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AFRICAN OIL: A CASE OF THE US ECONOMIC PROSPERITY OR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT?

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Abstract: This paper aims to assess the involvement of the United States of America (hereafter referred to as the US) in what scholars have termed, "new scramble for Africa". Furthermore, this paper will examine the extent to which Africa's oil wealth is a 'curse' or 'blessing' to its people. Most of the academic literature on this subject builds on the thesis of a 'resource curse'. In this context, this paper tests the probability that Africa's oil wealth is a terrain for shared or competing interests between her and the US. To achieve the objectives of this paper, the researcher relies on critical discourse approach and conversations in their broadest form. Equally important, the epistemic location of this paper is the Afrocentric paradigm.

Keywords: Africa; Development; Economic prosperity; Oil; United States of America.

INTRODUCTION

Oil is generally viewed as a significant and scarce resource in the international market system. To concretise the preceding statement, Makube (2008: 1) notes that oil is strategically important to any economy both as a 'fuel and a feedstock in the production process of chemical products'. Its significance gained centrality in the partnership between oil exporting countries and oil importing countries. It has also redefined the geopolitical and economic calculations of the stronger economies in their dealings with the developing world. For instance, oil supply is one of the critical areas in the relationship between oil-producing African countries and the US (Goldwyn & Ebel, 2004). However, the politics around oil resources in Africa and the world at large has attracted much interest from academics, businessmen and etc. This is due to the fact that much of the citizens of all oil-rich African countries live under poverty levels and their economies are underdeveloped (Keay, 2002). For instance, it is recorded in *Africapedia* (2009) that in the year 2007 the oil rich Angola and Nigeria were ranked 14th and 19th, respectively in terms of Human Poverty Index (HPI). Broadly, in 2006 the Human Development Index (HDI) of Nigeria was 0.448 and this figure had placed this country at 158th position out of 177 countries ranked. Much like Nigeria, in 2006 Angola's HDI was 0.439 and this has positioned it on number 161 out of 177 countries with data (UNDP, 2006). On the other hand, the standard of living of most oil importing countries in the West, such as the US, is high (*Wikepedia*, 2009). It is important to note that most of the oil companies operating in Africa are mainly from the West-US, Canada, Britain, Italy and France. These companies include Chevron-Texaco, Exxon-Mobil, Shell, ENI, McMoran, among others.

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While the dominance of the petro industry in Africa by Western companies is apparent, the effect of this industry to the well-being of ordinary citizens in Africa remains a doubt. It goes without saying that the challenges facing oil exporting countries and oil importing countries are different. As such, policy contradictions are imminent between the US and African and other oil producing countries in the international economic system. This relates especially to questions of whether the US's security or African development is a priority for Africa's oil.

In this paper, Afrocentricity explains the history of resources exploitation and the relationship between resource-producing African countries and Western countries (Asante, 2003). This theoretical locus was found relevant for this paper because it helps in understanding the nature of exploitation in the unequal relationship between Western countries and resource-rich African countries. Similarly, Marxism accounts for the nature of exploitation between individuals and nations.

US, Africa's Oil Endowments and the World Market

According to Desire (2007) Africa has significant oil [and gas] reserves in the world. The presence of both gas and oil wealth in Africa makes the continent pivotal in international economic relations. As such, the US and other industrialised countries stand to benefit from the exploitation of Africa's oil. The foregoing postulation is advanced against the backdrop of assurances by some of the officials of the Obama Administration to the contrary. The minority view among the American government officials is that oil from overseas countries is less strategic for the economic and energy security of the US. They argue that one of the grand ideals of the Obama Administration is to ensure that the US becomes a self-dependent and self-sustainable producer of oil for its domestic consumption. While the ideals of oil self-dependence and sustainability have been popularised under the reign of Obama, it is submitted in this paper that the US has always had rich oil reserves. But for strategic reasons, the successive US administrations in the post-Cold War era and prior to that, have been happy to exploit the oil sources of other countries (D. Mabizela, pers. comm.). In addition to the above, the unpopular narrative about the less strategic significance of Africa to the US economic and energy security among the diplomatic circles is emotive. It fails to capture the dominant realities of the competition for oil and gas in Africa and the position of the US in this regard (Xu, 2008). Thus, Dolan (2009: 2) correctly believes that the US pursues energy in Africa for two manifold reasons: (i) meeting rising domestic consumer and commercial demands for oil and natural gas and (ii) maximising American power and influence within the international system.

In Africa proven oil reserves are located in Libya, Nigeria, Algeria, Angola, Sudan and new discoveries have been made in Cameroon, Ghana and Mauritania. With the exception of the three countries mentioned here, other countries mentioned above have attracted at least 48% of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Libya and

Nigeria accounted for approximately 66% of Africa's oil export, at least until the Arab Spring caught with the former in the year 2011 (UN, 2007).

As such, Africa is fast becoming a strategic continent of the future due to its oil supplies. Its energy resources have attracted the involvement of big powers such as the US, Britain, China, among others. Makube (2008: 7) further argues that the US is interested in the continent as a 'cheap and reliable alternative to the increasingly volatile Persian Gulf'. Velempini and Solomon (2008) wrote that the US receives 12% of its oil imports from Africa and this is set to increase to 25% in the year 2015. Globally, it is estimated that West Africa alone will be responsible for one fifth of the world's oil supply (*Ibid*). Another scholar, Fikreyesus (2012) exponentially enforced the foregoing prediction when he wrote that in the year 2008 the US 'imported about 16% of its oil from the Gulf of Guinea and this figure is likely to increase to 25% by the [year] 2015'.

African Oil Trade: The Reversal of Fortunes

As a Marxist theory, World Systems Theory would argue that the involvement of the US in Africa's oil fields represents a second wave of the scramble for Africa by a country that did not directly benefit from colonialism. Given this, Habib (2007) equates the 19th century scramble for Africa with the current wave of the scramble for Africa. While the analogy for linking the 19th century scramble of Africa and the current one is befitting, it is argued that US involvement in Africa's resource sector may not be worse as compared to China.

Unlike its Western counterparts such as Britain and the US, Beijing does not have strong moral convictions to condemn authoritarianism in Africa. From an economic point of view, China has also been attractive to African states simply because of its unblemished record on promotion for the principle of 'non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states' as a guiding operational framework for the conduct of international relations. However, the under-current of Beijing's economic engagement in Africa is the worst. In fact, it is worse than even the 1st wave of the 'scramble for Africa'. Hence, when China's government or companies invests in the extractive industry of African countries such as Ghana and Tanzania, among others; it largely uses labour and products from China (I. Umejesi, pers. comm.). This practice ensures that maximum economic dividends are repatriated to China. The very strategy was used during the building of the African Union (AU) headquarters in Ethiopia.

In this context, Beijing's economic engagement with Africa has short term benefits for this continent, but in the long run it would hurt. Africa runs the risk of trading its economic sovereignty to China. Unfortunately, the undercurrent of Chinese political and economic engagement in Africa is dismissed by the majority of African elites as a true reflection of the anti-Chinese sentiments veering across the globe. The above defence position of the governments of Africa should be understood within the context that normally, the ruling elites (hierarchy) collude with the oil companies (individualism) from China and elsewhere for their self-enrichment at the expense of their people and communities (egalitarianism) (Umejesi & Thompson, 2015).

The US and the New Scramble for Africa

According to the AOPIG (2008), 'African oil is not an end but a means: a means to both greater US energy security and more rapid African development'. Contrary to AOPIG's position, this research advances the Marxist theory that argues that the involvement of the US in Africa's oil fields is similar to the original scramble and what is different is only, the political and economic climate in which it is taking place. The national interests of the US would be prioritised in their dealings with African oil exporting countries and the continent as a whole. What emerges here is that in every relationship, either bilateral or multilateral, each state seeks to prioritise its national interests regardless of its political or economic position in the world. Therefore, the US uses its political leverage to maximise its interests in its engagement with the African states on issues of trade and other economic sectors (L. Mutheiwana, pers. comm.). It is also not wise for Africa to have any high and unrealistic expectations from any US administration at any point in time. After all, the performance of any US administration is not judged in terms of its more often self-imposed humanitarian and moral responsibilities in Africa and elsewhere, but on how it best serve the interests of its domestic populace (Mamaila, 2008). The truth of the matter is that the development of Africa is secondary for the US and if it happens, it would be accidental. Lending credence to this view, the extant literature on resources and development in Africa shows that foreign investment pattern in transport infrastructure of the African oil exporting countries such as Nigeria was not organised to link the communities of the host countries and promoting other local interests (Onuoha, 2008). But it was developed to facilitate the transportation of oil exports to the US and other major players in the oil sector such as China. Therefore, it is hypocritical to think that both Africa and the US can benefit from African oil especially under the tutelage of the current trade rules in the international system. The advocates of the World Systems Theory would argue that any suggestion of how African oil could be used to mutually benefit both Africa and the US is like advising America on how best to use Africa to solve its domestic problems. An important point to note is that colonialism did more harm than good to Africa, and Africans should be careful about the current wave of the scramble of the continent's energy resources (Boahen, 2003).

In analysing the US's participation in the new scramble for Africa, it is important not to see Africans (or Americans) as homogenous- i.e. microcosms of African and American national interest, respectively (M. Thompson, pers. comm.). With the haemorrhaging development crisis in the majority of the resource-rich African countries, it important to also consider the roles of the local elites in patronage networks as well as self-enrichment schemes in terms of the African oil producers (Adejuwon, 2014).

The Dichotomy of Africa's Oil as a Curse viz. Blessing

A historical conundrum faced with economists, political scientists, historians, and development practitioners is whether oil extraction particularly in Africa lead to a shared economic growth and development due to a 'resource blessing' or it would result into a 'resource curse'? In the case of Africa, the key challenge is that the oil wealth did not benefit the people who are legally entitled to the resource (Mbachu, 2008). This can be attributed partly to corruption, illegal trading, uneven development policies and unfair international trade rules. In response to this misnomer, the Africa Policy Advisory Panel warranted that as Africa begins to contribute more oil to world markets, 'the US must use its limited leverage to press governments to become transparent, spend their revenues for the betterment of their people, and respect human rights and the rule of law' (CSIS, 2004). Admittedly, this is a logical option that is in line with the spirit of the new economic partnership for Africa's development. However, it does not nurse specific strategic interests of the US and it is quite a sour pill to be swallowed by the policy making and implementation machinery of Washington. It is hardly surprising when the US often puts a blind eye on despotic regimes especially in areas where American democratic demands are likely to jeopardise its oil entrenched economic interests. This explains the reason why the American government officials seldom tackled the longest reigning presidents in Africa such as the late Muammar Ghadaffi who led Libya for close to three decades, Obiang Nguema Mbasongo (leader of Equatorial Guinea since 1979), Omar Bongo (has been in power in Gabon since December 1967 till his death in 2009) and Paul Biya (ruled Cameroon for no less than three decades) (Ankomah, 2008). It must be noted that no written history of the politics of oil in Africa would be complete without mentioning Libya, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon because they counted among the major oil exporting countries in the world. As such, if the US is serious about the need to diversify its energy resources, it is bound to court this 'dictators club' because it is relatively receptive to the US foreign policy. This is symbolic of the replay of the Cold War era when the US propped up autocratic regimes to be used as geo-strategic and geo-political bulwarks in a fight against the encroachment of communism in Africa. Additionally, others were used as springboards or rather geo-economic bulwarks, to safeguard and preserve African mineral, oil and gas wealth for exploitation by the West (Shai, 2008). This practice stunted the development of Africa as petrodollars were used to prolong a civil war in Angola, fuelled a cycle of conflict in Nigeria and maintained and sustained authoritarian regimes in Gabon and Cameroon (Obi, 1999).

The association of the US with the 'dictators club' or some of the authoritarian African oil exporting countries leaves many questions unanswered especially with regard to its commitment to the promotion of democracy around the world. The answer to this question is that, it is not the responsibility of the US to establish and strengthen democratic institutions in Africa. This is the primary task of the Africans themselves and it goes well with the popular expression 'African solutions for African problems'. If the democratisation of Africa counters American economic interests, Africans might as well forget about the positive contribution of the US to their political and economic emancipation. Godfrey Mabale (pers. comm.) echoed this sentiment 'there is no person [nation] that can eat out of morality'. This means that in the face of competing economic interests in the international system, the US would put more focus on its realist foreign policy priorities and provide limited support to the less important liberal foreign policy priorities in Africa. Some observers view American capitalism as the circus of the US foreign policy (Westad, 2007). In their view, only through the understanding of growing economic role of the US in the world can the political aspects of its external relations be grasped. In terms of opinion surveys conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) as cited by Drezner (2008: 16), the promotion of democracy as the principle of the US foreign policy has gained less than 40% public support from the year 1990 to 2006. What can be deduced from this survey is that liberal policy goals can be easily stated, but are very difficult to implement.

Closely associated with the failure of the US to help democracy thrive in some of the African oil exporting countries, it has become fashionable for academics to state that Washington has failed to ensure that Africans benefit from the oil revenues generated by their governments. The application of double standards with regard to the US commitment to the promotion of democracy in Africa has denied Africans access to better living conditions. For instance, President Paul Biya [mis]used the oil proceeds of Cameroon to fund his unnecessary and expensive travels and prolonged stays in luxurious hotel(s) in Switzerland while his people were languishing in extreme poverty and underdevelopment (fatalism) (Umejesi & Thompson, 2015: 791-811). In the midst of this dire situation, the US has turned a blind eye to poor political and economic governance in Cameroon and it was 'business as usual' in regard to oil trading and other commercial exchanges between the two countries. This must be understood as an end-result of the failure of the US to reconcile its goal of promoting democracy and the rule of law with its economic diplomacy. All of the above is well captured in CCGA's study of Public Opinion and Foreign Policy wherein it is reported that the domestic support for the promotion of human rights abroad declined drastically from 58% in 1990 to 47% and 28% in 2002 and 2006, respectively (Drezner, 2008).

The scrutiny of the growth and development performance of democratic states shows that democracy does not necessarily bring about economic development;

instead it provides an enabling environment for development. In spite of this, this research argues that it is not the primary task of the US administration to create enabling conditions where Africans can live a better life. And it is no surprise that throughout the post-Cold War era, the improvement of the living standards of the poor nations nodded not more than 41% of public support as one of the American foreign policy goals (*Ibid*). Therefore, Africans themselves must primarily lead the struggle to put in place accountable and transparent regimes. This is essential if oil revenues are to be used for the development of the people (Africans in particular), instead of entrenching dictatorships for the benefit of the few ruling political elites and their cronies. For its part, the US should help the African states to review current natural resource legislations to adequately reflect and accommodate the interests of the masses. This can be complemented by whittling down of loan guarantees and subsequent imposition of diplomatic pressures including sanctions to states that do not adhere to good business practices in oil trading.

As observed from the above, it is quite difficult to find convincing evidence to wholly blame the US for the impoverished situations of the oil-producing African countries. This argument should be tied to the overall dependence on natural resources. The global comparative perspective reveals that the presence of natural resources in Botswana and Norway have not cursed the people, yet the US is actively trading with this countries. To a limited extent, the resource curse argument fits well in the description, explanation and interpretation of the extract of Africa except for Norway and Botswana. For example, Norway is the second largest exporter of oil in the world (Saudi Arabia being the biggest) yet it does not suffer the curse. According to Michael Watts (cited by M. Thompson, pers. comm.) the fact that Norway is 'a stable democracy and it was never colonised' has provided an enabling environment for her to combat the 'resource curse'. While the argumentation of the importance of the stability of the democracy of Norway in preventing the 'resource curse' is evident, it is incorrect that Norway was never a colony. Norway was the colony of Sweden at least until the early 1900s (M. Thompson, pers. comm.). And of course, the US also used to be a colony and with a mightily exploited resource – sugar. So there is certainly some more sorting out needed on this 'resource curse' front. It is argued that it is all to do with whether a country can get itself into the 'feasibility space' for democracy and of course, the African elites are no help there. Undoubtedly, the US and other trading partners of African countries have a responsibility of promoting sound governance in Africa, as a way of enhancing conducive trading environment. In the long run, it is in the best interest of the US for African nations to be developed and become self-reliant. This will enhance the capacity of African nations to buy products from the US. As such, the US should pursue policies that do not result in internal conflicts, such as resource related wars.

The Neo-colonial Orientation of the African Oil-based Economies

There is an extensive literature on the political and economic impact of oil on inter-African relations and international relations at large. Despite the centrality of oil on the economies of the countries that export it, it is essential to comprehend that globally the impact of its receipts has been controversial. In Africa for instance, new oil discoveries have increased the economic growth of the respective countries including Mauritania and Ghana. Unfortunately, the pace of economic growth in African oil exporting countries is not parallel to their level of socio-economic development. In part this is related to the lack of progressive change with respect to overcoming the colonial structure and orientation of their economies (C. Matlhako, pers. comm.). For as long as the systematic structural defects that characterised the colonial economy and structure in much of the former colonies persist, overcoming the legacies of the past gets stubbornly passed on the post-colonial state which reproduces the similar, if not worse social and other relations of production. These ultimately numb growth and development, if not skewing it in a certain direction that is not suitable for the political economy of the African states. Regardless of all of the above, there is certainly no doubt that domestic leadership is mainly responsible for the Human Poverty Index (HPI) for their respective countries. Hence, domestic leadership commonly has a legitimate mandate for internal management of resources and earnings.

American Oil Companies and Corporate Social Responsibility

There is an area that has also caught the attention of environmentalists, geologists and nature conservationists. This relates to the environmental impact of oil refineries. According to De Oliveira (2007), the extraction of oil in Africa was having damaging consequences. This is especially the case in the most productive oil provinces like Niger Delta where oil exploration brought about long term negative results including environmental degradation, disturbance of the ecosystem and health hazards to the local population.

The above situation has been worsened by the need of oil companies to increase production and profit, without being considerate of how such process would affect the population of the areas surrounding the oil refineries or drilling installations (Nwonwo, 2007). Emphatically, companies who are active in oil explorations in Africa include American oil giants such as Exxon-Mobil and Chevron-Texaco. Litvin (2009) pointed out that even though there is scant commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the international system, CSR is more of the province of big corporations as opposed to small or infant companies. Of course, with the presence of American oil giants, the fact that the Niger Delta and Sudan (Darfur) is still characterised by unending conflict and heightened violence is a reflection of major issues underlying the limits of CSR. Given the perceived threats to environmental sustainability - key to development, African oil producing countries have not been able to meaningfully engage with their partners in the petroleum industry, including the American oil giants. Studies show that the success of African oil exporting countries is delayed and withheld by their overdependence on foreign technology and finance (De Oliveira, 2007). Whereas foreign technology and finance was deemed necessary to address challenges of Africa's technical incapacity on exploration, transportation and refinery, this premise has also subjected this continent's oil rich countries to a disadvantaged position in the area of contractual negotiations.

The Strategic Importance of Africa's Oil to the US

Politically, the US oil companies were at an advantage because most of Africa's oil exporting countries are not members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The US was also trying to persuade Nigeria and Angola to terminate their membership of OPEC. The concealed goal of this American proposition was to break or weaken the solidarity of OPEC to its Arab member states that are in a political struggle with both Jerusalem and Washington. Although Nigeria and Angola did not surrender their OPEC membership, the US suggestion represents a desperate diplomatic move by the world's only remaining superpower to gain a total control of Africa's oil reserves. To substantiate the above, Rachidi Molapo (pers. comm.) aptly reminds us that 'Business interests can best be secured through a complicated diplomatic strategy'. Equally true, most of Africa's oil reserves are in the proximity of the East coast of the US and this makes the transportation of this high valued commodity cheap for the American oil companies. This fact does not imply that oil transportation costs from Latin America to the US are high than those from Africa to the US. In fact, Africa is treated as an alternative oil trading partner of the US because of Washington's hostile relations with its backyard oil exporting countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia. Velempini and Solomon (2007) note that the problem of Washington lies over the leftist tide sweeping around Latin America. The case in point was the harsh rhetoric used by leader of Venezuela (the late Hugo Chavez) in his description or rejection of the economic system of the US. Indeed, Chavez proclaimed that the 2008 world financial and food crisis is resemblance of the failure of capitalism and discouraged other countries not to take a cue from the US in governing their economies (Ellsworth, 2008). In the similar note, this study echoes that internationally communism has failed and now, capitalism is in crisis. As, it is important for African states and other global players to chat an alternative economic development path. To this end, the phrase 'wasted opportunities' sums up Washington's views of Latin America (Westad, 2007). It is argued that the heated conflicting views between the US and Venezuela are inevitable and should be understood within the context of the clash of civilisations in the 21st century.

Undoubtedly, African oil is of high quality as compared to oil from Latin America and the Middle East region. It has no or less sulphur content (Carson, 2004: 5). The lack of sulphur content makes its extraction cost-effective. In addition to the high quality of oil in West Africa, its reserves are abundant. The mention of West Africa does not denote that it is the only region with sulphur-free oil or the sole oil reserves region that is strategically important for the US. Other regions such as Central North and Southern Africa have their fair share of the oil exports to the US. In addition to Nigeria (West Africa) for instance, Algeria (North Africa) and Angola (Southern Africa) are considered as strategic countries to quench America's increasing energy needs (Makube, 2008: 8). Notably, West Africa supplies 15% of American oil imports (Vieth, 2003). It is important to note that oil extraction is one sector wherein American companies have invested a lot. Meanwhile, political stability is crucial for investments to thrive. Unfortunately, most of the African oil exporting countries are not politically stable and this situation has negatively affected the production and supply of oil to the US and other trading partners. Political unrests in oil producing African states are linked to Sudan, Libya, Angola and Nigeria. However, for America, Africa is relatively stable as compared to the politically radical and religiously turbulent Middle East region. Carson (2004: 5) affirmed that many oil analysts forecast that with the increasing turbulence in the Middle East, African crude oil will become an even more prized commodity.

As part of the US desire to diversify its oil sources, in the past Washington unsuccessfully tried to impose its currency as the only legitimate medium of trade for oil in the international market system. The failure was due to the resistance by OPEC member states. This move was aimed at diluting the power of the OPEC countries. While, OPEC is dominated by the Arab countries who prefer using oil price as a weapon against the US thereby showing solidarity with the victims of US's war on terror. Saddam Hussein of Iraq was one of the ardent opponents of the introduction of the US dollar in oil trading and it is alleged this was one of the concealed reasons for his ousting by British-American coalition forces in the year 2003 (Kornegay, 2003: 3-7). As such, Africans need to be cautious about the involvement of the US in the new scramble for Africa's oil resources to avoid becoming another 'Iraq' or a hottest bed for American oil interests. Very close to the need of the US to increase and diversify its oil resources, Washington sought to use Africa as a means of price stabilisation in the global oil market through the conclusion of AGOA with countries such as Angola, Gabon and Nigeria (TRALAC, 2009).

There is an unfounded perception within certain quarters that since the end of the Cold War, Africa has lost its strategic significance to the foreign policy of the US due to the disappearance of a communist threat in the continent following the collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Menasveta, 2003). The reality is that African oil is significant for the energy policy of the US. It is central for the maintenance of the US dominance of the international political economy especially in an era that ushered in the alarming rise of the economy of China and featured Beijing in the new scramble for Africa (Hong, 2007). The US-led war on terror has reinforced the centrality of African oil in America's foreign policy on Africa (Plaut, 2004). Hence, the US has placed strategic military programmes alongside the Gulf of Guinea where oil reserves are bountiful. In essence, this is meant to boost the domestic security forces of African oil exporting countries in their quest to protect oil drilling installations and the workers of American oil companies.

Compared to other regions, most of Africa's oil is produced off-shore. The US is happy with off-shore mining and drilling because its navy operates everywhere in the seas and as such, it is effectively able to extend security to its economic interests based on oil production.

CONCLUSION

It is safe to conclude that since 1990 and with the September 11 attacks, Africa assumed a new strategic position in the foreign policy of the US. Africa is fast becoming an alternative supplier of oil to the US in the light of the volatile Middle East conflict and the souring relations between Washington and the oil exporting Arab League. This research has shown that in the past, African oil was not used effectively to develop the population of the oil exporting countries due to corruption, illegal trading and poor macro-economic management among key reasons. Instead, it was used to sustain and maintain authoritarian regimes and fuel conflicts and civil wars. The US has done very little to improve the situation due to the limits imposed by its (selfish) national interests. At times, some of the abnormalities in the affairs of African oil exporting countries were blessed or graced by the US in order to guarantee their availability as key components of its energy security. This shows that the US leadership did not have the interest of the Africans at heart and cannot be entrusted with the responsibility to engineer Africa's economic development and growth. It is inferred that currently, there are no visible points of convergence between policy goals of African states and the US especially in the context of oil politics. As such, African states should develop a coherent strategy or common approach to protect their national interests and priorities from being eroded by US oil interests. Part of the engagement of Africa with the US is a need for the African citizens to see where the money generated from oil exports is going. This is to say that Africa's oil can be of high benefit to its people if its resources are properly and effectively managed.

Despite invisible points of convergence between the policy goals of African and the US; the analysis of this article has it that it is not farfetched to state that the US and Africa have more shared than competing interests in the natural resources sector. This implies that natural resource endowments of African countries (such as oil and gas) could be mutually beneficial to both the US and oil producing countries. However, the role of the US and its multinational oil producing companies in environmental degradation, grievance construction, corruption and agitation in oil-rich communities such as Nigeria's Niger Delta does not benefit ordinary people. This article contends that all natural resources are endowments for the development of nations where they are found. In the final analysis, this article acknowledges the roles of Western imperialism towards the underdevelopment of resource rich African countries. But it asserts that the 'curse of leadership' is central to the problems of Africa.

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