

CURRENT GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Order and Disorder? Exploring the implications for Africa



We need that reconstruction of that progressive voice. Without it we are not going to be able to take advantage of this new opening against unipolarity. (Refer to page 8 for the introduction)

By Thabo Mbeki

I think Aziz has properly identified the international setting and clearly I think when we talk about these current global dynamics, order, disorder, etcetera, our starting point surely must be the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has to be. And therefore the emergence of this unipolar world as it was called – I think it's still called that – with the United States as this dominant force.

This has been a defining element for the last twenty, twenty-five years in terms of foreign policy impacting on everybody across the globe. I think it's fundamentally important to understand this and really to internalise it in our thinking, because it's important then to answer the question: what is our response? What is this progressive African response? But it's got to be a progressive African response to something, and I think what it must be a response to is that reality which came with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I think the older ones among us here – I can see some bald heads and grey heads and things like that – would remember a man called Newt Gingrich who was speaker in the US House of Representatives some time back, a republican. What I discovered about Newt Gingrich, after we had had a bit of a chat, is that actually he is an educated man. I didn't know that. [Laughter] He's actually a doctor, he has a doctorate in history. His thesis was on the Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo. So Newt Gingrich, I met him somewhere, and he asked that we should have breakfast, which we did.

And he says, we now have the United States as the only superpower in the world, so I said, yes, I agree. He says there's a consequence to that and I said, well, Mr Speaker, what is the consequence? He says the consequence is going to be that the United States is going to do wrong things because there's no countervailing power. So I said, Mr Speaker, you are right, and you are already doing wrong things. He said, I feared as much. It was interesting coming from a right-wing republican who understood the uses of power, and clearly understood that there would be negative consequences

from this situation.

I found an article written by a gentleman called Jack Matlock last year. I'll read a couple of paragraphs. He was former Ambassador to the USSR from America, 1987 to 1991, and basically he's explaining the thinking of the ruling group in the US towards Russia. He says, "Vladimir Putin was elected in 2000 and initially followed a pro-western orientation."

And that's an interesting thing to say about Putin then compared to Putin today. He says he had a pro-western orientation. And then he says, came September 2011, and he was the first foreign leader to call Bush and offer support. He cooperated with the US when it invaded Afghanistan and voluntarily removed Russian bases from Cuba and Vietnam. And then Matlock says, and what did he get in

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return? Some meaningless praise from President George W Bush, who then delivered the diplomatic equivalent of swift kicks to the groin: the further expansion of NATO in the Baltic and the Balkans and plans for American bases there; the withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; the invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council approval; overt participation in the colour revolutions in the Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan; and then probing some of the firmest red lines any Russian leader would draw: talk of taking Georgia and the Ukraine into NATO. And Matlock says,

Americans, inheritors of the Monroe Doctrine, should have understood that Russia would be hypersensitive to foreign-dominated military alliances approaching or touching its borders.

But I think this response which Matlock talks about, of the US to Russia, indicates the frame of mind of this ruling group in the States. In an earlier paragraph he talks about Bill Clinton. So it didn't matter whether they were republican or democrat, they had a particular view manifested in this way.

But this attitude described as aiming kicks in the groin for everybody was not only applied to the Russians.

Aziz spoke about US National Security Strategy documents. He should have spoken about a later intelligence estimate of the US where they say that they are not going to allow any country anywhere in the world to present a challenge of any kind to the US in any respect. These are the kicks in the groin that they are talking about, and they had political consequences, some of which Aziz has mentioned.

You see it with regard to the Palestine issue. The issue of the liberation of the Palestinian people is off the agenda effectively. Some of you will mention Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions: I support BDS, but effectively the struggle for independence, nation-formation, sovereign rights of the Palestinians, this matter is very much on the back burner. It's a consequence of this unipolar world, and even when one talks about the response, you know, George W Bush, Bill Clinton, everyone, they're the great democrats who must democratise the world, the Middle East, going into Iraq in 2003, Bush and Blair were busy saying we are bringing democracy. These are the same people who would not respect the outcome of a Palestinian election which resulted in Hamas emerging as the bigger political formation – no, we will not accept that democratic outcome, but we want democracy in the Middle East. It's exactly this view, *what we want* must be what policy becomes for everybody.

Invasion of Iraq, 2003; all of the battles in the UN Security Council about that invasion: Aziz will recall this, that we then had quite an interesting discussion with the leadership of the UN, the secretariat of the UN after that invasion of Iraq, to say to them, Kofi Annan and everybody else, that you see, as small countries the UN is

very important to us because this is an instrument in world politics which should act to defend the interests of the smaller countries. We are not a big power; therefore the UN is important. And what has happened with regard to the Iraq event is that it has weakened the authority of the UN, so it's important that the secretariat of the United Nations, particularly the Secretary General, look at the UN Charter and what it says about who the Secretary General of the United Nations is and what he stands for, what he does, he or she does.

We're saying to them you've got to stand up to reassert, let's recover as much as we can of the authority and the prestige and the standing of the United Nations because the things that the US has done have corroded this. We had a long discussion with them. At the end nothing could be done and the reason nothing could be done was because the secretariat of the UN said Washington is angry, and because Washington is angry the Secretary General cannot stand up and say on behalf of the United Nations this is what is correct. No, no, the argument was 'Washington is angry'. And because Washington is angry the world comes to a standstill. We get paralysed.

A more recent example was the US Assistant Secretary for Europe, Nuland, – that thing which was intercepted by somebody and fortunately put out for the rest of us to listen to – choosing who must be the prime minister of Ukraine: "...No, no, Yatsenyuk, Yatsenyuk is the right one, not that one." And indeed Yatsenyuk is the prime minister.

Even closer to home, I'm talking about the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of this unipolar world, its impact. If you look at a very, very obvious consequence of that on the continent, it is the destruction of the progressive Pan-African organisations on our continent. They vanished. We talk about the students, All African Students Union, I don't know where it is now. The Pan-African Youth Movement, where is it? PAWO women's organisation, all of these progressive continental organisations, they vanished. It's part of this unipolar process. I'm saying that the *political consequence*, the political

consequence of this is this universal combination of this ruling group in the United States which openly says everybody must behave as we say; and that includes the United Nations.

The militarisation of United States foreign policy: it's one of the consequences of this, because clearly, in order to achieve that domination, to be this great unipolar power, indispensable nation and then all of these things that they say, you need all the necessary power that you can exercise. And one of the options they chose was this one, the use of force; militarisation, therefore, of foreign policy. And you can see it, it's very clear, and the uses of that power, growth in military expenditure in the US, and the boast about it.

I was reading not long ago an article, a right wing conservative commentator in the States saying, this is three, four years back, that the US defence budget

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was larger than the combined budgets of the next fourteen countries. That includes the entirety of NATO and everybody else. And it's deliberate, to be able to have this capacity to dominate.

And you see what happens with regard to NATO. What is NATO? I think NATO is clearly just an instrument of the United States. It was from the beginning that; but maybe we got persuaded that it was something that it wasn't – where you have a situation where the Europeans say our umbrella protection is provided by the US (that is, versus the USSR). The USSR disappears and the United States emerges: this is what they wanted. By this time, when he was talking about the Ukraine two years ago, a year ago, saying that we have to twist their arm sometimes to act on the Ukraine, to do what we want, those Europeans say

yes, and they do it, against their own interests.

So I'm saying these are some of the security consequences. The push for Africa, this African command, and to base it here on the continent: the military presence of the United States on the continent is very widespread. The overwhelming majority of African countries have got a US military footprint. It varies in nature. It might not be a US base, it might take another form. That would not have happened in earlier days but it's happening now. I'm saying it's part of the security consequences of that unipolar world.

Look at the Gulf. There's a war going on in Yemen now. We can discuss that another day – as to why the US are supporting that war in Yemen – and it has a direct impact on the Horn of Africa. It's across a little strip of water into the Horn of Africa, Somalia, and it's all linked to this business about the security consequences of that unipolar world. They impact on us in that manner.

If people have got time there's a very interesting interview conducted by *Al Jazeera*. It's on the internet. It's an interview with General Flynn, the Chief of Defence Intelligence of the United States until last year, 2014, and it is very interesting. They put out a report, Department of Defence Intelligence of the US, about the Middle East – Iraq, mainly, and Syria – which has leaked. Now Defence Intelligence in the States says to the administration, to President Obama – talking about Iraq – “it is quite clear that what we are seeing here in Iraq” – this must have been around 2012, 2011/2012:

“What we are seeing is a development of Al Qaeda in Iraq, and this thing is going to assume more violent forms, more extreme, and, as we can see, they are trying to establish themselves in Eastern Syria and the reason they are doing that is because they also wanted to target the government of Syria.”

So the Al Jazeera man asked him, “but General, this was your report...”

and the General says, “Yes, it was my report.”

“Now why didn't you do anything about it? You saw it coming, you

describe it, the birth of ISIS and exactly what to do. You say all of these things here. Why didn't you do anything about it?"

So he says, "My task as an intelligence person, is to prepare as accurate, as objective a report on the situation in these areas as possible and pass it to the decision-makers."

"So, oh, you are saying that the decision-makers ignored your report?" "No, I'm not saying that. They did not ignore my report. They deliberately took a decision to allow ISIS to grow because of their hostility against Assad and they wanted Assad overthrown. That's why they allowed it. This was a deliberate decision of the US government."

It's interesting coming from a US General who was Chief of Intelligence, Defence Intelligence, only until last year. And he's very straightforward about it. He says no, it's not, it was not a failure to act, it was a deliberate decision not to act because of this purpose. I'm saying that these are some of the security consequences of that unipolar world.

And of course we have the economic consequences of it, perhaps one of the most outstanding of which was the dominance of the so-called Washington Consensus globally on economic thinking. And I think all of us here are familiar with what that consensus said and some of the things that people pay particular attention to, quite correctly, like the trade liberalisation, liberalisation of imports, and so on, liberalisation of inward foreign direct investment, privatisation of state assets, deregulation, security for property rights and all that. Because clearly you can also see why this vision of the Washington Consensus becomes so dominant in economic thinking. It goes with the dominance of the political and security power of the US and the dominance of capital.

... Now the word neoliberal, it's an adjective, and they actually also use it as a swear word. So the question arises, what is neoliberal, what does it mean? I read an article some months back, which said you must start with liberal and then come to neoliberal. Okay, that makes sense. So what is liberal in these

economic terms? And they said, liberal described what Adam Smith said, and Adam Smith said the market is the invisible hand. This is why it gives order to society and progress and welfare and everything. No government, you stay out of it. The invisible hand is the market. That's liberal economics. Aha, okay, understood.

Now what is neoliberal? Neoliberal means it's not quite as bad as Smith said, because there is some intervention by government that might intervene to say watch out, don't produce toxic fumes as you are doing something in a factory, or don't employ underage children and so on, but let the capitalist economy go on as it wants but with these restrictions. That's neoliberal.

But I'm saying that is why you find

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the Washington Consensus called neoliberal – it is exactly because of that. It's essentially arguing the greatest possible freedom for capital across the globe, bearing in mind that there would be these little interventions by the state which makes it 'neo'liberal. In all of the things that Williamson and these others said there's no reference of any kind to the role of the state, the public sector as an instrument in terms of economic growth and development. It's not there. You're a regulator or something but not part of the processes. So I'm saying that it is quite clear why, particularly during this unipolar period, this view achieves the dominance that it does, with the negative consequences that it has.

And I think one of the outstanding

examples of the negative impact of this is the Russian economy, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. If you read about what happened to the Russian economy, advised by these professors and so on from the US, the government deliberately, and systematically went for the destruction of manufacturing in Russia – deliberately, systematically, and they largely succeeded.

One of the things that the Russian government had to deal with when Putin succeeded Yeltsin as president of Russia was what to do with the oil, oil extraction, because what had happened was that the Russians were paying the oil majors to come and produce oil. You're paying them, and they would get something from the production of oil, depending on what the oil major decided. You pay them ten dollars to go and dig there and extract and export and sell this oil as they wish and then they will say, well, look, in terms of the profit we made we think you are worth fifty cents. And you say but how could that have happened? But it was an implementation of this ... or that is the only answer you get...

And that's part of the reason that people in the west started having question marks about Putin; because Putin said, "But this is wrong!" This is a very clear example of the destruction of the Russian economy and an example of the implementation of this neoliberal model in terms of economic development.

You find its impact here on the continent. I'm talking about the economic consequences. Some years ago, I attended a summit meeting of the African Pacific and Caribbean countries in Libreville in Gabon. The development commissioner of the EU at the time was a man from Portugal and we sit in the hall and he says the post-colonial period is over. So now me I'm sitting there, I'm listening, I'm saying what's this Portuguese man talking about? The post-colonial period is over and therefore we have got to redesign the relationship between Africa and the EU? And the man explains it. He's quite honest and frank. He said, you see, when I talk about the post-colonial period it's this time, it's this period when we as the European Union have allowed you all sorts of concessions,

duty-free access into the EU market, and all of these sorts of things and so much development money from the European Investment Bank and all that. The reason we did all of these things is because we were feeling guilty because we had colonised you. So we're paying for the pain that we have caused you. That's the post-colonial period, but we've paid you people enough. From now onwards it's a reciprocal relationship.

So I mean I was stunned, sitting there in Libreville. He said so, he said now a reciprocal relationship, no more of these concessions to you people because we had colonised you. The consequence: we've got economic partnership agreements. The EPAs are exactly that.

And we went and protested. We met them in Portugal, the EU, and banged tables – and the European Union said, no, but we agreed on this. Where? No, read the Cotonou Agreement – and indeed it's their right. There's a Cotonou Agreement which all our heads of state signed very happily and had champagne afterwards. It's in the Cotonou Agreement. So they say we are implementing what you all agreed. Now when I remembered my Portuguese friend in Libreville, he had said so. No more post-colonial nonsense, reciprocal relations. Now *there's a big, big issue. We all agreed in Cotonou.*

I'm saying these are the economic consequences for us of this unipolar world. This would not have happened in a different setting. And of course you see what has happened with regard to the African economies. Even this, which would otherwise look like a simple issue, the reform of the IMF and the World Bank to give a bigger voice to the developing countries. This is a daily slogan from the developing countries, voice, voice, voice, and everybody says yes, you deserve it, but it doesn't happen. The economic consequences...

I think even in terms of value systems, the way that money has become the measurement of what's right and wrong. You can see it everywhere: it has infused governance, even personal value systems. The bigger the house, the bigger the car,

the more expensive the clothes, the more fashionable you look, like Chris Landsberg [laughter], the more successful you are. And you see it impacting on government.

You see it in human rights. A very interesting book by Kissinger that Aziz and myself discussed many, many years ago: Kissinger discusses the issue of human rights and he says during the time when he was secretary of state and national security adviser, the matter of human rights was never an issue of ethical policy. He says we used the issue of human rights in order to defeat the USSR. He says that's all. It was an instrument that we used, not because we believed in this damn thing. And of course you can see that Kissinger is telling the truth because people are pushing these human rights, the Helsinki process and all of that. Whom were they supporting in Latin America or even

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on the continent? The worst violators of human rights and Kissinger says in black and white it's because it was an instrument we were using to achieve this particular political purpose.

But we absorb it, the human rights, oh-oh-oh, if somebody somewhere in the world says your human rights record is bad we all shrink. But it's clear it defines a particular political system which is part of this unipolar world. It's *their definition* of what is meant by human rights and what human rights means and how it must be defended that becomes global.

... I think perhaps the most dramatic of the changes that are taking place, which challenge this unipolarity, the unipolar world, relate to Syria. Not Ukraine. Ukraine is on the border with Russia, it's been part of the Soviet Union, we can understand, but Syria is 'out there'. I think the decision of

the Russians to intervene in the Syrian matter in the way that they have done and quite openly to say we can't support regime change in Syria is of great significance. In Ukraine, they failed. The regime change took place in Ukraine, next door to them, when Yanukovich was removed, but in the Syrian case they have said no, it's not going to happen, not while we are here.

I think it's a signal of this change that's taking place. I think even the decision of the Obama administration to end the sanctions, the isolation of Cuba, it's a sign of a change that's taking place which is eroding the capacities of that unipolar world.

And the people here, who I'm sure have looked at the question about China and the Chinese economy, would have noted the very interesting relationship between China and the US, with China being the largest creditor of the United States. It's the Chinese who are buying US government bonds and being of course the supplier of manufactured goods which are very cheap, keeping the cost of living in the United States manageable. There is a very intimate relationship between these two countries, but clearly the US is afraid of China. But I think that fortunately China is not afraid of the US. That becomes part of this process which changes the global situation away from that unipolarity to something that is better.

And I think as Africans we would be very pleased with this. I keep saying to all our people on the continent that in 2007 or thereabouts we all trooped off to Beijing, the African heads of state, for the Africa/China summit and adopted two documents there. One of them is an action plan in terms of the relations between Africa and China and a very good document which says you, China, you are very interested in us because you want raw materials for the growth of your economy. We are ready to trade with you on that basis, but what you must know is that we want to industrialise our economies and therefore your own obligations towards Africa are the following. And they are spelt out.

At the end of that summit we, South Africa, we had a bilateral meeting with the Chinese leadership, with Hu Jintao,