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The US, Russia, China and Africa in the evolving global order

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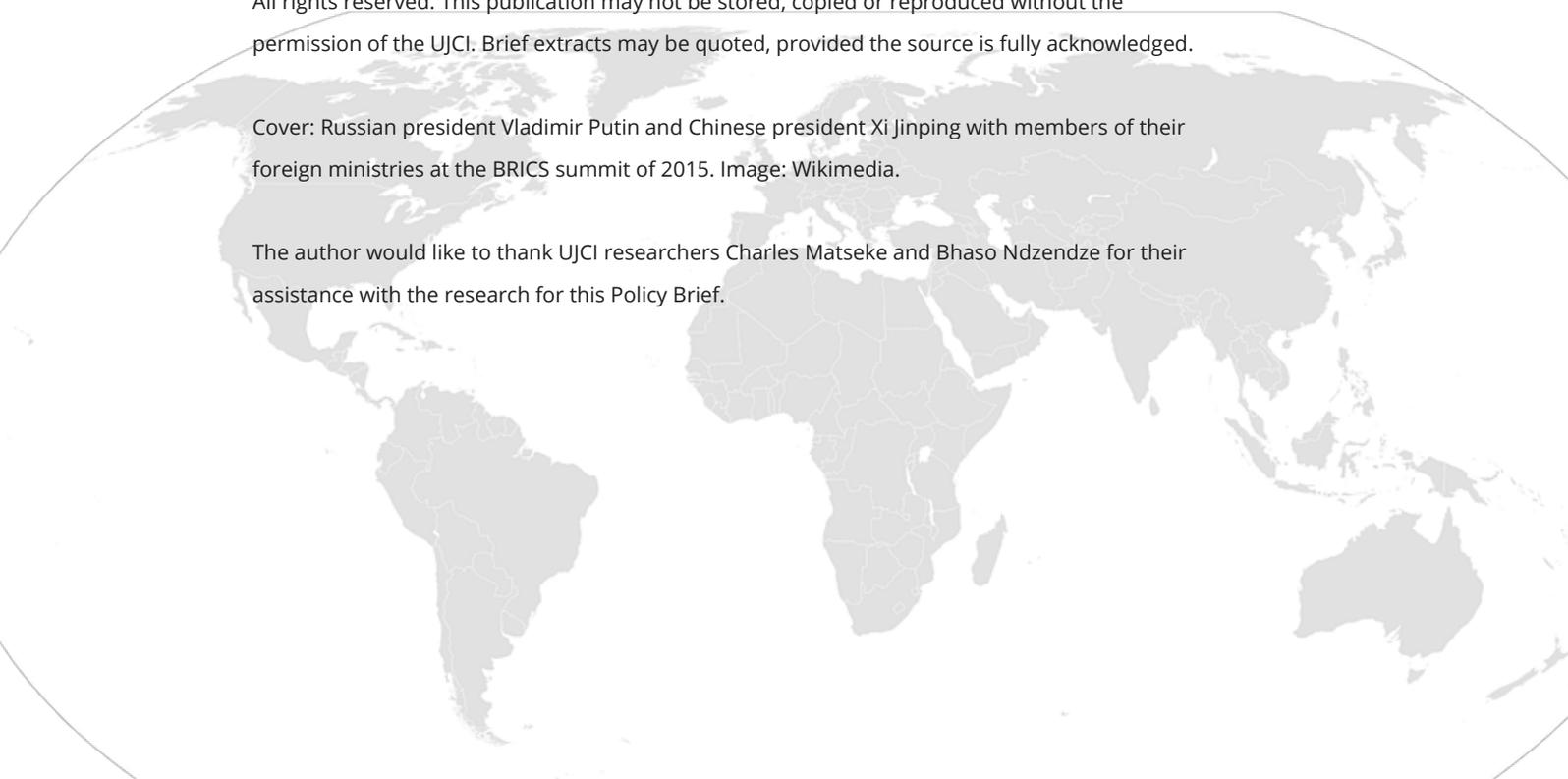
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Cover: Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping with members of their foreign ministries at the BRICS summit of 2015. Image: Wikimedia.

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Introduction

This Policy Brief examines the current global order in which Africa is widely seen to have been given a peripheral role, but which is also in a state of change, due to the resurgence of China and Russia and the intentional decline of the United States and the West at large.

It is divided into five sections. The first assesses the rise and decline of the US-dominated post-1945 world order. The second analyses Russia's post-1989 orientation, and its dealings with the West. The third examines China's opening up while retaining a Chinese self-understanding and its subsequent promulgation of a globalisation with Chinese characteristics. The fourth assesses Africa's position in the crumbling post-1989 world order through three lenses: (1) its peripheral stature in the international financial architecture, (2) its international political positioning after the 2008 global financial crisis which, ironically but typically, it did not help to create, but suffered the most from; and (3) its asymmetrical standing in the international legal and moral framework. The final section outlines the implications of the changing global order, and offers policy prescriptions for Africa.

The rise and fall of the post-war world order

The post-World War II global order is in crisis, more deeply so than we are led to believe. This crisis has numerous causes, both political and economic. Currently under the captaincy of a US president who has no policy experience and seemingly no policy direction, or any desire to continue leading the international community, this order does appear to have reached the end of the road.

After World War II, the US held the moral high ground. It had acted decisively in defeating fascism; was a beacon of democracy; and had helped to reconstruct war-ravaged Europe (if only to isolate and contain the Soviet Union in the process) through the Marshall Plan, and the international trade framework through Bretton Woods. It also played a leading role in fresh attempts to establish global peace and security, notably by financing and promoting the United Nations. It rallied around the UN agenda and, despite protestations by fringe budget wonks and anti-Soviet sections of US society, remained the organisation's biggest funder (Bennett 1983: 45).

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The US also sought to codify international free trade, notably in the form of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This was based on the notion of 'democratic peace', incorporating the idea that the market was a stabilising force. In this view, interlocking states into a cobweb of trade and investment acts as a deterrent against war, as it encourages them to discuss and resolve matters around a table rather than by means of conflict.

But this thesis has arguably been unravelling in the face of globalisation. The decisive decade in this process was perhaps the 1970s; the decade of Richard Nixon and later of Margaret Thatcher who was elected as British prime minister after the fall of a troubled Labour government (which had failed to quell worker unrest and had even resorted to IMF financing in an attempt to end the 'Winter of Discontent').

This decade also saw the return of market fundamentalism and neoliberal conservatism that was wholly embraced by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, which deregulated the US economy, and rolled back the state. The World Bank issued the Berg Report, which argued that African countries should spend less on social goods and services, and should privatise their health institutions. (According to some analysts, this is why the Ebola virus, which could otherwise have been contained by effective public health institutions has become a regional epidemic.) Ronald Reagan's successor, George H.W. Bush, pushed for war with Saddam Hussein in a pretended coalition with smaller partners, some of which were cajoled into cooperating when the 'Yemen precedent' (the threatening of removal of financial aid to small nations to ensure that they vote in favour of the US-favoured resolutions in the UNSC after the end of the Cold War) was allegedly set.

When, in the 1990s, centre-left governments came to power under Tony Blair in Britain and Bill Clinton in the US, they fell into 'Third Way' politics – the notion that conservatism could be swallowed up by the left, and extremism diluted by pragmatic strategies. But even this centrist agenda is crumbling. The greatest signifiers of its collapse are the outcome of the Brexit referendum, Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential race, and the rise of nationalist sentiment in France, Germany and Spain. These are signposts of the western world overturning the world order it had established after World War II.

This world order was marked by a total disregard for Africa and Africans; they were no longer seen to be of any importance, as they had been during the Cold War. This cynical shift was perhaps demonstrated most clearly when the US and the rest of the western community failed to intervene in the Rwandan genocide

of 1994. In the mineral-focused pragmatism of the Third Way, the Rwandan crisis did not require the same response as oil-rich Libya did in 2011. Following the Cold War, African countries were only important if they had strategic minerals to offer, and not for much else.

In the meantime, in 1989, Francis Fukuyama had published his celebrated thesis that, following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, together with its alternative world order, history had come to an end, bolstering the belief that western liberal democracy had proven itself to be the highest – in fact the only successful - form of social organisation, and should therefore be exported to the rest of the world. There was a sense of the West having conquered the rest of the world, and neoliberalism – now known as the Washington Consensus – was surrounded by triumphalism. But this celebration proved to be premature, for it ignored various factors, notably growing resentment in the former Soviet Union. The prophetic words of David Lloyd George after the Treaty of Versailles ought to have been salient in the White House and Whitehall:

‘You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments to a mere police force and her navy to that of a fifth-rate power; all the same in the end if she feels that she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919 she will find means of exacting retributions on her conquerors’ (Mayer 1971: 3367).

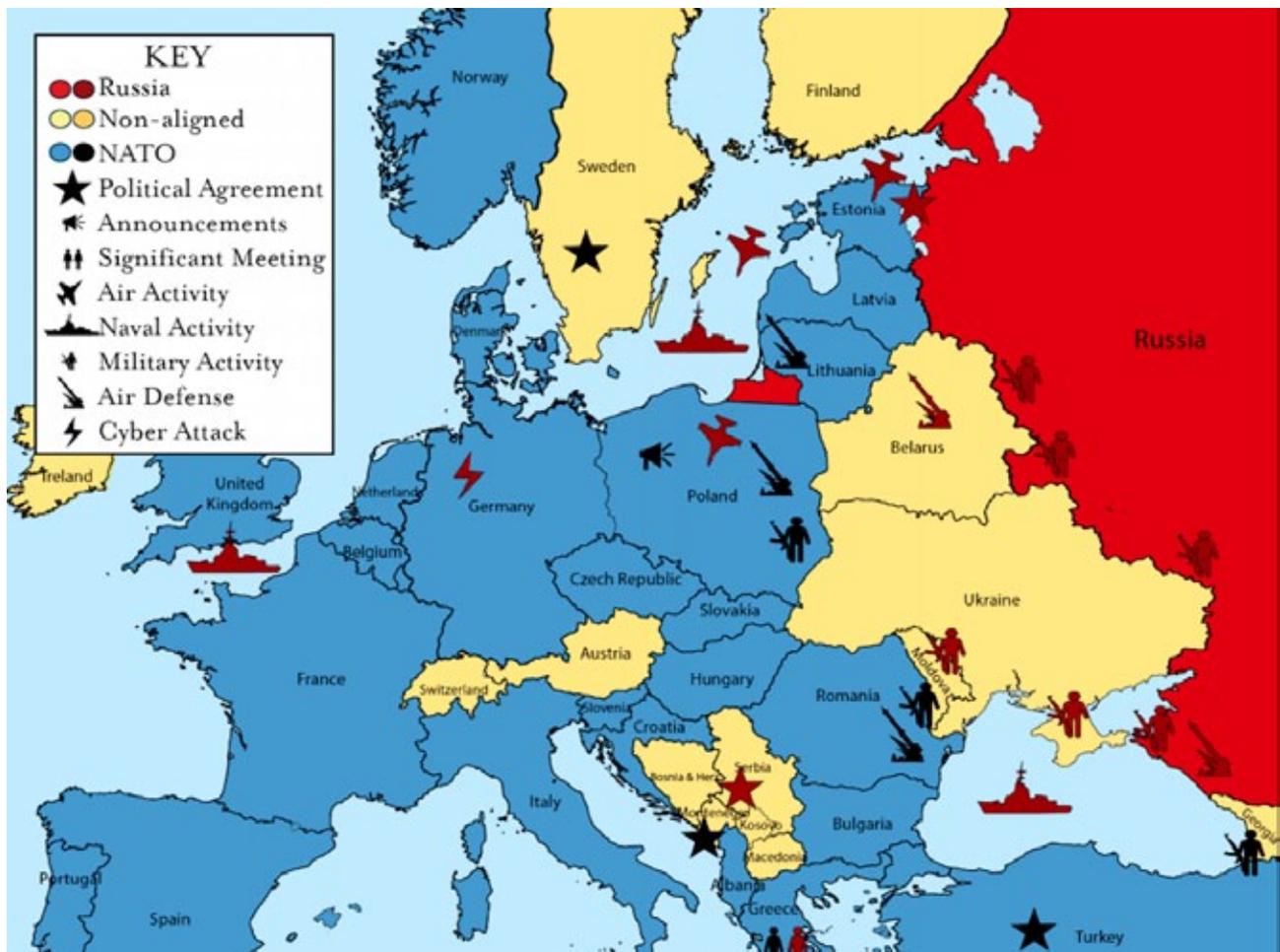
Following the Cold War, African countries were only important if they had strategic minerals to offer, and not for much else.

On Russia

Russia was essentially told not to worry about its defeat, and what ought to have been a Russian Question – i.e., how best to create an environment in which Eastern European countries could be integrated into the broader global order while ensuring that Russia would become a fully fledged member of key international organisations without fear of encroachment – was not deemed fit for discussion. It was obvious that, after a transitional period, Russia would become westernised (the folly of this notion ought to have been obvious, as various previous attempts to westernise Russia going as far back as the monarchical period, primarily under Peter the Great, only ever went so far).

Foreign policy analyses on both sides of the Iron Curtain assumed that after the end of the Cold War, both the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact would lose their foundational mandates, and would be dissolved. While the Warsaw Pact died quietly, NATO lives on, with no dissolution in sight. On the contrary, after 1999 the organisation saw an expansion

Figure 1: NATO's encroachment on Russia's borders post 1989



Source: Council on Foreign Relations.

seemingly directed towards Russia; in that year alone, three countries – Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic – were incorporated, with the seeming goal of strengthening the buffer between western European and Russia. Russian protestations went unheard in the West. In 2004, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and, crucially, the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia with which Russia shares its north eastern borders followed suit. In 2009, Albania and Croatia joined, and the circle was nearly completed with the inclusion of Montenegro in June 2017.

These moves by NATO, which bring home Russia's fall from power and prowess, have in part facilitated the emergence of a strong man in the form of Vladimir Putin, under whose leadership Russia has been more assertive, projecting the image of a Russia that is economically strained but is still a formidable military power. It still has the largest nuclear stockpile in the world with more than

7 000 warheads (see Figure 2), and the fourth highest military budget in the world. The American agenda of running Russia down has therefore not been successful, and has in fact led to greater Russian pushback, as seen in the Crimea in 2014, when the West could do nothing to Putin beyond sanctions and a suspension from the G8 – a testament to Russia's power owing to EU energy dependency on Moscow. Alleged American attempts to undermine electoral support for Putin within Russia (with the decision in March 2012 by the former US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, to direct provide \$50 million worth of assistance to Russian civil society cited as evidence of pernicious US interference in Russian elections), and mass protests have also been unsuccessful – liberal nationalists such as Alexey Navalny have been publicly disgraced as recipients of funds from foreign sponsors, and following the 2011-2012 mass protests in the same city (Ramani 2016), Putin's supporters launched their own counterprotests in Moscow to protest against what they perceived to be US meddling in Russian elections. Ironically therefore, perceived foreign meddling has helped Putin to consolidate his power to the point where his latest approval ratings have reached some 90%.

On China

The simultaneous regional military containment and conversion-from-within thinking in the western world is not limited to Russia. Indeed, its most ambitious incarnation is in relation to China. A far back as the 1970s, Richard Nixon had tried to exploit the Sino-Soviet split by recruiting China as an ally against the Soviet Union, drawing it into the western-oriented international community, and attempting to socialise it in that context. Therefore, China was let into the United Nations Security Council in 1971 and the US was even willing to cease its recognition of Taiwan as the One China. In 2001, harkening to the democratic peace thesis, China was let into the WTO on the assumption that opening up China economically would eventually open it up politically – thus, through commerce, China would be roped in and turned into a western-style democracy instead of a threat. But this has not happened. As China has developed industrially and commercially to become the second-largest economy in the world, lifting about 700 million people out of poverty in the process, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) has gained 'performance legitimacy' to the extent that about 90% of Chinese society approves of the CCP. Further complicating issues is the fact that some 60% of Chinese society believe that China is already a democracy, and therefore see no need to change the one-party system; thus, there is very little organic impetus for regime change.

Perceived foreign meddling has helped Putin to consolidate his power to the point where his latest approval ratings have reached some 90%.

For its part, China has neither been overrun by nor opposed to Western-style globalisation. In other words, China has embraced globalisation but not necessarily of the western kind – instead, it has sought a globalisation with Chinese characteristics, predicated on non-interference. The One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative is an infrastructure project of gigantic proportions which attempts to bring under its sway more than 60 countries, from Scandinavia to the South Pacific Islands, in its land and maritime versions (Madhav 2017). In a world of competing economic and trade alliances, OBOR has overtaken many others active in the region and beyond. By any measure, this is the biggest constellation of nations in the 21st century. Quite clearly, the US has failed to remodel China in its image; instead, China has come out of its engagements with the West with a Grand Plan of its own and is renegotiating the post-1945 world order, something that has not been well-received in the West, with many touting and espousing what has essentially come to be known as the China Threat Theory.

The increasing self-interest of western countries ended any prospect that the Doha Round of the WTO would be beneficial to Africa and the developing world

On Africa and the global order

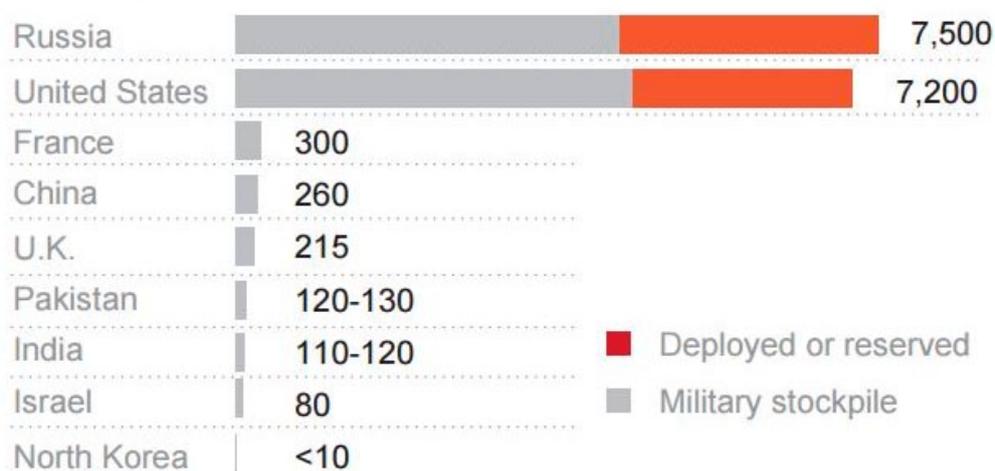
The 'New World Order' and its discontents

The end of the Cold War ushered in what US President George H W Bush called a 'new world order' (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2011). Marked by Western primacy in the international political economy for the past 25 years, it has seen the emergence of challenges (and opportunities) that are unique in character and have far-reaching implications for African development.

The increasing self-interest of western countries ended any prospect that the Doha Round of the WTO would be beneficial to Africa and the developing world (represented in the negotiations by Brazil, China, India and South Africa) – and it was not, as agricultural tariffs were only removed for one product, bananas, imported to EU countries and the US from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (Shah 2013). Moreover, many western countries subsidise their agricultural sectors, in which Africa is meant to have a comparative advantage (Shah 2013). This has inhibited the expansion of markets for African agricultural products; indeed, African producers find that they cannot compete against subsidised local producers in western markets (Gordon 2009). Furthermore, European and American multinational corporations have also crowded out local producers in domestic African markets.

Figure 2: The global nuclear arsenal, 2015

Nine countries hold the world's nuclear weapon stockpiles of nearly 16,000 warheads.



Source: Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Through partnership agreements such as the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which was signed in 2000, the European Union provides African countries with access to some of its markets while 'asks for compliance with a given set of good governance norms and procedures' (Gokcekus and Suzuki 2013). This has led to asymmetrical relations, as African countries clearly need these partnerships more than Europe needs concessions from African countries. This has given the EU the power to impose what it regards as better governance practices on African countries (Gokcekus and Suzuki 2013). This asymmetry is also seen, and used, in the international legal framework, notably the International Criminal Court (ICC).

South Africa's apparent hesitation in June 2015 to arrest the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, despite the existence of an ICC warrant which it was obliged to observe, attests to the 'high level of scepticism and outright lack of trust the court now has among African leaders and, to an extent, the general public' (Weller 2015: 1). Bashir, who has refused several requests to visit the court to face the charges against him, has described the ICC as 'a tool to terrorize countries that the West thinks are disobedient,' and other African leaders have expressed similar sentiments. As the Ethiopian foreign minister, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, put it in at the 2013 African Union summit, 'the court has transformed itself into a political instrument targeting Africa and Africans' (Weller 2015: 1).

'The ICC has transformed itself into a political instrument targeting Africa and Africans'

Despite its relative lack of integration into the world's financial machinery, Africa was still unable to escape the effects of the 2008 financial crisis

It is true that the ICC has so far prosecuted African individuals. Of the nine situations the court is officially investigating, all are in Africa. Furthermore, each of the 32 individuals indicted by the Court are African. This indicates a level of geopolitical bias which even the Court's most ardent defenders must take into consideration. As one scholar puts it:

The ICC operates in the context of a global governance structure characterised by a problematic multilateralism, the prevalence of Northern hegemony, and an implicit hierarchical moral and racial order that makes it acceptable for African leaders to be prosecuted but makes the indictment of American or British leaders inconceivable. In 2011, Amnesty International called for Tony Blair and George W Bush to be tried by the ICC as war criminals for atrocities committed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nobody believed for a second that these leaders would ever be brought to book' (Niang 2016).

The spectacle of crisis

Despite its relative lack of integration into the world's financial machinery, Africa was still unable to escape the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. This not only highlighted Africa's marginalisation, which then only accounted for less than 2% of global trade (Roux 2014: 120), but also the dependency pathways of Africa's relations with the west. Peering into the trajectory of the Great Recession, as it has come to be called, with particular regards to Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, it becomes clear just how disastrous the aftershocks were and to what extent Africa's marginalisation was deepened because of them. The crisis, having ushered in a financial recession in the West, clamped down on the continent's already meagre incomes.

Tourism receipts and remittances all declined, in parallel with trade financing. Due to the rise in unemployment in core African states, remittances dropped by 5-8% in 2009 alone (African Development Bank 2009), translating into a US\$1 billion shortfall for Africa. Some African countries, notably Kenya, were disproportionately affected due to a differential number of family members in the west. In line with the Bretton Woods-imposed currency devaluations in states such as Malawi, Liberia, Uganda and Kenya, this contributed further to the foreign currency exchange shortages and further deteriorated already limited buying power of African countries. Poverty and marginalisation were further entrenched (African Development Bank 2009).

Attempts to remedy the effects of the crisis were also telling, and characteristic of the state of Africa's dependency. Although some leaders, such as Malawi's

then president Bingu wa Mutharika who declared Bretton Woods institutions to be 'neo-colonial' yokes which had to be thrown off in favour of 'home-grown policies', many countries (including Malawi itself) had no choice but to pander to the west in trying to dig themselves out of the crisis (African Leaders 2011: 55; Ali 2016). Each in their own way, African states made overtures to western countries and business communities, trying to market themselves as investor-friendly for western capital. South Africa looked to use the 2010 FIFA World Cup to expose itself to the world as a viable investment destination.

Concurrently, the president of Tanzania, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, took to Perth to address the Commonwealth Business Forum of Australia to make the case for his continent, stating that 'what is required of us is to transform Africa's agriculture from its current state of being predominantly peasant, traditional, backward, less productive and subsistent to being modern, highly productive, and commercial' (African Leaders 2011: 225). Africa, he declared, was responsible for its own plight because it had hitherto 'pursued economic policies that lead to stagnation or even retardation of growth and development' (African Leaders 2011: 226). In closing, he reassured the dignitaries that 'our [African] governments and people are ready to play their part to play their part and work in partnership with friendly governments and representatives of the international private sector, such as the captains of industry and business gathered here this morning' (African Leaders 2011: 227).

It is ironic that Africa was disproportionately affected by the Great Recession, considering that it had 'never touched the complex financial derivatives that sparked the financial crisis' but not at all surprising. In fact, it is symptomatic of global capitalism, or put differently, how global capitalism was supposed to work. As the US Secretary of the Treasury under Nixon, John Connally, said to a gathering of foreign finance ministers, 'it's our dollar, but your problem' (Panitch and Gindin 2013: 144).

Harnessing competing global orders

Axiomatically, and history's verdict on this is clear, the world order and its structures are not given and static, and stability is a chimera. The world order is continually made and remade by problem-solving measures within the existing structural framework that are required to deal with emerging contradictions, and visualised through interactions and a lack of consensus between different actors. In our times, perhaps the greatest source of contradiction is the schism between US military dominance and Chinese economic pre-eminence.

The world order and its structures are not given and static, and stability is a chimera

But the changing nature of the world order does not explain away the fact that shifts in global economic and financial power create unfamiliar circumstances, and unfamiliar shifts create risks. In the 1960s and 1970s the rising powers, Europe and Japan, complained of destabilising economic impulses emanating from the US. This source of economic risks has been around for a long time, in other words, although it continues to mutate. But now, in addition, the US and other advanced economies must worry about the risk of adverse shocks arising out of events in China and other emerging markets.

There is no denying the often acrimonious differences among core power governments, and, in turn, the growing challenge from China and Russia

It is because of this that Africa finds itself in a multipolar world; a world characterised by competing and layered global interests. The emerging global order, we should bear in mind, is unevenly hegemonic. Indeed, hegemonic power does not operate in a uniform manner across the globe. There is no denying, firstly, the often acrimonious differences among core power governments, and, in turn, the growing challenge from China and Russia.

Intra-west competition (borne of the rise in populism in some western states and continuity in others) over gaining favour with African countries is beginning to emerge. Recently, the EU has negotiated Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with several African countries that provide some reciprocal tariff benefits, leading the US Congressional Research Service to plead with the US Congress to make AGOA even more favourable, as not doing so would 'potentially place US firms at a competitive disadvantage relative to European firms in some markets' (Williams 2015: 2). Furthermore, the British, in exiting the EU, are in pursuit of trade deals and are eager to outdo their European counterparts. Especially in terms of agriculture, African countries can harness this to their advantage.

Indeed, funders competing for business with Africa, while reminiscent of the tug-of-war politics of the Cold War, can mean that African states are able to negotiate with greater ease. In the wake of Trump's victory and his 'America First' stance, both the West and East are now more eager than ever to forge deals that outdo the other. Developing nations can take advantage of this, what Li Xing and Oscar Garcia Agustin have called 'interdependent hegemony' (2014: 53). Incumbent upon Africa is the crafting of a policy framework that will not tie it to Washington, Beijing or Moscow. Despite the history of cooperation with and assistance to many African countries by both China and the former Soviet Union in shaking off the yoke of colonialism, and the people-to-people sympathies of Beijing and Moscow alike, Africa has to play a game in which it avoids its territory being a battleground for these giants.



It falls within the ambit of the African Union to understand the long-range game of all three powers and devise corresponding policy measures that are Africa-centred and advance Africa's position. Knowing these states' histories, self-perceptions and touchpoints will enhance Africa's ability to serve its own interests in interacting with them. Therefore, African scholars should study, with explicit foreign policy intentions, the contemporary foreign policy aims of a state which once viewed (and perhaps still views) itself as the 'Middle Kingdom' (China) or the 'third and final Rome' (Russia), while generating an African position on China's Five-Year Plans and Russia's Foreign Policy Concept as well as more nuanced but less pronounced/official foreign policy and world visions, while closely monitoring these countries' interactions with states in their vicinity (for example, those in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of which China and Russia are members, along with a number of other Central Asian states and the nine-member Commonwealth of Independent States composed of former Soviet republics). This will help Africa to avoid one fait accompli after another.

At the same time, armed with its own self-generated understanding of China and Russia, Africa should engage with them on the basis of its own view of these states as opposed to Western-generated information; a process laden with conflict of interest which has produced such narratives as 'China props up authoritarian regimes' and 'China is neo-colonial' by an America and Europe which itself deals with those authoritarian regimes, and has sometimes placed them in power in the first place as puppet regimes – the epitome of neo-colonialism.

US President Donald J Trump before delivering his maiden address in the UN General Assembly in which he raised the prospect of the US reducing its support for the UN. *Picture: The Independent.*

American militarism towards North Korea is another matter that merits close and concerted African observation

As it stands, the world finds itself with a weakened America, a huge portion of whose elite population is bent on blaming Russia for adverse domestic electoral outcomes, and bent on reversing the greatest economic outcome of the post-War order: a powerful China with which the US has a trade deficit. The fundamentals that brought this situation about are crumbling politically in the sense that there is a dissolution of the moral high ground held and maintained by the US after World War Two. Africa needs to observe these arguments closely; allegations of Russian espionage and outside influence have a direct impact for Africa. Firstly, issues such as diplomatic freezes, US-Russia sanctions and espionage are reminiscent of the Cold War in which African states might find themselves caught in the middle. Indeed, leading up to the 2018 FIFA World Cup, with Vladimir Putin claiming that Sepp Blatter was removed as FIFA president as punishment for his selection of Russia to host the 2018 tournament, we are reminded once more of the reciprocal 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games boycotts by the US and the Soviet Union. Recently, these accusations of cyber influence have inspired the Zimbabwean government to prop up a Department of Cyber Security. Furthermore, Russia is an important ally from whose isolation it cannot benefit. Secondly, Russophobia merits some scepticism and weariness. If the US election was indeed influenced by a foreign entity, western democracy, is not as durable or impregnable as the US, among others, has claimed it to be. This is a further blow to America's international standing, further hastened by its own determination to shrink from global leadership.

The US is no longer in the business of nation-building. Proposed cuts to the UN budget which are bound to affect Africa directly, withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, as well a rise of explicit militarism under the banner of 'America First' are symptoms of an America that has forfeited its role of global leadership. American militarism is particularly worrying from an African standpoint, since it points to a lack of long-term orientation in resolving the issue of terrorism in Africa and leaving a stronger continent with strong nations, not through the barrel of a gun but through social development and creating opportunities for youths who would otherwise be lured into joining terrorist groups. A more comprehensive approach needs to be adopted; terrorism is a security issue, but it is also an economic and a social issue, and cracking down on it is the stuff of nation-building, failing which a vicious terror-poverty-terror-poverty cycle is bolstered.

American militarism towards North Korea is another matter that merits close and concerted African observation. To begin with, North Korea is a Chinese ally, while America's foothold in the Asia-Pacific implicates South Korea, Japan and

Taiwan and to some extent India – any potential conflict in this part of the world would have a direct impact on Africa as these are crucial trade partners, and the Asia-Pacific is a crucial trade route whose disruption, owing once more to the weak position Africa finds itself in, would serve only to choke Africa.

For its part, Russia needs to devise an African strategy of its own. Despite the advantage of history and established networks with African states which it assisted in the fight against colonialism (and an impressive total of 50 000 African students educated at Soviet universities and institutes by 1991). After the Cold War, the Russian presence on the continent abated. Under the leadership of president Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation looked towards the West, and retreated more rapidly from Africa; indeed after the fall of the Soviet Union, even Cuba seemed to play a bigger role in Africa. Faced with economic and political problems at home and its 'near abroad', as detailed above, this was perhaps inevitable – indeed the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party leader and former vice-chair of the State Duma, Vladimir V Zhirinovskiy, blamed the economic turmoil in Russia in the 1990s on aid to Africa. Indeed, Africa seems virtually absent from Russian foreign policy documents, notably its 2008 Foreign Policy Concept and its National Security of the Russian Federation Until 2020.

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More recently, Russia has drawn on new expertise in oil and gas exploration to forge ties with Algeria, and the two states alone control about 40% of the EU's natural gas supply. Other signs of a Russian resurgence in Africa include its participation in UN Security Council peacekeeping efforts (in the DRC, the Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan and South Sudan); its respect for international governance institutions in which Africa is invested, including the UN itself, from which the US is now divesting; state visits by Putin; the growing presence of Russian corporations in Africa; and Russia's involvement in BRICS.

Between 2000 and 2012, Africa-Russia trade increased tenfold, and according to the African Development Bank, Russian companies invested some \$20 billion in Africa in 2013 in such far-flung sectors as energy production, mining and fisheries. Russia's investment in Africa is coordinated in large part by the increasingly active Coordination Committee on Economic Cooperation with African Countries (AFROCOM), which brings together ministries and other government agencies as well as companies large and small. Russia has also relieved African debt to the tune of \$20 billion.

Also impressive is the fact that the Institute for African Studies in the Russian Academy of Sciences now has 13 research units and has more than 100

academic staff members; this is matched by very few governments elsewhere in the world. While these are positive signs, they need to be greater supplemented, and Africa needs to act towards Russia in a coordinated way, aimed at identifying the most promising areas of economic cooperation.

Implications and policy recommendations

The implications of this analysis are as follows. Firstly, the global order that started in 1945 and was consolidated in 1989 is undergoing a fundamental transformation, among others due to America's loss of global moral stature, enhanced by Trump's apparent efforts to diminish global US leadership on climate change, state-building, and stable institutions. Secondly, while the US maintains its military supremacy, there are emerging states which have not been entirely socialised by the US and West and are seeking to reassert themselves and reshape the world order in their own image, or at least bring about a multilateral global order. In addition, post-Brexit and in the wake of the crisis within the EU, a prospect lingers of West-West competition for access to Africa. Thirdly, Africa remains significantly unrepresented in the current global order, accounting for little in terms of commerce, and even less in terms of setting the agenda. Fourthly, the spectre of conflict, either through diplomatic freezing, military confrontation, or trade wars (and even alleged electoral interference and mutual regime undermining) among the US, China and Russia has far-reaching implications for the African continent.

Africa remains significantly unrepresented in the current global order, accounting for little in terms of commerce, and even less in terms of setting the agenda

On the basis of this assessment, the following policy recommendations for Africa can be made:

1. Currently small and relatively powerless, and subject to potentially harmful outcomes should they attempt to deal with the US, Russia and China on their own, African states have no other option but to cooperate and subsume their national interests in an overarching African agenda and framework.
2. Africa needs its own data. Currently, very few African countries have a sound grasp of demographics and other vital statistics. Besides boosting state capacity (through taxation and revenue collection), this is important for foreign policy-making, because it will reduce reliance on western governments and non-governmental organisations for key data, which has implications for security as well as development and continental coordination.

3. Africa is not obliged to 'pick sides', and should in fact avoid a repeat of Cold War-style advocacy, as this could lead to a massive loss of opportunities. Each of those three powers has specific benefits to offer (in terms of security, foreign direct investment and support at the UN), and policy formation should be based on long-term African goals and prospects as opposed to only historical links. As discussed previously, the world order is in constant flux, and African policy-making should keep pace. Furthermore, like China and Russia, Africa has its own interests, and should seek cooperation with these emerging powers only insofar as there can be an Africa-centred outcome.

4. The AU should have an epistemic function that informs foreign policy-making. It is the AU's principal duty to gain a deep understanding of the long-range game of all three powers, and devise corresponding policy measures that are Africa-centred and advance Africa's position. African embassies in those three countries should have research units that build up in-depth understandings of their histories, policies, and long-range plans – not just as officially pronounced but also through unofficial but detectable means – and then coalesce these with one another and with the AU.

5. The AU should implement the 2014 Malabo Protocol in order to enable the African Court of Justice and Human Rights to prosecute crimes under international law and transnational crimes. Indeed, 'the recent prosecution of Hissène Habré at the Extraordinary African Chamber in Dakar for crimes of war is evidence that where there is political will, and adequate resources, the cause of justice can be advanced on the continent' (Niang 2017).

6. Developments in countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia should be monitored, as this would reveal what proximity to Russia and China really means in practice. Major lessons could be learnt in the process, as many of their proposals for Africa have been piloted in those countries. Central Asia has seen simultaneous Sino-Russian and US-China-Russian involvement in much the same way that Africa has seen and is beginning to see once again. Countries in those regions therefore offer the potential for case studies with uncanny parallels with and implications for Africa.

Africa is not obliged to 'pick sides', and should in fact avoid a repeat of Cold War-style advocacy, as this could lead to a massive loss of opportunities

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