

## **African Renaissance**

- Indexed at: EBSCO, ProQuest, J-Gate and Sabinet
- Accredited by IBSS.

**Vol. 14, (Nos. 1 & 2), March/June 2017**  
**pp 93-115**

### **Energy security and war on terror: sketching US Relations with the Gulf of Guinea under President Trump's administration**

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#### **Abstract**

The triumph of President Donald Trump in the November 2016, US presidential election has confounded scholars of US politics and the electoral process. In a classic term, Donald Trump was seen as a wild card and his candidacy shrouded in controversies. While on campaign and since inauguration, President Trump views and pronouncements on core issues notably; Globalization, the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, Energy, Global Security and Terrorism, among others, have raised concerns among allies and foes. Informed by the controversies surrounding President Trump and the new administration, this paper examines US-Africa's relations using the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) as a point of reference. The study is situated within the context of the strategic importance of GoG in the calculations of the US, China and Nigeria especially as it relates to the region's oil and gas riches, war on terror, fight against piracy, and oil bunkering among other issues. It examines what might be the fate of US-GoG relations under the Trump administration.

**Keywords:** *Oil, Terrorism, United States, President Trump, Gulf of Guinea.*

## **Introduction**

The Gulf of Guinea spanning the coastline of West, Central and Southern Africa has been a region of geo-strategic importance to great powers' calculations and national interests for centuries. In the pre-colonial era, the ports that litter the stretches of the coastline of what now constitutes the Gulf of Guinea are strategic ports of call for European merchant ships on their way to India and the Far East. The Gulf of Guinea also serves as a vital source of raw materials that the European colonial powers notably Belgium, Britain, France, and Portugal maximally exploited to run the wheel of early industrialization in Europe (Xu, 2008, p.1123). Like in centuries past, the combination of oceanic freeway and abundant natural resources has made the Gulf of Guinea to remain a region's of great significance in the economic, political and geo-strategic calculations of the United States (US), China, the European Union (EU) and raft of other middle power countries (Onuoha, 2010, pp.373-375; Anshan, 2007, pp.69-70).

Nowhere is the Gulf of Guinea importance to great powers geo-strategic calculations better reflected than in the new scramble for the region's abundant oil and natural gas resources. In specific terms, the United States and China and their multinational oil corporations have engaged in high stakes competition to corner significant portion of the region's newly discovered super-size offshore oil and natural gas fields. The increase in the struggle for Gulf of Guinea oil and natural gas by China and the United States represents a part of the increasing trends of the struggle by global powers to exploit fossil and non-fossil natural resources from Africa that has in the literature been termed 'the new scramble for Africa' and the continent's resources (Volman, 2009a; Xu, 2008 and Frynas and Paulo, 2007). The scramble has given rise to the securitization of relations and accompanied with increased militarization of Africa.

With the purview of enhancing their status and leverage, China, India and Russia have deployed military instruments like; arms sales, military training programs, and military aids/security assistance to grow their bilateral ties with Africa countries and promote the advancement of their strategic objectives (Volman, 2009a, pp.10-13). In the same wise, the United States has ramped up her strategic military cooperation with traditional allies and deployed the military instruments to cultivate and nurture new friends on the continent. The establishment of the African

Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 represented the culmination of the securitization and militarization bent that has become a significant element in US policy thrust towards Africa starting from the Bush era (Imobighe, 2010, p.28; Volman, 2009a, pp.15-22; Xu, 2008, pp.1128-1130).

For Nigeria, the Gulf of Guinea, being an integral part of the South Atlantic, constitutes, the country's most strategic environment and security interest. Given its openness to hostile incursion that can threaten the exploitation of Nigeria's priced resource (crude-oil) offshore, the country treat issues that affect the Gulf of Guinea with utmost attention. The strategic importance of the area to Nigeria's interest is also anchored on the fact that it serves as vital artery for Nigerian trade, given that it is the main shipping transit in the Atlantic corridor. To this extent and given the increasing presence of extra-African interests in the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria has come to adopt the position that the region constitutes the country's backyard and issues that relate to the area are of great importance to Nigeria's geo-political, economic, security and strategic calculations (Eze, 2010, p.10).

Coming from this background, with a 'New Sheriff in Town' in the United States and the cloud of controversies that President Trump continue to stir since inauguration, within US body politics, and in international relations, the popular assumption is that wind of change is in the offing and about to be unleashed across US foreign policy landscape (CDD, 2017, pp.2-3; Adibe, 2017, p.24; Momoh, 2017, p.9). To this extent, examining what might be the fate of Africa under the Trump administration becomes essential. Informed by this position, this study examines the trends that US-Africa relations might take under President Trump with specific focus on the Gulf of Guinea. The Gulf of Guinea, is taking as a reference point given that it represents a microcosm of the continent and a region of significance to Africa and extra-Africa interests. This study is divided into five sections. Following this introduction is the section that discusses the importance of the Gulf of Guinea in global energy discourse. Section three examines the continuity and change in US's policy towards the Gulf of Guinea. Section four focuses on an examination of how the Gulf of Guinea might likely fares under President Trump administration taking into consideration important policy indicators and the last section contains the conclusion and policy recommendations.

## **The Gulf of Guinea in Global Strategic Calculation**

The Gulf of Guinea, in geographical, geo-political and geo-strategic contexts convey different meanings to different scholars/experts. As Tukur (2010, p.217) notes, the definition given to the region in relation to its scope and coverage will be informed by issue that form the focus of discourse and the perspective from which the region is looked at. In littoral terms, the Gulf of Guinea spans the Atlantic coastline that includes territories in West, Central and Southern Africa. Taking this expansive notion into consideration, the Gulf of Guinea will be taken to span the coastline from Senegal in the Western tip of West Africa to Cameroon and Central Africa Republic in Central Africa and through to Angola in Southern Africa (Council of the European Union, 2014, p.1). In institutional terms, the Gulf of Guinea can be limited to member countries that signed the Treaty that brought into existence the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), in Libreville, Gabon on 3rd July, 2001. At present, member countries of the Gulf of Guinea Commission include; Angola, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe (Kimeng, 2013; Eze, 2010; Tukur, 2013).

Although the Gulf of Guinea like the rest of Sub-Sahara Africa might not have ranked high in geo-strategic interests of the United States and other great powers in the past, that position has witnessed a dramatic change (Brown, 2013, p.xii; Eze, 2010, p.229; van de Walle, 2009). Starting from the early 1990s, the Gulf of Guinea has experienced rising significance especially as it relates to energy security for major economies notably the United States, China and to some extent, India. The increasing international attention and priority given to energy discourse and the need to have secure access to the supply of oil and gas has reinforced the significance and direct the attention of global powers to the Gulf of Guinea in particular and Africa in general (Brown, 2013, pp.1-4). The attention is justified given the fact that with the exception of Chad and Sudan, the most notable crude-oil producers in Sub-Sahara Africa are all located within the Gulf of Guinea axis (Luqman, Ifejika and Aliu, 2016, p.171).

The significance of the Gulf of Guinea to the energy security calculations of great powers is informed by a number of factors. An important one is the fact that the region encompasses two of the most important producers in Sub-Sahara Africa, Angola and Nigeria, with daily

production capacity that is more than 2 million bpd and large proven reserves. Aside the two, there are; Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe and Ghana that have recently joined the list of the region's oil producers. Another factor that has raised the significance of the region in global energy security calculations is the issue of continued exploration and discovery of major offshore oil/gas fields across the region's coastline with the Afam, Bonga, Bosi, Egina, Ehra North, Ekanga fields, among others, such new discoveries in Nigeria; the Dalia, Girassol, Kissanje, Kuito, Rosa, and Xicomba fields in Angola; the Alba, Ceiba and Zafiro fields in Equatorial Guinea and the Jubilee field in Ghana serving as important examples (US Energy Information Administration, 2016; Brown, 2013, p.204). There is also the issue of access to international waterway that the Atlantic Ocean provides for countries of the region to export their products to the international market. Political instability in the Middle East and North Africa especially since the Arab Spring and the threat that the crises in the region portends for global oil supply had encouraged the need to look for stable and secure alternative sources which the Gulf of Guinea provides. The sweet and sulphur free nature of oil produced from the Gulf of Guinea fields is also an issue that has further raised the significance of the region in global energy calculations.

**Proved Reserves and Daily Production of Crude Oil by Gulf of Guinea producers as at End of 2015**

S/No	Country	Total Proved Reserves Billion barrels	% of Total Global Proved Reserves	Daily Production in Thousands of barrels per day	Share of Total Global Daily Production
1	Angola	12.7	0.7	1826	2.0
2	Chad	1.5	0.1	78	0.1
3	Republic of Congo	1.6	0.1	277	0.3
4	Equatorial	1.1	0.1	289	0.3

	Guinea				
5	Gabon	2.0	0.1	233	0.3
6	Nigeria	37.1	2.2	2352	2.6
		56 billion barrels	3.3 percent	5.055 million per day	5.6 percent

Africa's total proven reserves 129.1 billion barrels (7.6 percent of global total proved reserves).

Africa's daily production 8.375 million barrels (9.1 percent of global daily production).

Source: British Petroleum, BP (2016, pp.6-8).

As the figure above shows, the proven reserves of Gulf of Guinea producers total 56 billion barrels, it constitutes just 3.3 percent of global total and Nigeria and Angola hold nearly 90 percent of the reserves. In terms of daily production, the GoG contribution stands at 5.055 million barrels per day. This constitutes 5.6 percent of global daily production with Nigeria and Angola productions making up 82.14 percent of the total from the area (British Petroleum BP, 2016, pp.7-8). In clear terms, Nigeria and Angola are the producers of significance in the GoG. Given the statistics, the GoG's contribution to daily output and proved reserves pale in comparison with what comes from the Middle East. However, as stated earlier, the issue of security of supply, oceanic freeway and absence of choke point along the route like the Suez Canal and the quality of the crude makes the Gulf of Guinea attractive for leading energy consuming countries and particularly the United States (Lubeck, Watts and Lipschut, 2007, p.3). In relation to natural gas reserves and production, Nigeria is the only country listed in British Petroleum BP global statistics in the Gulf of Guinea and Sub-Sahara Africa. Nigeria's proven reserves are reported to stand at 5.1 trillion cubic metres (2.7 percent of global total) and the country, holds the largest reserves in Africa. Nigeria's yearly production of natural gas for 2015 stands at 50.1 billion cubic metres (1.4 percent of global total) and trails behind Algeria that produced 83 billion cubic metres for the same period (British Petroleum BP, 2016, pp.20-22). Much as the Gulf of Guinea had witnessed increase significance arising from great powers attention, the region continues to face challenges as it relates to security (national and region-wide), governance, and competing claims over territorial waters, economic zones and resource basin. The

issue of maritime boundary disputes between and among countries in the Gulf of Guinea has emerged as serious security concerns for the region, the global powers (United States and China) jostling for prominence in relation to securing access to the region's oil and gas and the multinational oil corporations conducting exploration and production operations in the region. While efforts have been invested at settling territorial waters and exclusive economic zone disputes among countries in the region in peaceful manner and gains have been made in this regards, there still remains concerns as substantial number of disputes relating to boundaries and territorial water claims continue to linger. There is also the challenge of militancy notable in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, lingering conflict in the oil producing enclave of Cabinda in Angola, oil bunkering, piracy and hijacking of seafaring vessels on the water of the Gulf of Guinea, fishery poaching by big trawlers and fishing vessels from other parts of the World notably Asia in the rich waters of the region (Council of the European Union, 2014, pp.2-5; Brown, 2013, pp.200-202; Onuoha, 2012, pp.4-8; Tukur, 2010, pp.218-220; Eze, 2010, pp.233-237).

For the United States in particular; the undemocratic nature of states in the Gulf of Guinea, governance crisis, natural resources induced conflicts, and possibility of conflagration given the instances in Cabinda and Niger Delta, continue to be of concern to policy makers in Washington. There are also issues of unbridled corruption especially in the governance of the oil industry among Gulf of Guinea countries and threat from organized criminal syndicates. Added to the above is the threat from terrorist groups of which the Boko Haram group's terror campaigns that engulfed Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad in recent time constitutes a prime example. Thus, the trio of terrorism, criminality, and instability to which the Gulf of Guinea is vulnerable and the implications of these for United States interests in the region has been highlight as sources of concern to Washington as far back as 2005 (Lubeck, Watts and Lipschut, 2007, pp.2-3; Goldwyn and Morrison, 2005, pp.1-3). Attempts at getting a gripe on these issues has made the Gulf of Guinea a concern in Washington and drive US policy posture towards the region for more than a decade.

## **Oil, War on Terror and US Policy in the Gulf of Guinea under Bush and Obama administrations**

Since the era of colonial rule, external penetration of Africa and its economic exploitation has been a defining hallmark of the continent's relationship with the rest of the world in general and the Western powers in particular. The penetration and the need to secure access to the exploitation of the continent vast resources was facilitated through political domination by the Western powers (Belgium, Britain, France, Portugal and Spain) during colonial rule. In the post-colonial period, political manipulation, diplomatic arm-twisting and military force had been deployed to enhance and facilitate the continued exploitation of the rich natural resources of African states (Imobighe and Zabadi, 2003, p.vii). The penetration of Africa during the Cold War period took a new dimension as ideological considerations become a significant factor in external powers' engagement and relationships with regimes in Africa. Although economic considerations now reign supreme in their engagement with Africa, great powers interests in Africa continue to be advanced and promoted through plethora of instruments of which the military is a significant part of.

Being the dominant super power in the post-Cold War era, the United States has maximized the use of its military instrument to promote and advance the cause of US corporate economic interest in Africa. One of such military agenda in the 1990s was the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) that was actively promoted by the United States (Imobighe, 2003; Ochefu, 2003; Yoroms and Obasi, 2003). One resource that has been central to United States economic agenda in Africa in recent times has been oil and securing access to the rich deposits of crude-oil and natural gas of the Gulf of Guinea states was promoted as United States strategic national security interest and elevated to serious national policy discourse under George W. Bush administration. Contrary to the Clinton administration's Africa's policy that was characterized by lack of commitment and timidity, the Bush Administration executed a radical policy shift as it affected US foreign policy towards Africa with particular focus on the Gulf of Guinea (Lubeck, Watts and Lipschutz, 2007).

Without doubt, the Bush administration tripling of aid and foreign assistance to combat disease, promote economic partnership, advance the cause of democracy promotion, fight corruption and enhance good



governance constitute notable foreign policy successes in Africa. On trade relations, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) signed into law in the twilight of the Clinton administration in 2000 is a comprehensive multi-lateral platform through which the US had conducted trade relations with Africa countries in recent time. Working within the context of AGOA, the Bush administration was able to enhance US trade dealing with Africa (Dokubo, 2017, pp.21-22). However, as van de Walle (2009, pp.2-3) avers, more significant in US foreign policy towards Africa under President Bush was the massive military aid and assistance directed towards the continent and the establishment of a unified military command (AFRICOM) to serve US interests in Africa as against the lack of coherence and division of Africa among three US military commands before AFRICOM was floated (McFate, 2008, pp.112-113). The establishment of AFRICOM more than any other policy initiatives signified US strategic commitment to the continent and the elevation of Africa as a region of significant importance to US national interest. Central to the new found interest in Africa that characterized the Bush administration's relationship with the continent was the need to secure access to oil of which the rich deposit offshore in the Gulf of Guinea was perceived as a solution.

The position that AFRICOM was a military instrument for securing access to oil and gas deposits of the Gulf of Guinea was reinforced by the powerful US Senate Armed Services Committee during the confirmation hearing for Lt. General William Ward, the pioneered commander of AFRICOM. The Committee pointedly asked General Ward to respond to allegation of observers on the perspective that, 'AFRICOM is simply an American effort to protect US access to gas and oil; fight terrorism and counter China's growing interest and activism in Africa' (McCaskie, 2008, p.314). Much as General Ward tried to allay the fears of partners and foes, his response, 'that AFRICOM will aid the conduct of security cooperation, enhance the building of partners capacities in the areas of peacekeeping, maritime security, border security, counter terrorism and support other US agencies programmes that promote regional stability', fits the position that the command was created to secure access to oil and gas off the Gulf of Guinea, contained China's expanding reach in Africa and secure other US interests on the continent as espoused by observers notably from Africa (Nmehielle and Iyi, 2011; Hart, 2010; Ifeka; 2010; Saliu, 2010; McFate, 2008). As McCaskie (2008, pp.314-315) notes, central to US policy maker concerns

that informed the establishment of AFRICOM was the challenge of insecurity in Nigeria's oil producing Niger Delta and its ramifications for security in the Gulf of Guinea. This is understandable given the fact that Nigeria is the largest producer and suppliers of oil and gas in Sub-Sahara Africa; that export from Nigeria constitute a critical part of annual US oil import; and that for decades insurgent and militant groups had wage war of attrition against the Nigerian State in the oil bearing region and this has often disrupted production and exploration activities of oil multinational corporations from the US and the West operating in the area (Ate, 2012, p.319; Ifeka, 2010, p.31; McCaskie, 2008, p.315).

The establishment of AFRICOM to secure US strategic interest couched in access to oil and gas notably in the Gulf of Guinea represent an important signpost in US-Africa relations in recent time no doubt. However, AFRICOM was but the culmination of military engagements that commenced after the bombing of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 and the September 11 terrorist attacks. In the aftermath of the embassies bombings in East Africa, the Clinton administration initiated series of military assistance, military education, and training programmes for Africa. The Bush administration inherited these initiatives and expanded them within the context of the regime's 'war on terror' campaign (Saliu, 2017, p.38; Nmehielle and Iyi, 2011, p.54; van de Walle, 2009, p.7). On the training front, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme which facilitates the training and capacity building of officers from African countries military establishments in US military schools is one of the most enduring planks of US military collaboration with Africa. Then, there is the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Programme (ACOTA) and Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) which is a bilateral military training programme designed largely as platform for the enhancement of multilateral peacekeeping capabilities of officers and men of participating National Armed Forces in Africa (Volman, 2008, p.38; Ploch, 2007, pp.11-12).

In 2002, the Bush administration launched the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). The objective of the task force was to deter and counter terrorist groups' threats emanating from Somalia, Kenya and Yemen and provide technical assistance to national armed forces in the region. The operation areas of the task force was later expanded to include Eritrea, the Seychelles, and Mauritius and a permanent base set up at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. The camp

represents US first permanent base in Africa in many decades. There is also the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) set up to enhance the capabilities of border security agencies to combat arms smuggling, drug and human trafficking and transnational terrorist movement in Sahel and North Africa. The PSI was upgraded through, Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) and the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI). The US also foster naval agreements with African countries and engaged in regular naval operations in Africa especially in the Gulf of Guinea and the East Africa Coast. It is in the context of such relationship that the US collaborated with Nigeria to establish the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS) in 2005. The GGESS was task with the objectives of providing secured business environment in the region. There are also the Foreign Military Sale programme coordinated by the Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the African Coaster and Border Security Programme (ACBSP) and the Excess Defence Articles (EDA) through which surplus US military equipment are transfer to African countries military (Vanguard, 2008; Volman, 2009b, 2009c). With the formation of AFRICOM, these programmes and initiatives were collapsed to become part of the policy mandate of the Africa Command (Nmehielle and Iyi, 2011, p.55; van de Walle, 2009, pp.7-8).

The cause of those that had consistently argued for more increased US attention to Africa within the policy establishment in Washington and Capitol Hill was strengthened by the increased in oil export from Africa as a percentage of US oil import notably from 2005. Aside this important factor, the stark reality of the link between security and development also played right into the hands of those that argued for increased US role and commitment towards Africa. In the context of the security-development nexus, the Bush administration increased foreign aid to Africa and the President's Emergency Programme for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) constituted a significant part of this aid windfall (Katito, 2009, p.146; van de Walle, 2009, pp.8-10). Irrespective of the angle from which it is approached and the possible drawbacks that might have characterized it, the Bush administration policy towards Africa was more engaging than what transpired before.

President Obama election as US president in the 2008 elections was greeted with more optimism and euphoria in Africa (Katito, 2009). This high expectation that the administration would herald positive change in US-Africa relations was anchored on President's Obama Africa heritage

and circumstance of history as the first African-American occupant of the White House. However, Nmehielle and Iyi, (2011, p.31) note, informed Africans realise earlier that President Obama would not be less American when compared with his predecessors in office and that the ultimate guide of his regime's overarching policy thrust will largely be informed by US national interest and the interests of corporate America. With the benefit of hindsight, the scepticism and at best guarded optimism that characterize the view of informed observers seemed not have been misplaced. Though the Obama administration reiterates the regime's commitment to advance the promotion of rule of law, good governance, promote democratic process, support human rights and help combat poverty and disease during official visits, however, much of the promise failed to materialize in concrete development term. While the Obama administration demonstrated strong commitment to environmental issues, however, this did not undermine the regime's strong support for corporate oil multinational corporation's business interests in the Gulf of Guinea and the rest of Africa.

The pursuit of regime change in Libya and the deployment of AFRICOM from Stuttgart to the Libya's mission was a demonstration of the continued deployment of US military assets to the realization of the interest of corporate America notably access to oil and gas (Nmehielle and Iyi, 2011, pp.58-59). Aside seeing to the peaceful resolution of the South Sudan referendum, the Obama administration failed to achieve the regime's stated mission of aiding peaceful resolution of disputes in Africa as the lingering conflicts in Darfur, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and others have shown. On the 'war on terror' and counter terrorism plank, the Obama administration largely key in to the Bush regime's funnelling of military aid and assistance to Africa states and their armed forces. By so doing, the Obama administration continued the policy of overt and covert militarization of Africa, which had become the defining hallmark of US-Africa relations starting from the twilight of the Clinton era (Nmehielle and Iyi, 2011, p.64). Rather than project a new policy direction for Africa as the first African-American President, the Obama administration Africa's policy represented more of a continuity and little change (Katito, 2009; Oyewole, 2009).

Indeed, some African observers notably Nigerians have argued that in comparative term, the Obama administration failed to meet expectations of Africans when compared with the Bush presidency

(Saliu, 2017, pp.40-41; Fawole, 2017). This might have informed, Adibe (2017, pp.26-27) position that, the notion and often held belief by Africans that Democrat regimes are more inclined towards Africa and prioritize African issues more than Republicans is somewhat erroneous as it lacks empirical validation. Indeed, contemporary evidence points to the fact that Republican administrations had done more for Africa and African causes than their Democrats counterparts. For instance, AGOA that was President Clinton's signature Africa's programme was enacted in May 2000 just few months to the expiration of the administration's second term in office. Essentially, it was the Bush administration that implemented the trade programme and expanded on the mandate of AGOA. The Bush regime's signature programme PEPFAR came on board in 2003 and was by far the single largest and comprehensive programme by a country directed at combating the scourge of infectious disease in Africa (Adibe, 2017, p.27). While the Obama administration was proactive in combating Ebola outbreak in West Africa, yet the assistance paled when compared with an institutionalized initiative like PEPFAR and the administration's 'Power Africa' project cannot be said to have achieved 10 per cent of its baseline target by the time the Obama administration wound up in November 2016. Thus, while there are palpable tensions with regards to what the Trump presidency might hold for Africa given Trump's acerbic rhetoric on election trail, however, the reality of governance is different from rhetoric and media grandstanding of campaign. If what is happening within the US as it relates to the administration's difficulties in pushing through core policies (visa ban, repeal of Obamacare, California muting of secession) is anything to go by, there is hope that institutions have the capacity to rein-in and moderate many of President Trump's extreme views and policy positions.

### **The Trump Presidency and US Relations with the Gulf of Guinea: Looking Forward**

When the campaign for the White House commenced in November of 2015, observers of the American political system treated the Trump bid for the presidency with little or no seriousness (Dokubo, 2017). The notion held by many analysts, observers and ordinary US citizens was that the Billionaire would drop out of the Republican nomination race midway. On the contrary, Donald Trump not only defied the odds, he did so by trashing establishment candidates that included Jeb Bush. As a wealthy

businessman that had never held any public position/office, Trump's election and inauguration as the 45th President of the United States was viewed with trepidations and at best cautious optimism by policy analysts, academic, policy makers and political leaders in capitals across the World (Reuters, 2017, p.1). The concerns of many observers revolves around the assumption that US's foreign policy under Trump might take an isolationist posture and economic nationalism (Labaton, 2017, pp.2-3).

This view was largely informed by many of President Trump's campaign speeches and utterances on key issues including: the US and the maintenance of global order; the Americans first mantra; vow to curtail immigration; close US borders to refugees, and build a wall along US-Mexico borders; the promise to revive US industries, bring firms back home; impose high taxes on foreign products especially from China, praising UK for exiting the EU and calls for other members to exit the integration scheme, statements on NATO that threaten the unity of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and, of course, the open disdain for Muslims and unapologetic expression of Islamophobia (Arnault, 2017, p.1; European Parliament, 2017, p.5; Muhammad, 2017). Many of President Trump's statements, rhetoric and positions during the campaigns might be difficult to implement, however, since inauguration, the President has left no one in doubt that his administration has the potential to radically alter US foreign policy direction and thrust. That said, it is also important to note that institutions and national interests concerns might limit President Trump's ability to effect change in US foreign policy landscape that suit his personality traits, perceptions and worldview (Dokubo, 2017, p.11; Carl Le Van, 2017, pp.56-57; Hunt, 2016). Another important issue relates to the fact that foreign policy operates within the context of internal and external factors. While the Trump administration might be able to have measured control on internal factors, the external realities and shifting international context within which the administration will have to operate will considerably impact on the foreign policy actions, options and decisions the administration will take (Grevi, 2016, p.2).

Before the emergence of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, the question of whether Africa still remains relevant to America's national interest and the significance of the Gulf of Guinea to US strategic energy security calculations have been raised. In a 2012 report, Brown (2012, p.44) notes, Africa is still significant in US energy security

calculus. However, past projections had proved to be far too high in light of contemporary reality. Indeed, the projections that oil and gas imports from Africa and notably Gulf of Guinea as percentage of annual US total imports will witness dramatic rise to between 20-25 percent have becomes mere illusion. While Africa has supplied upward of 20 percent of US oil imports in years past and production from the Gulf of Guinea projected by the National Intelligence Council to increase to 25 percent by 2015, the reality is that this had failed to materialize. The major factor was that the US shale producers had experienced unprecedented successes in exploration and production. Increased production has meant that US dependence on oil and gas imports to meet demand has reduce tremendously. By so doing the US has been able to reduce its imports across board with importation from Africa (notably the Gulf of Guinea producers) in 2012 dropping to 40 percent of the peak it had attained in 2007 (Brown, 2012, p.45).

Given this background, the question of what would be US foreign policy disposition to Africa and the Gulf of Guinea in particular under President Trump becomes a serious issue of concern. There are number of important policy issues in which the United States has had stake as it relates to the Gulf of Guinea under Presidents Bush and Obama. The foremost relates to the securing of access to oil and gas imports from the Gulf of Guinea. Irrespective of isolationism, nationalism and protectionism that might characterize US foreign policy under President Trump, achieving energy security will remain a significant national security issue (Dolata, 2017, p.93). Indeed, the dipping of crude-oil price at the international market has impacted on the growth of US shale oil as the record high price that makes fracking of shale bed for crude-oil profitable has vanished. Therefore, there is the tendency that some of US shale producers will be forced out of production and this will mean that crude oil importation by the US will pick.

Within this context securing access to oil and gas imports from the Gulf of Guinea notwithstanding the percentage that imports from the region will constitutes in US's annual imports will make the Gulf of Guinea to retain some level of relevance in President Trump administration's energy security calculation. That said, the need to promote, advance and protect the interests of US multinational oil corporations operating in the Gulf of Guinea will also make the region to feature in US's foreign policy going forward. The appointment of Rex Tillerson that served as ExxonMobil Chairman and Chief Executive

Officer from 2006-2016 to head the highly influential State Department points to the fact that protecting the interest of corporate America will likely take centre stage in US's foreign policy under Trump (Shear and Haberman, 2016). If that is the case, then the protection of the multi-billion dollars investments of US energy giants in the Gulf of Guinea will be a top priority and thus the region can be expected to feature in policy considerations.

However, the above position, are speculative and President Trump policy decision might radically shift in ways that would weaken the above view point. Indeed, while the issue of energy ranked first in President Trump agenda following his inauguration, it is discussed within the context of 'America First' mantra of the President and largely informed by the need to keep and create more jobs within the United States. In the context of the administration's 'America First Energy Plan', President Trump has vowed to use American resources and wean the US from foreign oil dependency. The administration's promise to achieve complete American energy independence by encouraging more investment in US shale oil and gas production, freeing Federal Land for oil and gas exploration, lift Federal ban on offshore drilling, and increase production of coal through the revival of coal mines. By so doing, the Trump administration hope to achieve two core objectives: energy independence and drive the economy (Dolata, 2017, pp.95-96). If the Trump administration ends up pursuing these policy decisions and achieve success, then the leverage that the Gulf of Guinea will have as it relates to being central to US energy diversification, independence and overall energy security calculation will be diminished. That said, it is also important to notes that, that this scenario painted will happen is a possibility, especially given, the challenge that President Trump is facing in pushing through the administration initiatives in Capitol Hill and within the larger American society.

That said, it is however, important to note that it is not energy issue alone that ties the Gulf of Guinea to US foreign policy calculation. The fight against militant Islamist groups in the Sahel region of West Africa, Boko Haram in North-eastern Nigeria and militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta and the ramification of these threat for national and regional security in West Africa and the Sahel is also an important area of concern. Past administrations (Bush and Obama) have invested enormous US resources in combating terror threats especially within the context of America's 'war on terror' campaign that commenced under



President Bush administration. The raft of bilateral military agreements, military assistance, military aid and US bases that littered the landscape in West Africa and the Sahel region constitute critical area of mutual interest that the Trump administration will likely continue to engage countries in the Gulf of Guinea in particular and Sub-Sahara Africa in general. With the US African Command (AFRICOM) in full operation US military engagement in the Gulf of Guinea is not likely going to diminish. If the need to combat piracy along the coastline and territorial waters of states on the Gulf of Guinea, the war against drug trafficking and proliferation of small and light weapons are lumped into the mix, then there exist the basis to held the view that US militarism in the Gulf of Guinea that started with the Bush administration is not likely going to stop under the Trump administration. More importantly, President Trump had talked about the need to revive US military power, use it forcefully and in ways that advance America's interest and degrade enemies with particular emphasis on radical Islamist groups like the Islamic State (ISIS) (Grevi, 2016, p.7). Thus, given the perceive link between the Islamic State (ISIS), Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Boko Haram the administration might be willing to continue military assistance and aid states in the region in their fight against terror.

All said, it is important to state that the scenario painted above need to be juxtaposed within the context of President Trump's electoral campaigns and earlier statements. Within this context, there are a number of salience issues that need to be noted. Important among these is, President Trump's mantra of 'America First'. This slogan is not only nationalistic, but also driven by narrow considerations of what constitutes America's national interest. Giving President Trump's prior statements, the approach to protect national interest under his administration might tilt more towards scaling back from international engagement. If this position take pre-eminence then region like the Gulf of Guinea might be classified as not too strategic to America's national interest and thus US commitment and engagement might diminished. If this is taking along with President Trump's transactional perception in which foreign policy actions and decisions are situated within the context of deliverables, then what might become the administration's policy direction as it relates to the Gulf of Guinea will be open to conjuncture (Grevi, 2016, p.7). This is reinforce by the position of former US Ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell (2016), when he argued that it is too early to say in conclusive and clearer term that the Trump

administration will be a bad news for Africa. This is premised on the position that there is no substantive evidence to indicate that President Trump is familiar with major issues at the core of US foreign policy inclusive of US-Africa relations. In fact, the back and forth, inconsistency, vagueness and flip flop nature of President Trump clearly shows the President lack of understanding and grasp on issues across broad spectrum inclusive of that on Africa and Gulf of Guinea. This might turn out to be good news as it will mean that career civil servants, diplomats and the US Congress rather than the executive led by President Trump will play decisive role in directing US foreign policy towards Africa under the Trump era (Page, 2017, p.63). This will then means that more of continuity rather than change might be what will characterize US-Africa relations and by extension US engagement with the Gulf of Guinea under the Trump administration.

## **Conclusion**

Touted as wild card aspirant's among the Republican party pool, Billionaire celebrity business mogul Donald Trump defied all odds to emerge first as a forerunner and then snatched the party's presidential slot beating established politicians that include former Governor Jeb Bush, Senator Ted Cruz and Senator Marco Rubio among other intimidating opponents. Donald Trump approach to the campaign was not only radical, he also broke all restraints known to US Presidential electoral process. Against all predictions and poll results, Donald Trump went ahead to defeat Senator Hillary Clinton in the November 2016 presidential election. The election and inauguration of President Trump as the 45th President of the United States created panic in capitals across the world among friends and foes alike. The fears of the unknown as it relates to what will be the policy posture and thrust of the administration to the rest of the world is well founded given President Trump's utterances and statements in the course of the electoral campaigns. Given this context, discussion on what will be the Trump administration policy thrust towards the Gulf of Guinea becomes important. This is because of number of issues of which oil and gas exploration and production, the interest of US oil corporations operating in the region, the war on terror, piracy, foreign aid and assistance on HIV/AIDS within the context of the highly comprehensive PEPFAR started by President Bush, trade agreement such as the Africa Growth and

Opportunity Act (AGOA). These issues are of significance for states in the Gulf of Guinea and what constitutes US policy thrust under President Trump will highly impact on them and by extension national and regional security. As this study summed up, there are opportunities and constraints. However, what will be the administration policy thrust towards the Gulf of Guinea going forward is open and it is the future that will determine it.

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