FOREWORD

This insightful and timely book from the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, fulfils one of the major reasons for the creation of African centres to produce knowledge and critically reflect on the United States (US) as a nation and a society. The Centre at the University of Pretoria—now one of more than three and growing on the continent—and the publications they are producing, including this book, fill a gap in knowledge and scholarship by Africans on a major world power that has significant influence on African countries and the continent, as well as the world. The Centre will reverse the status quo where Africans understand America from the perspectives of US and other world scholars.

The publication of the book advances the idea that, from creating knowledge from their own perspectives, Africans should be able to influence African agency, policy directions, policymaking, policymakers and African actions in response to the US. In other words, Africans ought to be able, from the knowledge they create, to develop their own clear foreign policy positions that advance their own interests and contribute to the creation of a new global order that is fair and equitable to all.

The book comes at an important time when Donald Trump (Trump 2.0) has made a remarkable comeback from a previous first tenure 2017–2020, then loss in the election in 2020, as the President of the United States, for a second term. Trump's return has been marked by ongoing, swift and dramatic foreign policy changes and actions not only directed at Africa, but the whole world in all areas from US aid, cultural and social issues, immigration, war and peace, to economics, trade and tariffs, multilateral and bilateral issues and relations in ways that did not happen under previous US administrations. As if to ensure that these changes are visible to everyone, the Trump 2.0 'revolution' is conducted in front of television cameras daily, including sometimes contentious and acrimonious meetings with world leaders. These interactions with world leaders, especially the uncomfortable ones, traditionally happen behind closed doors. A level or some kind of 'transparency' also not seen before

in the conduct of US foreign policy has emerged. The changes have not only been dramatic, but also carried out at an unprecedented speed and in ways that do not follow the norms by which US foreign policy positions have been traditionally developed and implemented. The speed at which the changes are carried out is such that it gives the impression that Trump has been in office for several years, when in fact, he has yet to complete a year in office. The changes and ways in which Trump operates have also had an impact internally in the US and not just on the outside world. Courts at every level, from the federal to the Supreme Court, have never been busier as his opponents mount legal challenges.

This book analyses the changes and actions that have shattered not only expectations of US conduct in the foreign policy space, but also well-established and recognised norms. The support, for example, of US aid for development, including African health challenges like HIV/AIDS, malaria and preferential market access for some goods, has within months been withdrawn or not renewed, leaving African countries scrambling to seek alternatives. In this sense, it has shaken African countries and the continent out of expectations, apparent complacency and presumption in relation to their relationship with the US. This complacency or assumption includes that changes to US policy would be gradual and was a significant vulnerability for Africa and the world. The certainty is gone, and unsettling unpredictability is the new norm. Disruption is the name of the game. This new context is a double whammy for Africa, as the effects of Trump's second-term policies on the rest of the world have a secondary impact on Africa, given not only the world's interconnectedness but also Africa's specific connections with the rest of the world. For example, some countries in Europe with long historic links and relationships with Africa have also tightened their immigration policies and reduced or cut aid in ways similar to US aid cuts to Africa. In this regard, Africa is facing ongoing disruptions that undermine its development agenda and trajectories.

It is, however, an opportunity for Africa to consciously and intentionally craft its own foreign policy relations, engagements, and interactions with the US, rather than relying on the traditional US–

Africa relations. The scholarship coming out of the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria, such as this book, is critical to this endeavour as knowledge creators on the relationship between Africa and the US.

A knowledge-driven understanding of these complexities and complications that have arisen since Trump returned to office is more important and urgent than ever. Publishing this book at this time, within a year of Trump's second term, meets both imperatives. In fact, the book was conceived within three weeks of Trump's second inauguration. It means that the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria recognises the importance of responding intellectually through grounded, critical, and analytical African scholarship, within the timeframe of ongoing changes. This responsiveness to real-time events makes the Centre an actor in the unfolding processes, providing the opportunity for Africans in general and African policymakers specifically to draw upon the critical insights it produces to respond more strategically and hopefully effectively.

The range and breadth of the contributions in the book also reflect the Centre's understanding that Trump's foreign policy directions are not just directed at Africa and African countries, which are not major powers, but at the whole world. African perspectives on US foreign policy must always recognise the larger global context of Africa—US relations. In turn, African foreign policymaking must consider this reality and craft its responses and foreign policy positions accordingly. The book's penultimate chapters are dedicated to African responses to Trump, reinforcing the intellectual and scholarly agenda of the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria to a necessary reverse gaze that asserts African agency, engagement, interaction and responses to a world power, the US and by extension the world, at a time of turbulent change.

This book is an important contribution to the growing literature on African perspectives on the US and Africa–US relations coming out of the Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria, and provides illuminating scholarly perspectives on how Africans understand the US.

It is a valuable source of knowledge for those crafting strategies on how Africa, as a continent and African countries, should engage, interact and respond to the US.

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