
AFRICA AND THE END OF US GLOBAL HEGEMONY

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. has dominated world affairs since the end of the Second World War in 1945. This reality has allowed the U.S. to play critical roles in the establishment of important international organisations such as the United Nations and all its affiliate bodies, as well as multilateral groups such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD – World Bank), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and several others. Thus the U.S. has determined the course of international relations and global socio-economic development and peace and security cooperation.

In the area of peace and security, the U.S. also led the formation of Western Military alliances across the world, the most significant being the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Equally importantly, the U.S. established military bases across the world. In response to this the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) also established the Warsaw Pact alliance, bringing together all Communist countries of Eastern Europe. This development led to the Cold War between Western capitalist countries, under the umbrella of NATO, led by the U.S., and the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, led by the Soviet Union, thus the beginning of the East-West competition.

Over the decades, the U.S. also strengthened its global domination through its strong post-Second World War economic boom, a situation that allows it to impose its national currency, the dollar, as a global currency especially after the adoption of the dollar as a preferred currency for the global oil trade, the so-called petro-dollar, further consolidating its global dominance in the financial sector.

It was into this world dominated by the U.S. that African

countries emerged after their independence from colonial bondage. Though the U.S. was not a colonial power in Africa like some European powers, such as the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, and others, the preponderance of U.S. power, its hegemony over world affairs, manifested in the pattern of centre-periphery relationship that developed between African states and the U.S..

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and as a consequence, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, it was thought in some quarters that NATO would also be dissolved paving the way for the establishment of a new global collective security arrangement which could have brought all nations together. The U.S., however, had a different objective of consolidating its global dominance.

Against the chaos that ensued in the Russian Federation, the successor state to the Soviet Union, during the transition from the Communist order to a western style democratic arrangement, the U.S. emerged as the unchallenged global super power. American scholars began to talk of the “End of History” and the triumph of the American world view.

THE U.S. AS A GLOBAL HEGEMON

It is widely recognized that power is a very important attribute that nations pursue in the international system. Power is the basis of foreign policy decision making and planning of security strategy, the management of national resources and the control of market share and access to globally available resources. Accordingly, the more powerful a nation is, the more it should be able to achieve its national economic, political and security objectives on the international scene. To understand the global hegemony of the U.S., therefore, we must understand the power that the U.S. possesses.

But first, we must understand this power against the background of the international system.

Between 1945 and 1991, when the USSR was dissolved, the U.S. and its NATO allies were in competition with the Soviet Union and its War-

saw Pact allies in what became known as the Cold War. African countries emerged on the international stage as independent nations in this Cold War environment. They were immediately confronted with the challenge of global alliances. However, African countries, and many other developing countries in Asia and Latin America, opted for a non-alignment policy, choosing not to be aligned to any of the ideological camps. This policy allowed the young nations of Africa to have access and to cooperate with all nations irrespective of their ideological leanings. This policy was tested again and again as critical issues confronted the global community, such as the national liberation struggle, the anti-Apartheid struggle, the campaign for a new international economic order, and the issue of global peace and security among others.

The U.S. expected the African nations to support its global vision and agenda. However, most of the African countries remained non-aligned. Though nations are largely interdependent on the international stage, some are more dependent than others on the dominant global capitalist countries. Meanwhile, U.S. hegemony and interests continued to pose challenges to the interests of the Global South generally and African countries, which were largely primary commodity producers and exporters and therefore dependent on the goodwill of the developed countries.

The crucial factor on the international stage is power. The extent to which one nation can pursue its international and domestic goals is based on its power broadly defined. Critical elements of power include military capability, in terms of men and material, strong economic capability, including technological and industrial capability, huge territory, huge population, institutional capabilities, the power to develop a strategic vision and the capacity and the will to pursue the vision. All these elements constitute the critical factors which define the power of the U.S. on the international stage.

For a long time, particularly up to the early twentieth century, state power was equated with military capability. This explains the arms race by states to acquire more weapons of mass destruction in relation to other actors throughout the century.

The realist school of international relations has built a deep understanding of the role of power in the affairs of nations, and how power affects the possibilities of states, both within their boundaries and in relation to

other nations on the international scene. This small group of nations has been able to establish their hegemony and, on the basis of their power, determine the fate of other actors. To the realists, appeal to human reason or to the world court will not produce peace and order; only power will. Though the realists are concerned about peace and order in the international system, they believe that these values can only be achieved, not so much by international law or international organizations, but by power. Hence the pursuit of power by the U.S. and its allies to foster a unipolar world, a hegemonic world, dominated by them. The realists also believe that U.S. and Western hegemony is good for the world. However, it is this hegemonic pursuits that have led to U.S.-led wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan and even Ukraine with dire consequences for the international community.

THE U.S. AND AFRICA

The United States has always occupied a prominent position in the relations between Africa and the outside world even though there was no colonial relationship between them. The relationship grew out of the dominant position of the U.S. in the international system, in critical multilateral agencies such as the IBRD, also known as the World Bank and the IMF, its economic, military and political power and influence. The U.S. is also attracted to Africa because of the strategic position of the African continent and the rich natural endowments of the continent and its potential both as a market for American goods and services and also as a destination for American investment.

After the Second World War, African states looked up to the U.S. in their struggle against colonialism, and for national liberation and for support in the campaign against the Apartheid system in South Africa and other racist regimes on the continent. In addition, African countries also looked up to the U.S. for economic assistance, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and investment. Even though most of the African states were non-aligned during the Cold War period, they continued to seek American support in a variety of ways especially as their economic condition deteriorated in the 1970s.

At the end of the Cold War in 1991, which also coincided with the end of Apartheid, many African countries moved closer to American policy prescriptions for them



Photo: Xinhua

People protest against U.S. sanctions in Zimbabwe, 2022.

by accepting the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the adoption of multiparty democracy and liberal and neo-liberal economic reforms, the central principle of which was market orthodoxy. Accordingly, in the last three decades, as African countries embarked on democratic construction and economic reforms, and as African leaders trooped to the U.S. for validation and support, there was no major obstacle towards a reinvention of U.S.-African relations, which could be classified as growing in leaps and bounds with every successive American president adding new elements to the mix of policy engagement of African countries. Though terrorist attacks on the September 11, 2001 imposed new elements into American foreign policy, particularly the Global War on Terror, U.S.-African relations did not suffer any major setback because of U.S. pursuit of its anti-terrorism policy, which profoundly affected the international system. In fact many African leaders consider U.S.-African relation as being good and friendly, and American support for African aspirations on the international stage very reliable, even dependable.

That was until President Donald Trump came into office in 2017 and openly adopted an antagonistic “America First” attitude towards African states. The period of 2017 to 2021 therefore marked the lowest point in U.S.-African relations since the end of the Cold War. The coming into office of President Joe Biden in 2021 offers

a great opportunity for improving U.S.-African relations and putting up U.S.-African engagement on a pedestal of mutual benefit in this new and dynamic international system.

However, beyond the dramatic changes in global politics, the rise of China and a resurgent Russian Federation and the role of emerging powers like India, key issues in U.S.-Africa relations remain aid and the prospects for socio-economic development on the continent.

Through aid, technical and humanitarian assistance and trade, the U.S. became very close to several African leaders, and became second or third in influence after the departed colonial masters in most of the African countries.

The national liberation struggle and the fight against Apartheid and racist regimes on the continent, however, created some obstacles for the growing U.S. African cooperation as the U.S. continued to support those racist regimes. As a result, the diplomatic relations were not as warm as was expected, even though American investment continued to expand across the continent.

By the 1970s, African economies started to experience several severe negative turns. Their need for economic and humanitarian assistance from the U.S. continued to grow as well as the need for U.S. support in negotiations with the World Bank and the IMF to solve critical balance of payment problems. It was also a period of campaign for a new international economic order.

This was a time when the Cold War was raging and the African countries were promoting their non-alignment policy against the background of U.S. strong support for the Apartheid regime of South Africa and other racist regimes on the continent.

By the 1980s, the U.S. through the World Bank and the IMF was promoting Structural Adjustment Programme for African countries. In the evolution of U.S.-African relations, the 1990s was a critical period. Soviet Union had collapsed, bringing to an end to the Cold War, while a triumphant capitalist order was unchallenged on the global stage, and globalization was declared. Apartheid South African and all other racist regimes have been defeated opening up opportunities for a new level of engagement between the U.S. and African countries. At the same time, African countries were experiencing severe political and economic crises, because of economic decline in most countries, resulting in growing autocratic rule and human rights abuses. In response, the U.S. invoked democratization as a solution to Africa's political and economic problems, investing enormously in the development of non-governmental organisations and activist civil societies committed to fundamental political change on the continent. By the end of the decade, several African countries have embraced democratic rule, with most of them adopting American-style presidential system. In Nigeria, the second longest period of military rule, starting from 1983, came to an end following the sudden death of General Sani Abacha and the decision of the Nigerian military under General Abdusalam Abubakar to return the country to democratic rule, at the shortest possible time, a feat accomplished in less than one year with a democratic election and the arrival of a democratic government in May 1999.

Consequently, Washington's agenda on the continent was now focused on the promotion of democratic rule, market driven economic reform, and to this was deployed American aid to the continent.

U.S.-African relations continued to improve, signposted by increased visits of American leaders to the continent. President Carter had visited Nigeria and Liberia (1978), President George H. W. Bush had visited Somalia and Ghana (1993); President Bill Clinton visited Uganda (1998), Rwanda (1998), South Africa (1998), Botswana (1998), Senegal (1998) and Nigeria (2000). President George W. Bush visited Senegal (2003), South

Africa (2003), Botswana (2003), Uganda (2003), Nigeria (2003), Benin (2008), Tanzania (2008), Rwanda (2008), Ghana (2008), Liberia (2008). President Barak Obama visited Ghana (2009), Senegal (2013), South Africa (2013), Tanzania (2013), Senegal (2013), South Africa (2013), Kenya (2015) and Ethiopia (2015).

In general, we can talk of improved U.S.-African relations in the new millennium. Some African countries are closer to the U.S. than others. Generally however, those countries that embraced democracy and neo-liberal economic reform such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco and others enjoy greater cooperation and support from the U.S., further signposted by increased level of high-level official exchanges between the U.S. and Africa, greater collaboration between American and African agencies and institutions in the fight against drug trafficking, piracy, terrorism, money laundering and other transnational crimes. There was also greater security cooperation, with several military cooperation agreements signed (i.e. with Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa and others) for training and other types of cooperation.

Another significant issue is the growing presence of the U.S. military on the continent with a U.S. military sub-regional command at Sao Tome and Principe, and another major U.S. military base in Djibouti, at Camp Lemmonier, the only permanent U.S. military base in Africa. The U.S. has also signed an agreement with Ghana on the establishment of the West African Network Logistics, a kind of military hub to ferry military supplies to U.S. troops across the continent, indicating a growing U.S. strategic presence. The decision of the U.S. to build a huge 500 million dollar consulate in the commercial capital of Nigeria, Lagos also suggests that the Americans have a grand strategic plan for the African continent. President Joe Biden has recently authorized the deployment of 500 U.S. troops in Somalia. Overall, the U.S. now has 30 military facilities in 15 African countries.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITION OF AFRICAN STATES

The pressing challenge most African states face is the building of a sustainable and secured society. Thus, the most critical project for Africa is the institutionalization of good governance. The end of the Cold War in 1991 opened a new window to address Africa's developmental problems through the promotion of democratization and

subsequently good governance and economic reforms in the new millennium. Africa continued to face several political and socio-economic crises expressed in lack of food security, high level of unemployment and consequent high level of poverty, terrorism and other types of criminality, environmental problems and challenges to peace and security, all of which were encapsulated and explained as governance crises.

However, while the U.S. and World Bank called for democracy and good governance, they fought running battles with governments that were supposed to be democratizing in Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria and others for one reason or the other. On the other hand, while demanding that African states take back seat in development to allow market forces to operate, they also wanted strong states or authoritarian governments to implement its unpopular neo-liberal programmes. Thus the World Bank concept of good governance had undemocratic connotations. This is why some African scholars have tried to define good governance in social terms as “democratic governance” and not good governance as being popularly promoted. Democratic governance implies over and above technical efficiency and probity, regular interaction between government and civil society and free participation by the latter through its institutions and popular organs. It means the achievement of socio-economic welfare for the people in the broadest sense. In other words, Africa needs a developmental state and not just a technocratic state.

The enduring nature of neo-colonialism in Africa, the imposition of neo-liberalism with policies of privatization, deregulation of the economy under the logic of market forces, only expose the fragility of African states making them more dependent on the global capitalist system.

African countries are still largely at the bottom of the global economic ladder. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to more than 1 billion people, half of whom will be under 25 years old by 2050. According to the World Bank, Africa is a diverse continent offering human and natural resources that have the potential to yield inclusive growth and wipe out poverty in the region, enabling Africans across the continent to live healthier and more prosperous lives. Africa undoubtedly has made immense progress in moving toward effective democratic governance as mirrored in an ever-larger number of elections, the implementation of new constitutions, including term limits and constraints on unlimited

power, and the African Union’s refusal to embrace or cuddle regimes that come to power through military coups. At the same time, key governance challenges exist in Africa: poor resource management or complete lack of management, disconnects between citizens and leaders or utter disregard for social compact, the use of ethnic or religious identities to incite violence and marginalization, impunity and sheer disregard for the rule of law, decrepit infrastructure, spent, weak and almost comatose institutions, corruption, poor service delivery, absence of accountability, the list is endless.

AID IN U.S.-AFRICAN RELATIONS

The U.S. as the richest nation in the world occupies a significant position among donor countries to African states. Though never a colonial power, American economic success as the number one economy in the world has given it a leading position as a leading provider of economic and other aids to African countries.

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has continued to introduce new initiatives in its aid programme. The U.S. provides bilateral aid and also through multilateral agencies. Africa’s needs and American priorities are not the same. In the first place, Congressional guidelines require that U.S. aid promotes American values, such as human rights and democracy, promotion of economic reform, humanitarian needs and security, in line with broad U.S. interests.

In the past, the U.S. did not accord the African economy any serious attention beyond access to its minerals. However, in the new millennium, with the successful engagement of China with African countries, the U.S. has had to rethink its strategy on the continent and has accordingly been introducing one initiative after the other to enhance its engagement with African states.

However, U.S. aid does not go to the most needy, but to countries which are in a position to meet some American interests in terms of energy and/or solid mineral resources or security. In the last couple of years, with the achievement of energy sufficiency in the U.S., countries like Nigeria, Angola and other major oil producing countries no longer have the attraction they once had. Now, American assistance on the continent is deployed more than ever before to pave the way for American corporations to make good investment and enter the African market more effectively.

(Photo/IC Photo)



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits Rwanda in 2022.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) receives about a quarter of U.S. foreign aid through the State Department and the USAID. The amount going to SSA has also increased steadily because of the increasing challenges facing the continent in terms of global health problems, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Maternal and Child health, and nutrition. Another source of concern for the U.S. is the security problems on the continent, growing transnational crime, and the perennial ethno-religious conflict now further compounded by terrorism.

In the last two decades, American Presidents have taken steps to register their support for African development by launching pet programmes and initiatives which were identified with them. In 2000, President Bill Clinton launched an elaborate African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to assist the economies of Sub-Saharan African countries by helping them gain access to the American market thus improving trade relations with the U.S.. The Act provides eligibility criteria which include that the countries concerned must adopt market reform, respect the rule of law, human rights and workers' rights, adopt political pluralism, accept to protect intellectual property, adopt anti-corruption and poverty alleviation measures, improve healthcare and educational opportunities, eliminate child labour and remove barriers to U.S. trade and investment in their countries. On the basis of the Act, African textile and apparel and other goods, including agricultural products gained access to the American market. This was a big opportunity indeed for textile manufacturers on the continent, expanding benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme. In all, 47 out of 48 Sub Saharan African countries have become eligible

for AGOA. It was extended to 2015 on expiration in 2008 and after its initial 15-year validity, and the AGOA legislation was again extended on June 29, 2015 by a further ten year period till 2025.

The U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) was launched in 2005 under President Bush to reduce the burden of malaria on governments of African countries. It was continued by President Obama. The programme also provided support for agricultural development, economic growth and support for peace and security and other efforts to enhance democratic consolidation and good governance.

President Obama introduced the Trade Africa Initiative (TAI) to help enhance intra-regional trade in Africa which started off with an East African Hub. Another initiative of the President was Doing Business in Africa (DBIA) which was meant to create U.S. business exposure in the African market.

Though President Donald Trump tried to reduce the level of assistance by previous administrations, at the same time he launched his own initiative, "Prosper Africa" to encourage economic growth in Africa by promoting U.S. commercial and investment interest in Africa and also encouraging African investors to also invest in the U.S.. The initiative also imposes more stringent conditions on U.S. assistance to African countries.

At the G7 Summit in Cornwall, UK, President Joe Biden launched his own initiative, called the Infrastructure Initiative also known as "Build Back Better World" to help meet the infrastructure needs of developing countries, but with private sector capital. Obviously, this was an attempt to match China's infrastructure development programme, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping and already well received across the world.

PROSPECTS FOR U.S.-AFRICAN RELATIONS IN AN EMERGING NEW WORLD ORDER

The Russian Military Operation in Ukraine and the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. and its NATO allies have exposed the weakness and indeed the fragility of

the U.S. global hegemony and opened up opportunities for new initiatives in the management of global affairs. In the first place many countries have seen through the sanctions on Russia how vulnerable they are to U.S. imposition and lack of respect for international agreement.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is a fallout of the U.S. and NATO aggression against Russia, using Ukraine as a proxy through intense interference in Ukrainian affairs, particularly after the February 2014 revolution in Ukraine, the Maidan Revolution, which led to the overthrow of a pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich. This was followed by anti-Maidan and pro-Russian protests in Eastern Ukraine, and the subsequent integration of Crimea into Russia and civil war in the Donbass region. The provocative U.S. intervention in Ukraine was meant to ensure further breakup and disintegration of Russia, a very huge country and indeed the largest country in the world with enormous natural resources. Towards this end, the U.S. and NATO also embarked on NATO expansion eastwards towards Russia.

Instead of seeking peaceful resolution of the problems between Russia and Ukraine, the U.S. and its allies were instead promoting Ukrainian intransigence, providing arms and ammunition to the Ukrainians, and promising NATO membership to Ukraine, a major issue in the conflict.

Significantly, the U.S. imposed a comprehensive sanction on Russia which included the ejection of Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT), a key factor in global financial transactions and international trade. Travel bans were also imposed on Russian officials and businessmen on top of many other restrictions. A ban was also imposed on Russian export trade in oil and gas among several other restrictions.

These sanctions have disrupted international trade, undermined global food security and clearly demonstrated the misuse and abuse of American global power and hegemony.

Reactions to the sanctions on Russia across the world were swift. Apart from the U.S. and its NATO allies, many countries were reluctant to follow the example of the U.S.. The Global South

generally was not ready to support the U.S. and NATO. While 141 out of 193 members of the United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine, most members did not support the escalation of the war by the U.S. and NATO. 93 members voted to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, but African countries abstained or voted no. Major countries like China and India abstained. Most developing countries support Russia despite the arm twisting by the U.S., accusing the U.S. of double standard and hypocrisy, citing American aggression across the world in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and others. Nearly half of AU members abstained during the UNGA's two proposals on the issue, demanding an end to the war. The AU issued a statement asking Russia to respect international laws and territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine.

Despite the impact of the war on Africa including rising commodity prices including fuel and wheat, which threaten food security in Africa, most African countries remain supportive of Russia, remembering the support of the Soviet Union for African liberation struggle and the struggle against Apartheid and racist regimes on the continent.

As a consequence of the sanctions, Russia has retaliated with a regime of sanctions of its own on NATO countries, refusing to accept payment for its oil and gas in dollars, insisting on payment in rubles. China, India and other countries are insisting on other currencies for payment. Meanwhile Russia has set up another payment platform for its international trade, the Mir, which is already being adopted by other countries including India and Türkiye. China is also promoting its Cross-Border Inter-bank Payment System (CIPS). The repercussion of the sanctions on Russia is that the role of the U.S. dollar in global financial transactions will diminish, signaling the end of the role of dollar as a global currency and the decline of the U.S. as a global financial power.

This does not however mean the end of U.S. global power as the U.S. remains the major global military power. However, it appears the U.S. is bent on provoking tension in Asia with the 2nd August, 2022 visit of Speaker of the U.S. House of Representative Nancy Pelosi to China's Taiwan region. This was also quickly followed by the visit of U.S. Senate team of five led by Senator Ed Markey to Taiwan region on 14 August, 2022.

These desperate moves are signs of decline of the U.S. in world affairs. It will be a great opportunity for the Global South particularly African countries to reorganize their global engagements with a view to nurturing more beneficial engagements with other countries, such as China, India and others, towards the establishment of a multipolar world. ■