. It is the lifeblood of our economic wellbeing. Fuels the troops that protect our homeland. Provides essential services in growing our crops, heating and lighting our homes, transporting goods to market, moving local, regional and international commerce, making information transfer via the internet possible and providing us with the quality of life and mobility that we have come to enjoy and expect.

Maasse (2010:12) gave another reason why Oil will continue to remain very intrinsic to America, which he identified as the Military usage of Oil as the Pentagon, spends trillions of dollars on Oil. In his words:

A study carried out by Rogers Stern, an economic geographer with Princeton University on the cost of keeping aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf from 1976 to 2007 reveal expenditure over three decades of \$57.3trillion. That is just a partial accounting of peacetime spending. It is far trickier to figure out the extent to which America's wars are linked to Oil and then put a price tag on them.

For Soman (2009:10) the overdependence of the United States on Oil has made it a cornerstone of the US foreign policy in the Middle East. In his words,

The 1973 Arab Oil embargo dealt a severe blow to U.S. economy. In the 1970s, only around 37 percent of American Oil imports were from the Middle East. However, by 2007, American Oil imports have risen to almost 60 percent. It is more accurate to say that currently, America runs on Oil. Thus, controlling Oil access is a cornerstone of United States Middle East policy.

In tandem with the foregoing, Abok (2010:12) avers:

.. .the United States' involvement in the Middle East stem from the fact that they are heavily dependent upon the region's oil and to further this interest, Israel is seen as their

strongest ally in the region, while at the same time using the territory of most Middle East countries as strategic American bases.

The above brings to limelight while succeeding administration in the United States have made the issue of Oil very strategic to her foreign policy towards the Middle East which is a region that has the largest deposits of Oil. This assertion is further corroborated by Lenczowaki (2009:36) when he states that:

Despite the physical distance between the United States and the Middles East, U. S. influences has been left in every country within the region. American economic interests particularly in assuring access to Middle Eastern Oil have long motivated presidents and lawmakers to "intervene in the-region. Historically complicated U.S. relationships with Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states have often revolved around Oil, specifically ensuring an adequate supply at a reasonable cost.

Similarly, Michon (2007:28) notes that the United States Oil policy in the Middle East is mainly for the following reasons:

To prevent any hostile state or internal groups from gaining control over the Persian Gulf region... In this instance, the case of Iran point to this reality. Therefore, current U. S. policies as it related to Iran is in living up to this responsibility.

Indeed, the United States intervention policy in the Middle East is purely to show a continued flow of Oil in the region and at affordable price to be maintained especially judging her experiences from the 1973 Oil embargo by the Arab States against supporters of Israel which almost crippled the U. S. (and her pro-Israel European allies). This culture of intervention was succinctly put by Siegel (2008:59) thus:

The United States intervention in the standoff between Iraq and Kuwait leading to the 1990 Gulf war, the invasion of Iraq in 2002 that led to the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the war against the Talibans in Afghanistan and he present efforts to ensure that Iran does not attain nuclear capabilities are all purely because of Oil. This is because a nuclear Iran can change the balance of power in the Gulf region and can undermine the United States interest in the area.

Oil interest has also determined the actions and inactions of the U.S. (and her Western allies) in the 'Arab Spring' or pro-democracy uprising in the Middle East. Unlike anti-West radically led Syria and Libya for example, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's age-long monarchical regimes were treated as "Sacred Cows" by the double standard oriented U. S. (and her allies) despite their brutal cum fatalistic crackdown on peaceful anti-regime demonstrators. Why? The U.S. (and her European allies) prefers maintenance of their favored status quo (the existing monarchical U.S. Saudi and Bahrain regimes that have been cooperating with U. S. Oil interest). Thus the U. S. prefers gradual democratic changes (unlike Libya for example) rather than engineering quick or abrupt democratization that may see to the emergence to power in non-pro-U. S. regime, which will undermine U. S. Oil interest.

Worthy to note is that the rulers of the Kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have been playing supportive role of "Good Boys" to the U. S. (and her European allies) in the U. S. led war for liberation of Kuwait, U.S. invasion of Iraq and ousting of 'recalcitrant' and 'nationalistic' Saddam Hussein. U.S. war on terrorism in Afghanistan, as well as U.S. efforts at weakening the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and quest for uninterrupted flow of Oil at moderate price. Thus, in the case of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and even Mubarak's Egypt, the U. S. inaction or non-mobilization for immediate enthronement of democracy tantamount to double-standard justice (against say Libya, Yehmen and

Syria) and clear sacrifice of the so-called U. S. democratization s internationalization of human right agenda at the altar of her 'national interest' (basically 'Oil).

In the North Africa's wing of the Middle East, the U.S enjoyed the non-democratic age-long pro-U.S. 'moderate' regime of Egypt's Mubarak (and the likes who ensured free flow of Oil), even though under America's "use and drop policy", he (President Mubarak) has to be "softly" abandoned but given soft-landing (unlike nationalistic anti-West Libya's Gadhafi). Thus, the pro-U. S. Egypt's military was used to hijack pro-democracy movement's efforts at enthroning post Mubarak non-neocolonial democratic regime that will likely undermine U.S. interest (especially Oil) in the Middle East region.

In Libya's pro-democracy violent rebellion against Maummar Gaddafi, the U.S. (with her European) allies, for purposes of her national interest (i.e ensuring free access to enormous Libya Oil and at favourable price), saw the uprising as an opportunity to actualize her age-long efforts for regime-change against the nationalistic, no-nonsense anti West and radical Muammar Gaddafi whose country has been enjoying high rising GNP and income per capita. Utilizing Nicollo Machiaveli's deceptive idea of 'Fox' and 'Lion', she (the U.S.) secured U. N. resolution via UN. permanent representative- Sussan Rice for 'protection of civilians from the ensuing war between pro-Gaddafi forces and anti-Gaddafi rebels. Determined to illegally exceed the U. N. mandate (i.e. protection of civilians) the U.S. quickly mobilized her European Oil-oriented allies" (Britain, France, etc), sided anti-Gaddafi rebel's and converted their military alliance-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as "Air Force wing" of the anti-Gaddafi rebels.

Though Gaddafi "vowed to fight to the end" (Daily Sun. June 8, 2011:14), President Obama who according to Fareed Zakaria (Time. April 4, 2011:23) "repeatedly" stated a regime-change goal in Libya ensured that the rebels rejected Gaddafi's acceptance of proposed African Union (AU) mediation facilitated by South African President (Jacob Zuma). In the end, NATO's devastating aerial bombardment of Tripoli and general decapitation of Gaddafi forces, enabled the anti-Gaddafi rebels hitherto bottled up in Benghazi to over-run entire Libya with the eventual killing of Gaddafi cum takeover of power by the National Transition Council (NTC) that was to oversee (on behalf of the U.S. and her Western allies) the final emergence of elected puppet regime ready to cooperate (unlike Late Gaddafi) in running a neo-colonial political economy favourable to U. S. (and her allies) Oil interest.

Conclusion

From the foregoing exposition, logical chain of evidence testifies the realities that the global sole super power (the U.S.) needs enormous petroleum to maintain her socio-economic, technological and military advancement and consequently made access to Oil and at favourable price a cornerstone of her foreign policy towards the Middle East countries. This is in view of the fact that the Middle East region holds about half of world's Oil Reserves and any policy flop in the area will do a lot of damage to America as witnessed during the 1973 Arab Oil embargo. Thus in her Machiavellian stratagem, hiding under the camouflage or the smokescreen of democratization, internationalization of human rights and the likes, the world Leviathan (the U. S.) has been directly and indirectly taking foreign policy decision and actions towards the Oil-rich Middle East countries (be it Liberation of Kuwait, regime-change in Iraq and Libya, protectionism over pro-U. S. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Monarchies, pressure on Iran, etc.) in furtherance of her national interest (Oil).

In conclusion therefore, while the United States is posing as Messiah or selfless godfather to pro-democracy demonstrators in the Middle East amidst installing pro-U. S. puppet regimes (for her Oil interest), the paper recommends that the people of the Oil-rich Middle East countries should as a matter of urgency learn to carry their destiny in their own hands while solving their domestic or regional problem as there is no "Charity-begins-Abroad" or "Father-Christmas" gesture of liberality (as the U. S. possesses) in international politics whose trade mark is the pursuit of national interest and as Kwame Nkrumah (in Daniel A. Offiong, 1980:122) correctly noted; 'A state in the grip of Neo-colonialism is not a master of its own destiny'.

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