

## BOOK REVIEW

# **“USA – AFRICA: THE POLICY OF PRESIDENT B. OBAMA ADMINISTRATION. 2009 – 2014”, AND “USA – AFRICA: THE POLICY OF PRESIDENT B. OBAMA ADMINISTRATION. 2015 – 2016. CHRONICLE OF EVENTS”**

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The 14th International Conference of Africanists that took place last October in Moscow convincingly demonstrated a high level of African Studies in Russia. After all the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences with over a hundred staff members that hosted the conference is the biggest institution in the world in this field. However, most of the works by these scholars are published in Russian and as a rule are poorly known beyond the borders of their country.

This review is an attempt to make readers of the REBREA acquainted with the writings of Dr Andrey Urnov, a prominent Russian diplomat and academic. Dr Urnov, a graduate of the Moscow Institute of International Relations has been doing research of the US policy since his student years. Then, from 1966, as a desk officer, head of section and finally deputy head of the CPSU International Department for almost a quarter of the

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<sup>1</sup> A.Yu. Urnov. 2015. *USA – Africa: the Policy of President B. Obama Administration. 2009 – 2014*, Moscow, IAfr RAN, 207. A. Yu Urnov. 2017. *USA – Africa: the Policy of President B. Obama Administration. 2015 – 2016. Chronicle of Events*, Moscow, IAfr RAN, 366 pp.

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century he had been responsible for Moscow's political ties with African countries especially with the liberation movements. Later he was the first Soviet/Russian ambassador to Namibia. For his "excellent contribution to the fight for the liberation of the people of South Africa" he was awarded South African national order "Companions of O.R. Tambo" (silver). After retiring from diplomatic service he joined the Institute for African Studies as Principal Research Fellow.

Dr Urnov's research in President Obama's policy towards Africa is issued in two volumes, the first covers 2009-2014 and second – the last two years of his administration. However, it is preceded by a short expose of the policy of previous administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He writes that initial decline of Washington's interest to Africa after the end of the "Cold War" did not last, and singles out the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act of 2001 as "one of the main instruments of the USA's policy in the region". The following year Camp Lemonnier, the first official USA military base on the African continent was founded in Djibouti and then in 2006 Washington created AFRICOM, a new regional United States Africa Command.

"President Obama continues the course of his predecessors on strengthening political, economic, military and other ties with African states", Urnov writes (2015, 13). At the same time, the fact that the new President was an African American "opened a credit of trust to his administration" (2015, 13). Indeed, the African Union Assembly in February 2009 in a special Message of Congratulations welcomed the administration of President Obama "which opens a new chapter for America, Africa and indeed the entire world" (2015, 13). To confirm Obama's initial popularity, especially in East Africa, here is my own story. Soon after Obama's first inauguration, I noticed a vehicle in a street of Dar es Salaam with the inscription "Barac Obama" on it. However, symbolically, that vehicle was just a tuk-tuk, a three wheel auto rickshaw.

In Chapter 1 the author indicates the main "pillars" of Obama's policy towards Africa and meticulously analyses its political, economic, humanitarian and military aspects. In particular, Urnov writes about "certain positive results" of AGOA, in particular, the rise of bilateral trade, including non-energy export from Sub-Saharan Africa to USA (2015, 18). However in his opinion this region remained for the United States primarily a supplier of raw materials that constitute 80 to 90 per cent of American imports from there (2015, 18) while only 300 items of 1 600 allowed by AGOA were exported to USA.

More positive is the author's assessment of Washington's health

and humanitarian assistance, especially of the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) advanced by Obama's predecessor but enlarged by him.

The next initiative, launched personally by Obama in 2010 is "Young African leaders Initiative" (YALI) that includes the Mandela Washington Fellowship, Regional Leadership Centers and YALI Network. In Urnov's opinion its aim is formation "of an 'American column' which was to become a US-oriented ruling class" in Africa (2015, 25).

Both volumes contain a detailed expose of the USA's military activities in Africa. A relevant part of the first volume is entitled "Counterterrorism. 'Small footprint' or creeping militarization?" (2015, 25) It analyses various forms of American military "activities" on the continent: Cooperative Security Locations (CSL), Forward Operating Sites (FOS), Counter-Terrorism Partnerships, etc. that were carried out in 47 African countries by the end of Obama's first term (2015, 33).

While discussing Washington's attitude to conflicts in African countries Urnov pays a special attention to NATO's aggression in Libya (2015, 52-64). He recalls a notorious phrase of Hillary Clinton, then the Secretary of State on the CBC News about Muammar Qaddafi's murder: "We came, we saw, he died", though in a joint article for the leading Western newspapers Obama together with Nicola Sarkozy and David Cameron insisted that their aim is not "to remove Qaddafi by force" (2015, 56).

In Chapter 3 Urnov analyses the USA's relations with several African countries, from South Africa to Ethiopia as well as Washington's attitude to Beijing's activities in Africa. A special attention in the first book is paid to two events: the 2012 Presidential campaign debates (Chapter 4) and the first ever US-Africa Leaders summit in 2014 that Urnov calls "America's Year of Africa" (two chapters in Part 2 of the first volume).

The next two chapters are devoted again to relations with separate African countries and Washington's attitude to "zones of conflicts" in Africa in 2013-2014. In the final chapter, entitled "The Year of Africa is over. What's next?" the author gives an interesting forecast: "The growth of US activity will entail an aggravation of the competition for Africa .... And this can help Africa, promoting its policy of balancing and playing on the contradictions of the competitors." (2015, 201).

Urnov's second volume, even more detailed (it includes 1793 references and its sub-title "Cronicle of Events" is fully justified) serves as a proof of this forecast. As in the first volume the author analyses the development of US ties with Africa in various fields. A special attention is paid to a milestone event, Obama's visit to the AU Headquarters in Addis

Ababa and his Remarks to the People of Africa, pronounced there on July 28, 2015 in the Mandela Hall (2017, 34-37).

In the economic field the author concentrates on the prolongation of AGOA in July 2015, elaborating the changes that expanded the powers of President in reviewing the status of its beneficiaries (2017, 52-53). Urnov studies in detail the materials of the AGOA Forums in Libreville a month later and in Washington in September 2016. In particular, analyzing the statement by Michael Froman, the US Trade Representative, he comes to the conclusion that Washington was seeking "to involve Africa in the implementation of US plans aimed at breaking up the global economic space with the goal of creating a vast exclusive zone in which the United States will preserve its dominant economic positions" (2017, 61)

Discussing the issues of the US military presence and counterterrorism in Africa in the next Chapter 3, Urnov profoundly explains the contradictory nature of this involvement. On one hand, "the US hegemonic course and its anti-Muslim component contributed to the rise and spread of international terrorism. In a certain period, the activity of terrorist organizations was useful for Washington. The United States used these groupings to create chaos and instability in countries that they disliked...The assistance [to African states] led to increased dependence on the United States, not only military, but also political".

On the other hand, Washington was not always successful in keeping terrorists under control. "Unchecked chaos prevented the achievement of political and economic goals of the United States, creating a threat to their security. So, where terrorism acted as a hostile to US force, the struggle against it remained a completely natural component of US policy, including in Africa." (2017, 84).

The second part of volume 2 covers Washington relations in the last two years of Obama's presidency with individual African countries. The whole Chapter 1 analyses (perhaps, in too much detail) the situation in Libya (2017, 147-199), and contains its pessimistic assessment by US officials. The great attention is paid, in particular, to the assessment of US relations with South Africa that Urnov characterises as "almost equal partnership" (2017, 342).

Through all the text Urnov draws readers' attention to discrepancies in the US administration policy and statements. For example, at a round table with representative of the Ethiopian civil society during the visit to Addis Ababa Obama underlined that the US resolutely opposed the groupings who were seeking the violent overthrow of power. "So it would be in Syria!" Urnov sarcastically comments (2017, 34). A number of other

countries, Libya in particular, can be mentioned in this respect as well.

In the Conclusion the author gives a summary assessment of President Obama policy towards Africa. In his opinion in the last two years “B. Obama’s administration managed to gain a foothold in the positions occupied and move forward somewhat. In Africa, as in other regions of the world Washington pursued hegemonic goals, however, it must be admitted that it acted rather flexibly and skillfully (Libya’s exclusion)” (2017, 360).

Urnov writes that in 2016 US Government general expenses on rendering assistance and realisation of global, continental and regional programmes in 51 African countries were 9.645 billion USD, but “the quantity did not translate into quality” and China “was winning ‘the battle for Africa’”, while in a number of African countries (Libya, South Sudan, DRC) “events did not follow the American scenario” and “it was not always possible to keep terrorists under the control”. In Nigeria, Somalia and many states of Sahel and Maghreb they acted as hostile to US force” (2017, 360).

One of the chapters of this volume is devoted to Africa’s place in the 2016 presidential election campaign. In Urnov’s opinion, Donald Trump had no thoughtful and integral policy on Africa. Moreover, he made some overtly racist remarks. However, as elections approached, he changed his tone in an attempt to win over at least some African American voters and even promised that after four years of his presidency 95% of them would vote for him. (2017, 134-135)

Trump’s victory was not expected in Africa (“as essentially everywhere”, Urnov adds), but the attitude to this event varied on the continent. “Close partners and allies, representatives of civil society were frustrated and worried”. Nevertheless, in the same time it was met “with a sigh of relief by those who were tired of Washington’s mentoring teachings and interference and were criticized for failing to comply with democratic norms” (2017, 139).

In Urnov’s opinion “the first steps of Donald Trump’s administration did not clarify the situation” on his policy towards Africa (the book was sent to press on August 31), but the readers have all reason to hope that he will continue his deep and thorough research.

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