

Two contradictory trends regarding Africa can be observed nowadays. One of them is Africa's growing role in the world – in global politics, economics, social and cultural processes, etc. This trend manifests itself at the level of some separate African states, many regional and pan-continental organizations. At the same time, in the 21st century, there is a clear activation of attempts of an increasing number of non-African national and international actors to establish their influence in, and make impact on actually each and every African state. Although sometimes they co-operate, these diverse actors naturally compete with each other.

Among all these so-called old and new partners of Africa, the role of the United States of America remains very important – as of a proponent of political liberalization and democratization, supporter of the civil society institutions, donor and investor in African economies, educator of students and recipient of migrants from Africa, and so on. The role of the United States remains very significant despite many events that could destabilize (and to some extent did destabilize) its positions on the continent, like widening and deepening of the Chinese penetration, a negative estimation by many Africans of the changes in the US African policy during Donald Trump's presidency compared to the time of Barack Obama, and others. An integral part and the undisputable leader of the blamed for centuries-long oppression of African peoples "collective West", the United States is not a former colonial master in Africa, and this dualism makes its position on the continent essentially ambivalent – unfavorable in some contexts and favorable in others. The current rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and other forms of anti-racist activism in the United States resonates in Africa rather powerfully and also has a staggering impact on the image of the USA and the prospects of its policy on the continent. While the United States is a promised land for one part of Africans, it is an imperialist that imposes alien for Africa political, social, and cultural values for another.

The aforesaid testifies to the vital necessity in an international academic journal that could give full treatment to the complex and contentious subject of the US policy in Africa, its consequences and prospects, as well as its perceptions by Africans and influence on their lives in different spheres. Therefore, we are introducing the inaugural issue of the *Journal of US-Africa Studies*.

The first issue includes six papers: four articles in the section “US-Africa” and one paper in each of the sections called “African Issues” and “Commentary”.

Two of the four articles in the section “US-Africa” deal with the US policy in the Maghreb states. In particular, Belkacem Iratni in “US Policy towards the Maghreb: An Arduous Combination of Strategic Interests and Economic Stakes” argues that although strategic alignments and energy resources have attracted US attention to the Maghreb, for different reasons the relations between the two parties have not been upgraded to the level of vitally crucial dynamics, interdependent needs, and promising prospects yet.

A more specific topic is discussed in “The US-backed Moroccan-Israeli Normalization Agreement: Implications on the Future of the Maghreb Union” by Boutkhil Guemide and Samir Amir. The authors are critical of that Agreement initiated by then US President Donald Trump, and skeptical about its beneficence for the Maghreb Union and Morocco as its member state. They predict the Agreement’s negative impact on the future of the Arab Maghreb integration project.

One more paper in the section “US-Africa” that provides a regional perspective is Redie Bereketeab’s “External Interventions and Consequences in the Horn of Africa”. The author points out that recently, the region has witnessed convergence of military forces of major global powers, what in turn sparked reactions of radicalism, fundamentalism, and extremism. The paper argues that the conflated interventions and constant shifts of alliances generate convolute pathologies that plague the Horn of Africa.

In “South Africa-US Contest over Africa Policy Dominance: A Study with Emphasis on AFRICOM, BRICS and Libyan Issues”, Martin Rupiya examines the tensions that developed between the two states over their intentions over Africa. He assesses their contest that, in his view, began with the 2006 US intention to locate AFRICOM in Africa, a development openly opposed by then South African President Thabo Mbeki through the AU. Describing in detail the course of events since that time, Rupiya demonstrates that by now, the South Africa-US political contest has passed three phases – of belligerence, collegial neutrality, and uncooperative behavior.

The problem of migrations, so crucial for the understanding of contemporary processes in Africa and beyond, is approached by Elieth Eyebiyi and Eugène Allossoukpo in “Return Migrants Reintegration Projects in West Africa: Critical Notes on the Sahel”, published in the section “African Issues”. The topic of this article – return migrants and their reintegration in African societies, is definitely understudied, and the piece by Eyebiyi and Allossoukpo contributes to this situation’s improvement. The paper promotes rethinking of the public policies of reintegration of return migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa as a component of the European Union governance of migration. Basing their paper on a combined analysis of several projects implemented as part of the transfer of European migration governance policies, the authors measure their scope, but also their inconsistencies.

Finally, in the section “Commentary”, one can find “Out of Africa: A Steady American Disengagement” by Belkacem Iratni. This contribution is openly polemic and explicates the author’s overview of the US African policy in the time of Donald Trump’s stay in office. He reminds that many political scientists have regarded US-intended withdrawal from Africa in those years as detrimental to America’s national interests and therefore, a reset of its relations with African countries may need to be implemented. Iratni expresses hope that Trump’s stepping down may open the way for a new US-African relationship that may bring mutual advantages for both parties.

The papers in the inaugural issue of the Journal of US-Africa Studies prove the argument expressed in the beginning of this note: the United States remains an important actor on the African scene which activities may be positive, negative, or controversial for nations of the continent. Thus, the US policy in Africa is definitely worth studying now and in the future, and promoting it is the ultimate goal of this new journal.

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