



**EMERGING MARKETS  
FORUM**

**BACKGROUND PAPER**

**AFRICA IN THE  
REMAINS OF THE ORDER**



## **Emerging Markets Forum, 2024 Global Meeting, October 22–24, Washington D.C.**

### **Panel: From a unipolar to a multipolar world: whether and how?**

#### **Africa in the remains of the Order**

It is the fifth time I am coming to the EMF, having the pleasure to listen and participate in this so well informed and educated group of people. I thank the organisers, you Harinder, your colleagues of the Board and the EMF collaborators (with a special mention to Sylvie). However, this is the first time I am speaking in a panel – and what a panel! I am humbled to be in the company of such prominent speakers, not forgetting Andrew Sheng, who unfortunately could not join us. Lastly, a salute to all the other participants. Some of them I already had the pleasure to meet before and I am very much eager to continue to diminish my circle of ignorance by listening to and speaking with you. Allow me to say some words about myself. I lived in Mozambique, 15 years during the colonial period, 10 more years after independence. Being an economist by formation, for the last 30 years I am working on international relations, with a major focus on Africa – reason why I will concentrate my comments on this continent.

As Andrew pointed out in his paper, the development banks' assets of the BRICS are six times bigger than those of the G7. However, a closer look at the numbers, tell us that by BRICS we should read China. However, bigger assets do not translate necessarily into power, which is further and foremost a combination of military might and political will to manage the consequences of becoming a global leader. Bridging his comments to the question of the Order, its change means a replacement of the leader, the US, by the rival power, China. And I guess this is not, or at least not yet in Beijing plans...

True that a growing number in the Rest (I would also add in the West) are uncomfortable with the Order. But let me stress that I do not see the US very much committed to bear the burden of leading the global Order, namely since the last decade. May be they feel they can continue to exert their power regardless of any Order – after all hegemons tend to interpret the rules a la carte... I would also add that more than China, Russia or the BRICS, the major responsible for the deceleration of globalisation and the imposition of protectionist measures is the US itself, just because Republicans and Democrats believe that would play in their best interests. Needless to say the move is already affecting negatively China, the emerging economies, the global majority, and the very US allies, including the EU.

Anyway, which countries would want an Order led by China? I dare to say not even China. Beijing would hardly be eager to see its money being bought and sold in the free markets. As Xi Jinping proclaimed in the 2017 DAVOS meeting, China is interested in Globalisation and Multilateralism, not in protectionism or in any bunch of multipolar centers. I would imply

that what China really wants (and deserves) is a greater protagonism and involvement on a (slightly modified) rules based Order. Therefore I would guess that China is now playing the multipolar card not out of conviction but because it was forced to do that as a second best...

As for African countries, I would argue also for the other weaker countries, a consensualised, multilateral rules-based Order would be preferable than a multipolarity of powers and rules – some ideological proclamations might say the contrary, but...

Let me now clarify why I usually prefer to say African countries instead of Africa. Just because Africa is not a country! There are huge social, historic, geographic, demographic, economic diversity among the 54 countries of the Continent. Most of them are not only plurinational entities, they are also, in diverse degrees, domestically disintegrated countries, still in the process of creation or consolidation of their statehood. Therefore, it is my opinion that looking at Africa as one is a flawed slogan, as we are not in the presence of a geopolitical entity. This does not mean that regional or continental collaboration or the adoption of common positions are not possible. They are necessary.

Since its huge involvement in the Continent in the beginning of this century, China became the major financier and investor on infrastructures, hydrocarbons and other minerals, as well as on primary sectors. In less than two decades, China became the bigger economic partner of most African countries. And China was followed by many new investors - India, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey, the UAE, Qatar or Saudi Arabia – meaning emerging economies. The same can be said about a bunch of Western multinationals, new and old, motivated by a renewed interest in raw materials, from hydrocarbons to critical materials to profitable stones.

I also would like to say some words about the EU and its relationship with the Continent. There is a long lasting flawed, EC led approach, branding the mantra of “cooperation between equals” and enforcing political conditionalities disguised as common values. Besides, EC cannot avoid to “sell” regional economic integration as a panacea for development - as if its experience could be simply transposed. How can countries that do not produce enough industrial, competitive goods, some of them hardly integrated domestically, engage in regional economic processes? I am aware that what I am saying contradicts usual proclamations of African and European politicians, academics, government officials, NGO members or development cooperation consultants. Afterall this is not only a credo, it is an industry.

Finally, whatever the Order we are in between, African countries have some important cards to play globally. Let me name two.

One has to do with the global quest for raw materials, mostly hydrocarbons and critical minerals. In the words of Robin “...growing global demand for the minerals and commodities that are heavily concentrated on territories of countries across the Global South give them the opportunity to attract foreign direct investment that will help lift their economies up the global value chain, as opposed to them to continue serving just as raw material suppliers to China or western markets”. African pro-modernisation leaders (there are some) are already trying to play the hand of accruing added value to raw materials. For that purpose, multinationals might be more interested partners than the usual providers of aid. As a matter of fact foreign opponents to the adding value card are politicians and government officials. This is not a conspiracy! After all, politicians are eager to creating jobs and added value in their countries, not elsewhere. Coming back to Andrew’s paper and his strong concerns on climate change, let me tell you that I am convinced that African governments and resident businessmen will try to profit from natural resources, including hydrocarbons – after all demand exists. The factual argument that “we were not the polluters” will remain. This does not mean green technologies and correlated industrial ventures will not be carried on (they already are) – provide there is financing or foreign investment involved.

The other card is demography. As demonstrated by various projections – including projections published some years ago by EMF – African countries as a whole have the higher rates of fertility and population growth. For now and for the next future, this is more a nightmare than an advantage, due to the high rate of urbanisation and the huge number of youngsters entering the work age and not finding jobs or opportunities. But the demographic card should be played globally – and namely with the European side. Not in the way it is being done by many “if you don’t help us (or, in the words of some European politicians, if we do not contain them), millions of migrants will flood Europe”. Well, first this is not happening, it is a lie, a very much effective politically effective lie I would say. Furthermore, this scenario is a practical impossibility – courtesy of the Sahara (a wall I guess Trump would love to have) with its 9.3 million square km, meaning migrants will not flood Europe, they will flood neighbours – which is already happening in significant numbers... In my view, the right way to play this card should use real facts and trends, contradicting lies or nationalistic, xenophobic perceptions which are poisoning the European political landscape. And facts and trends show that European countries are rapidly ageing, that they need more workers to pay their social security and more consumers to boost the economy – therefore, Africans are not the danger, but the opportunity. easier said than done, I know.

Thank you, obrigado, kanimambo.

Fernando Jorge Cardoso, Executive Director of the Club of Lisbon