United States Interests and Policies in Africa: transition to a new era
edited by Karl P. Magyar
US$59.95/£45.00.

The Clinton administration’s (1993–2001) departure from office has generated
an increasing amount of scholarship devoted to understanding the successes
and failures of US foreign policy toward Africa by the first two-term
Democratic administration to occupy the White House during the post-
Second World War era. The Clinton administration’s early rhetoric, like that
of its Democratic predecessors (the Kennedy and Carter administrations) and
liberal counterparts in other northern industrialised democracies (especially
the Labour Party in Great Britain and the Socialist Party in France), raised
expectations among Africanists that the Clinton White House would enhance
Africa’s standing in the US foreign policy hierarchy and pursue more
enlightened US Africa policies. Although the Clinton administration clearly
raised the foreign policy bar as concerns the African continent, most notably
by President Clinton making two official trips to Africa, in 1998 and 2000,
Africanists nonetheless have criticised the administration for pursuing policies
heavy in rhetoric but weak in terms of concrete actions, save perhaps in the
realm of promoting trade and investment.

Karl P. Magyar’s edited collection of essays, which examines the Clinton
administration’s Africa policies within the general context of the ‘transition’
of US–Africa relations ‘to a new era’ (i.e. post-Cold War), offers a welcome
contribution to retrospective analyses of US policy toward Africa. An
introductory chapter written by Magyar offers a brief overview of Africa’s
standing within the US foreign policy hierarchy (consistently last compared
with other regions) and a detailed summary of US political, economic and
strategic interests in Africa. A concluding chapter, also written by Magyar,
assesses the implications of Africa’s political and strategic marginalisation for
US foreign policy, with a particular focus on the spread of African conflicts
and US conflict resolution efforts. The heart of the book, however, is a series
of essays that document the evolution of US foreign policy toward individual
African regions: North Africa (written by Mohamad Z. Yakub), West Africa
(Karl Conteh-Morgan), Central Africa (Raymond W. Copson), East Africa
(James E. Winkates) and Southern Africa (also written by Magyar).

Magyar notes at the beginning of the book that he chose not to impose a
common framework to be followed by each of the contributors, thereby
leading to different interpretations of what should be included under the
rubric of US foreign policy. The book’s strength lies in the historical context
of US policies provided by each of the five regional case studies—an element
typically lacking in similar volumes. The fact that three of the five authors
work for US government agencies (Magyar with the US Air Force Air
Command and Staff College, Winkates with the US Air Force Air War
College, and Copson with the Congressional Research Service) not
surprisingly (but not inevitably) results in an analysis heavily focused on the
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The success of the first two-term administration, like that in France, raised the issue of enhanced and more effective policies in the region. The Clinton administration, in its last two years in office, such as the intensification of regional conflict in the Great Lakes region (which many now refer to as Africa's First World War) and the passage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, are thus not covered. The book nonetheless constitutes an important contribution to understanding the evolution of US policy towards the African continent, as well as to further attempts to offer a comprehensive analysis of the successes and failures of the Clinton administration in Africa.

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Islam and Politics in Kenya by ARYE ODED

Arly Oded is senior lecturer in the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has served with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recently (1992-93) as ambassador to Kenya. The scope of his work is such that it is an extremely important reference on Islam in Kenya and East Africa. The arrangement of the text is thorough, including tremendous detail without undue duplication. In particular he clarifies, as only one who is familiar at first hand with the country could, the intricate relationships between the different Muslim groups. The Arabs constitute the dominant element in the hierarchy. They came to the East African coast—what is now in Kenya the coastal strip—before Islam came into existence. They take great pride in their heritage. Below them in the hierarchy are the Swahili, initially the people of the coast who were the offspring of Arab men and African women. Their language is part Arabic; their culture is a blend of African and Arab/Muslim. They were an important element in Arab commerce, including the slave trade. The Swahili, in the hierarchy, are above Africans who have accepted Islam. The Somali, who dominate the Northeastern Province, are unique, considering themselves superior to the Africans, Muslim or otherwise. When one adds to this complex population various differences between Sunni, Sufi, Shi'a, special brotherhoods and new groupings that are as numerous as Christian splinter sects in the West, one realizes what problems the Kenyan government faced after independence. The coastal area of Kenya was heavily Muslim and wanted autonomy, if not independence, or even to remain with the Sultan of Zanzibar. Likewise, many of the Somali in the Northeastern Province wanted to secede and join Somalia.