

REPUBLICANS VERSUS DEMOCRATS: A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE US FOREIGN POLICY, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Although all the American presidents' foreign policy has focused on confirming and maintaining America as the super economic, political and military power, there seem to exist a clear cut difference in the management of international issues, whether the ruling party is the Democrats or the Republicans. If it seems to the American successive leaders that "keeping the union, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense,..."¹ depends on the amount of strengths they show to the rest of the world; it is also apparent that from the Democrats ruling of the USA to the Republicans', there is an impression that the entire world has moved from peace to unrest, with war scenes here and there in the world, promoted or supported the US Republican administration, on the premise of fighting terrorists abroad, promoting democracy or exercising their rights of humanitarian assistance. A basis of such comparison of the Democrats and Republicans foreign policy could be the four last presidential terms, with Clinton and Obama's presidency marked with almost no apparent international conflicts including America, and Bush and Trump's presidencies marked successively with the US-Iraq war, the war in Syria and the crisis with Iran, to mention a little. The present paper aims at highlighting the differences in the international relations between the Democrats and the Republicans ruling of America in general, and the specific interest the two parties have had for Africa. The aspects of international relations here are strictly based on management of war and peace in the global world, in the one hand, and the American assistance on various domains in Africa. The methodology used is based on documentation and critical analysis, and the literary theory applied is the New Historicist Criticism.

KEYWORDS: *America–Republicans–Democrats–Foreign Policy–Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Framework of the Study

- **Contextualizing the Study**

The history of the American political life, and that of the American executive in particular is nothing but a turning competition between two political parties: the Republicans and the Democrats. Although there has existed many parties in the American political system, only those two parties are known outside the country, since the other parties have very little influence nationwide. To better apprehend the difference (if any) and the competition basis between the Democrats and the Republicans, it would be important to scrutinize through the essence of this almost bipolarization.

The Philadelphia Constitutional Convention in 1787 and the resulting constitutional proposal has led both the congressmen and the people of the then thirteen states scattered between the need of a very strong executive to solve the

¹US Department of State, 2004, *About America : The Constitution of the USA, with Exploratory Notes, Pge 10*

problems resulting from their brutal and total independence from the United Kingdom, and the fear of setting up a tyrannical executive that might be a danger in matters of civil rights. As such, debates following the Philadelphia Convention were mostly concerned with acceptance or rejection of the newly enacted document. There appeared the pro and the opponents of the new Constitution; the former, fighting for a stronger federal executive formed the Republican Party, and the latter, in favor of clearly stated and guaranteed civil rights, created the Democrat Party. From American's fifth president John Monroe's presidency, one could think that America was not really to appear on the international scene, as they would not admit any foreign entity to be concerned with the international affairs, as they also decided that "America (was) for Americans". From this historical recall, one may rightly imagine America would be absent from the global economic and political scene, or at least even when they happen to be a party, that the Republicans and the Democrats will always have different views and policy with other countries.

OBJECTIVE, METHODS AND THEORY

The present research work aims at exposing the bipolarization of the American political life, that is the preeminence of the two parties: Democrat and Republican over the other parties, while studying and analyzing the differences (if any) in the foreign policy management between those two parties, with a specific emphasis on the American-African relations. To reach this objective, the study has required reading through the American historical process and investigating on the American international relations, with Africa as a case. The data and information collected have been processed, selected and analyzed with regard to the fore-set objective.

The literary theory adapted to the present research work is the New historicism; this theory takes two forms: it is first an analysis of the work in the context in which it was created, since it wouldn't be possible to have an accurate analysis of the Democrat and Republican view on foreign policy without considering the ideology that gave birth to each of them, their progress and the global motives of American relations with the external world. Then, New historicists assert that literature "does not exist outside time and place and cannot be interpreted without reference to the era in which it was written" (Kirsznner and Mandell 2038). As such, it would be important to note that despite the clear opposition of the Democrats and Republicans' presidencies in America in view of international relation policies, their respective ruling of America has not been static, their respective policies depending on the challenges and the interests of the time.

America in the Global International Relations

- **Brief Overview on the Democrats and Republican Philosophy**

The American Democratic and Republican Parties were originated from the hard debate that followed enactment of the American Constitution in 1787 in Philadelphia. The 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention did not then all agree with the newly written document to replace the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union; then in perspective of the three-fourth ratification that would enforce the new document, it has appeared the Anti Federalists championed by and the Federalists factions, which later 1792 turned into political parties respectively the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Yet, from the birth of the United States of America in 1789, only the Democratic Party has ruled America until the birth of the Republican Party in 1854, founded by former anti-slavery expansion activists, modernizers and strong supporters of the 1787 American Constitution, with its first candidate to the American presidency, Abraham Lincoln, winning the 1860 election. Based on the natural and original opposition in matters of civil rights conception, the two parties have moved onto the socio-economic and international setting with some clearly cut differences in philosophy.

Republican philosophy is mainly focused on individual freedoms, rights and responsibilities. In contrast, Democrats give more importance to such aspects as equality and social/community responsibility.

Since the division of the Republican Party in the election of 1912, the Democratic party has consistently positioned itself to the left of the Republican Party in economic as well as social matters. The economically left-leaning activist philosophy of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which has strongly influenced American liberalism, has shaped much of the party's economic agenda since 1932. Roosevelt's New Deal coalition usually controlled the national government until 1964. The Republican Party today supports a pro-business platform, with foundations in economic libertarianism, and fiscal and social conservatism. (Schraeder, P. 1996, P 17)

Another area of difference between the two parties concerned with the role of government: For Democrats the government should have a more active role, as they think that such attitude could help improve the life quality of individuals and communities. As such Democrats are in favor of environmental regulations and anti-discrimination laws enacting. On the other hand, for the Republicans, the government should be less visible in terms of number and responsibilities so as to avoid stepping on people's liberty of choice and lifestyle. "They see big government as wasteful and an obstacle to getting things done" (Smith, Ben 2009, P. 81). Such a conception is based on the Darwinian capitalism approach that campaigns for free market and that sees government regulation as a threat to successful business.

- **Disparity Basis of the Democrats and Republicans Home Policy**

The American Government home policy is described as guide lines set up by the American nation, and not by the Democratic nor by the Republican Party. It should then be expected the same and continuous style and policy in the governance of the Democrats and the Republicans, internally. The American policy then "should be one which will bring the greatest moral and material benefits to this country and to the world in which we have a most important stake" (Schraeder, P. 1996, P39). Yet, in the real fact, there is a difference in the domestic and policy of the Democratic and Republican Parties. At home Democrats and Republicans have divergent views on major issues such as taxes, the role of government, social Security, Medicare, gun control, immigration, healthcare, abortion, environmental policy and regulation. The chart below explicifies the clear difference between the two parties in terms of home policies:

Table 1

Philosophy	Democrats	Republicans
	Liberal, Left-Leaning	Conservative, Right-Leaning.
Economic Ideas	Minimum wages and progressive taxation, i.e., higher tax rates for higher income brackets. Born out of anti-federalist ideals but evolved over time to favor more government regulation.	Believe taxes shouldn't be increased for anyone (including the wealthy) and that wages should be set by the free market.
Social and human ideas	Based on community and social responsibility	Based on individual rights and justice
Stance on Military issues	Decreased spending	Increased spending
Stance on Gay Marriage	Support (some Democrats disagree)	Oppose (some Republicans disagree)
Stance on Abortion	Should remain legal; support Roe v. Wade	Should not be legal (with some exceptions); oppose Roe v. Wade
Stance on Death Penalty	While support for the death penalty is strong among Democrats, opponents of the death penalty are a substantial fraction of the Democratic base.	A large majority of Republicans support the death penalty.
Stance on Tax	Progressive (high income earners should be taxed at a higher rate). Generally not opposed to raising taxes to fund government.	Tend to favor a "flat tax" (same tax rate regardless of income). Generally opposed to raising taxes.
Stance on Government Regulation	Government regulations are needed to protect consumers.	Government regulations hinder free market capitalism and job growth.
Healthcare Policy	Support universal healthcare; strong support of government involvement in healthcare, including Medicare and Medicaid. Generally support Obamacare.	Private companies can provide healthcare services more efficiently than government-run programs. Oppose Obamacare provisions like (1) requirement for individuals to buy health insurance or pay a fine, (2) required coverage of contraceptives.
Stance on Immigration	There is greater overall support in the Democratic party for a moratorium on deporting - or offering a pathway to citizenship to - certain undocumented immigrants. e.g. those with no criminal record, who have lived in the U.S. for 5+ years.	Republicans are generally against amnesty for any undocumented immigrants. They also oppose President Obama's executive order that put a moratorium on deporting certain workers. Republicans also fund stronger enforcement actions at the border.

Source: This table was elaborated basing on data from: <http://www.isidewith.com>, Republican Views On the issues, Democratic vs. Republican on Foreign Policy, Retrieved February 16th, 2019

Democrats versus Republicans in the Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of a political party is usually of the same cloth as its domestic policy. But specifically in the American context, there has never been any president's foreign policy; there has always been an American foreign policy. As such the presence and intervention of America on the international scene is just the execution of a national mandate conferred to the mean Head of the American Executive. He or she should not then be taken for responsible at any level of intervention (militarily), but America is. The basis for comparing the Democrats and the Republicans actions and attitudes on the international sphere, here, has sampled the two last administrations for each party: Bill Clinton and Barack Obama versus George Bush Jr and Donald Trump.

- **The Democrat Administration War and Peace Policy: a Case Study**

During the two term presidency of Bill Clinton (1993 to 2001) the American foreign policy was marked with the ending of the Cold War and the effective Dissolution of the Soviet Union that had started under his predecessor President George H. W. Bush. But for Clinton as for most Democrat presidents, internal affairs were more important than foreign ones; that is why Clinton had kept criticizing the preceding Bush (father) administration for being too preoccupied with foreign affairs. Despite the fact that the United States have come as the only remaining superpower following collapse of the Soviet Union, Clinton did not choose to impose America outside through military presence and armed conflicts.

Clinton's main priority was always domestic affairs, especially the domestic economy. Foreign-policy took a backseat, except to promote American trade, and during unexpected emergencies His emergencies had to do with humanitarian crises which raised the issue of American or NATO or United Nations interventions to protect civilians, or armed humanitarian intervention, as the result of civil war, state collapse, or oppressive governments. (Landler, Mark (2009, P. 529)

Yet, in October 1993, President Clinton ordered a botched raid in Somalia which ended in eighteen deaths and eighty wounded among the American troop being sent there for humanitarian mission the previous year by President George H. W. Bush. Faced with public criticism and opposition foreign interventions causing death within the American troops where there was no real interest for America, Clinton largely withdrew the America troops from Somalia. Clinton later referred to massive air bombing in the then Yugoslavia with no lost among the American soldiers. The major trouble spots during Clinton's two terms were in Somalia and Rwanda (in Africa) and Eastern Europe (Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia). Clinton also tried to resolve long-running conflicts in Northern Ireland, and the Middle East, particularly the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

As for Obama, he inherited the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, and various aspects of the War on Terror, all of which began during the Bush Jr administration. He gradually draw down the American soldiers in Iraq, while increasing their presence in Afghanistan during his first term, then withdrawing during his second term. In 2011, under Obama leadership Osama bin Laden, the organizer of the September 11 attacks was killed. Obama also reduced dramatically the number of prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, despite failing to close the camp before leaving office. Yet, Obama's presidency unfortunately ended with his deep involvement in the civil war in Syria; a democratic nation will normally not take side in a country's internal affairs, but America sided with the ISIL opposition in Syria, overtly providing arms and ammunitions, and occasionally executing strikes against the rebels.

- **The Republican Administration War and peace Policy: a Case Study**

George W. Bush had little experience or interest in foreign policy prior to the presidency and his decisions were guided by his advisers. Bush embraced the views of Cheney and other neoconservatives, who de-emphasized the importance of multilateralism; neoconservatives believed that because the United States was the world's lone superpower, it could act unilaterally if necessary (Nolan D. McCaskill, Spicer, 2017, P.53)

During his campaign for presidency, Bush Jr focused on a more national interest, with a support for stronger economic and political relationship with Latin America, especially Mexico, and a reduction of involvement in "nation-building" and other small-scale military engagements. But following his election, he was quickly influenced by ideologues who argued for unilateral action to establish American primacy in world affairs.

The September 11 terrorist attacks became a major turning point in Bush's presidency. As an immediate reaction to the attacks on the World Trade Center and other symbols of America, he addressed his countrymen from his office, promising a strong response to the attacks. Bush latter addressed a gathering via a megaphone while standing in a heap of rubble: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." (Smith, Ben 2009, P). America had to prove to the world that it has not collapsed under the attacks, but also that it remains the superpower and had the capacity of prompt reaction against whatsoever power or terrorist organization. In the process, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was immediately targeted not only for hosting Bin Laden who prepared and executed the attacks, but also for keeping mass destruction weapons. Under such pretexts, America invaded Iraq, destroying the country: Saddam Hussein was arrested and assassinated, but Bin Laden was nowhere there to be found, and no massive destruction weapon was discovered.

Donald Trump's foreign policy could just be summarized in inconsistency and antagonism with American European allies. Trump "has praised and supported populist, neo-nationalist and authoritarian governments, has described himself as a 'nationalist', and has referred to his foreign policy as 'America First'. Trump has espoused isolationist, non-interventionist, and protectionist views" (Nolan D. McCaskill, Spicer, 2017, P. 311). The basis of trump's foreign policy was more on military personnel than his predecessors' administrations, aiming at reducing terrorism in the world. His military interventions were then directed to some Islamic states with the death of Islamic leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2019, and assassination of Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani.

Among foreign policy decisions made during his presidency have been his reversals and re-evaluations of the American previously-established global commitments, such as his partial withdrawal of American troops from northern Syria, and withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the INF Treaty, and UNESCO. Trump introduced a travel ban from certain Muslim-majority countries, while recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and increasing belligerency against Venezuela, discussing with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The Trump administration often used economic pressure for its foreign policy goals; this includes the triggered trade war with China.

The Democrats and Republicans African Policy

Before World War II, America was rather less visible on the international scene, let alone in Africa; and with the bipolarization of the world following World War II, with the United States of America championing the so-called democratic world against the dictatorship and communist block led by the then Soviet Union, most African independent nations were ruled by military or dictatorship regimes, far from the American and their European allies' capitalism and democratic philosophy. As such, America was totally absent in Africa, and the case of the African nations was let to the appreciation of the former colonial powers. But with the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990's there America has progressively appeared on the African scene globally as a socio-economic and political partner, but sometimes as a regulator.

The Democrats' Administrations and Africa

The advent of Bill Clinton's presidency is set in the early American interest in Africa. But Clinton's intervention in Africa occurred only in those situations qualified as crisis by the president and his closest advisors; as such, Africa was just a 'backwater' for the White House under Clinton's administration and the wider foreign policymaking establishment. Yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the gap this created urged the American executive to occupy the field and remain active in Africa, and the Clinton's administration decided to champion that. Yet, the then newer challenges for Africa such as environmental protection, human rights and political reforms, they failed to shape any clear-cut objective, any issue for collaborating with Africa, and Clinton's 1998 trip contributed very little. In response to a question about his priorities for Africa at the June 1994 White House Conference on Africa, Clinton confessed that "it would be nice if we could just work on one or two issues, but unfortunately, this is not possible" (Bolder: Westview Press, 1997). Eventually, Clinton's first diplomatic test in Africa has been the Somali crisis, and his deep involvement in this crisis was his only action in Africa.

The election of Barack Obama as the first African-descended president of the United States in 2008 was particularly celebrated with euphoria in all African countries. Most Africans have forecasted positive changes in American intervention on the black continent. And immediate signs comforted this hope, as following inauguration into the Oval Office, the first official trip of President Obama was in Accra, Africa, in July 2009. In the speech he delivered at the occasion, President Barack Obama announced his Africa policy in the following:

I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world – as partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect. We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans...I will focus on four areas that are critical to the future of Africa and the entire developing world: democracy, opportunity, health, and the peaceful resolution of conflict.(Madison, Lucy 2013, P71)

President Obama's projected plans for Africa were viewed as fresh and significant progress in comparison with his immediate predecessor's (George W. Bush) that Africa were mainly concerned with health programs Millennium Challenge Corporation, which included several development and democracy related initiatives., President Obama mainly announced his plan of strengthening democratic and economic institutions in Africa through creating strong democratic government as well as economic and civil structures that are essentials for a successful democracy. Obama's policies strived for sustainable economic performance, and government accountability, instead of only focusing on short-term gains in areas of health, food security, and the environment. Little, however, changed in the substance of United States.-Africa relations under the Obama administration. Africans would finally admit that it was not sufficient to have a black man elected to the White House for Africa to get privileged. This underscores the limits of the symbolic politics of race and presidential personalities in the face of the structural imperatives of the American super-power and foreign policy in which African interests remain marginal and subordinate to American interests.

The Republicans' Administrations and Africa

President George W. Bush's policies toward Africa was mainly focused on health programmes such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Malaria Initiative, which was aimed at providing malaria drugs and preventive assistance to 15 African countries. Meanwhile, President Bush made great efforts to create a Millennium Challenge Corporation, which included several development and democracy related initiatives. By attacking Malaria and AIDS which have represented the crucial health issues to the African continent, President Bush has proved efficient in his policies in Africa. Also, despite the counterpart from the Millennium Challenge Account forcing African States to relinquish part of their judicial sovereignty to America, the Millennium Challenge Corporation has appeared beneficial to Africa: it has allowed modernizing the countries judiciary systems with bringing a positive blow to the economy and social.

President Donald Trump was very late to express his policy for Africa. In December 2018 the Trump Administration indicated its African strategy, which was supposed to be a very new one. But this rather displayed Trump's personal views on Africa, which revealed his lack of interest in the continent, other than for its economic and commercial potentials. Trump's view for Africa showed nothing but continuing with previous American policies under presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Yet, it clearly confirmed the global American international motto: 'America First', and especially basing on the rivalry with China and Russia. For his four years in the Oval office, President Donald Trump has met talked with only two African presidents, which is from far fewer than any of his predecessors since the collapse of the Soviet Union; he has mainly indulged in making racist statements on Africans citizens and leaders, and has strained relations with Africa by rolling out limitations on immigration for African countries, while repeatedly proposing deep cuts to foreign aid programs to Africa, which are critical on the continent.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study has help understand that there is actually no clear-cut style between the American Democrat and the Republican administration in the management of the international relations. The sample case study based on the two last Democratic administrations and the two last Republican administrations foreign policy has taught that the difference in strategies and priorities are guided by present issues and the environment. All the same, it has appeared difficult to

conclude on any preference of Africans for a Democrats in the American White House: the Democrats presidents in America have expressed and planned good actions for the benefit of Africans, but none (based on the sampling) has accomplished more than Republican President George W. Bush; but in the same way, Republican President Donald Trump has emerged as the greatest antipoeitical American President for Africa, who not only has had no typical initiative for the continent, but has worked on stopping what his predecessors initiated for the continent.

Democrat President Clinton ordered bombing Somalia, and Barack Hussein OBAMA, from African descent, whose election to the White House had brought greatest hope for Africans, could not go beyond his promises to Africa, but has contributed to assassination of Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi who appeared as the greatest alternative hope for Africa, which is a disastrous paradox. On the other hand, President Donald Trump has not been associated with any war during his four year presidency, and if President George Bush has mainly been associated with the attack on Iraq and assassination of Saddam Hussein, this could be explained (though not justified) by the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attack on America, and also the accusation of Iraq for hosting Bin Laden and for possession mass destruction weapons.

Globally, the America foreign policy has not been dependent on the Democratic or the Republican Administrations; it has traditionally been relatively consistent one to the other. And to paraphrase former France President Charles De Gaulle, America has no friends, but only interests.

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