

**The Shift to a Multipolar World: The Opportunities and Challenges
this will Present to the African Union in achieving its Objectives set
out in Agenda 2063**

Major Research Paper

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Abstract

The current international order is going through an important shift. As Western dominance declines and non-Western states such as China, Russia, India and the Gulf states see their power and influence rise, the hierarchical, American-led unipolar order is giving way to a new era of multipolarity. As countries strive for greater power under this multipolar order, geopolitical tensions are once again increasing as states attempt to shape the shifting international system to best reflect their preferred norms, values and institutions. This rising tension and competition are leading current and emerging powers to actively court countries across the Global South to help expand their influence and secure new partners. One of the regions that has witnessed an abundance of this attention in recent years is Africa. The renewed geopolitical competition that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the new multipolar era will undoubtedly impact the continent's most important regional organization, the African Union (AU). As the distinct features of the bipolar and unipolar orders of the 20th and 21st century shaped the structure and functioning of the Organization of African Unity and AU, it should be expected that the new features of the multipolar international order will once again have a significant impact on the organization. However, the exact nature of this impact is still largely unknown. This paper sets out to further explore this topic through analyzing the opportunities and challenges facing the AU in achieving the objectives set out in its Agenda 2063 document in the context of the current multipolar shift of the international order. Specifically, the paper focuses on the impact of two objectives that are pinnacle to the AU achieving its Agenda 2063 and broader Pan-African objectives. These objectives are: (1) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law and (2) Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner. Through conducting an extensive analysis of both primary and secondary documents and research, the paper argues that while the new era of multipolarity could provide the AU with greater power and leverage in international politics, it could also further divide the continent while eroding democratic and liberal values that are cornerstone to the AU. Recognizing these opportunities and challenges highlights that the shift to a multipolar has placed the AU at a critical point in time. On one hand, a multipolar world could allow the AU to secure greater influence in international relations through leading a united African continent on the international stage. However, multipolarity could also undermine the power of the organization through dividing the continent into competing factions as African states choose to prioritize national policies and sovereignty at the expense of greater continental unity. Should this occur, the chance of achieving its Agenda 2063 objectives becomes virtually impossible.

Keywords: *African Union, Africa, Multipolarity, Global Governance*

I. Introduction:

The international order is going through an important shift which will continue to create substantial and novel changes to international relations. Following the end of the Cold War, the world entered a unipolar moment dominated by American hegemony (Krauthammer, 1990). The collapse of the Soviet Union not only brought the end of a power that could economically and militarily compete against the United States; it also eliminated the notion that communism was an ideology that could rival the democratic capitalist model of the West (Börzel & Zürn, 2021). This allowed Western countries, led by the United States, to push liberal values such as market deregulation, human rights, and democracy onto other nations and international organizations (Mearsheimer, 2019). As the United States offered the only legitimate source of security and economic support, other states were forced to adopt these liberal principles to receive these goods (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). For a brief moment, these factors created the belief that this new liberal international order (LIO) would become the permanent structure for the international system moving forward (Mearsheimer, 2019). However, it has possibly turned out that this is a fleeting belief. As American hegemonic dominance wanes, the global order is once again moving towards significant change.

A multitude of both internal and external factors have helped contribute to the loss of American hegemonic power in recent years. Internally, America and its Western allies are destabilizing the LIO that they established. The election of President Donald Trump in 2016 led to an increase in populist rhetoric and policy in the United States. Trump has openly pushed back against the LIO through pulling out of international organizations and agreements such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris Climate Accord while simultaneously promoting a nationalist America First Policy (Friedman, 2019; Sridhar & King, 2020). Western European countries are also witnessing populist and anti-liberal parties gain increasing support (European Commission, 2022b). Simultaneous to this pushback of the LIO in Western countries, non-Western nations have increasingly seen their power and influence rise in international politics. The most notable example is China which has achieved this powerful position without becoming a liberal democratic nation (Xuetong, 2020). While it cannot be denied that China has

directly benefited – primarily economically – from joining and participating in the LIO, it was able to gain power while largely remaining an illiberal state (Weiss & Wallace, 2021). Gaining this success while having a non-liberal democratic model of governance has created an ideological competitor to liberalism that has not existed since the end of the Cold War (Xuetong, 2020). China is not alone in attempting to increase its power and role in shaping the new global order as the LIO weakens. Russia, which has regularly protested and rejected the American led LIO, has demonstrated through its 2022 invasion of Ukraine that it will continue to attempt to erode the LIO and cement itself as a revisionist power (Groitl, 2023). Other emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Turkey, and the Gulf states are also seeking to increase their power and influence in re-shaping the global order (A. F. Cooper & Flemes, 2013; Kukreja, 2020; Spies, 2010). As Western influence weakens and non-Western states power continues to rise, the international order appears to be entering a multipolar era (Cooley & Nexon, 2020).

This retreat of American hegemony and shift to multipolarity is increasing geopolitical rivalry between nations (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). Western states, China, Russia and other emerging powers are each seeking to shape the new international system based on their preferred norms and values as well as increase their influence and power through securing new allies and partners, particularly across the Global South (Ikenberry, 2024). A particular region that has witnessed a renewed interest from numerous powers is the continent of Africa. As geopolitical competition between great powers grow, each side has been actively courting African nations in an attempt to secure allies and gain access to the continent's abundance of natural resources and large voting bloc within the United Nations (UN) (French, 2023). While these actions clearly demonstrate an increased interest in improving ties with the African continent, it is less clear what repercussions this will have for Africa, particularly for the primary regional body, the African Union (Abrahamsen et al., 2023).

With 55 total member states, the African Union (AU) is the most significant regional organization on the African continent. Established in 2002, the AU desires to move Africa towards greater continental integration and unity (Murithi, 2007). While only an intergovernmental organization, the AU has gained

the authoritative power to speak on behalf and with a uniting voice for the continent (Fagbayibo, 2022b). To further help guide the implementation of these objectives, the AU released its Agenda 2063 strategy in 2015 (African Union, 2015). Agenda 2063 not only presents a re-dedication to achieving greater continental integration; it also includes the key objectives and programmes that are required in order to achieve greater economic prosperity, development and unity (Bischoff, 2023). While the AU has made some important steps in working towards its Agenda 2063 goals (Tieku, 2022), it has struggled in other areas at implementing its objectives. In 2024, the African continent is facing democratic backsliding in multiple countries, slow or stunted economic development and a lack of clarity around political unity and its role on the global stage. While a combination of interplaying factors impacts the ability of the AU to implement these goals, one of the most influential elements moving forward will be the continued shift to a multipolar international order. As Abrahamsen et al (2023) discusses, Africa's regional organizations both shape and are shaped by the global order of the time. The principles of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were shaped during the ending of the imperial world order, however, goals of greater integration were impeded by the geopolitical rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The shift to the LIO following the Cold War significantly influenced the founding principles of the AU which are based around the dominant liberal norms and values of the unipolar era (Abrahamsen et al., 2023). However, the continent was also marginalized and placed further on the order's periphery due to its strict hierarchical component (Akopari, 2001). As the unique elements of previous international orders have impacted the structures and actions of Africa's regional organizations, it should be expected that a shift to multipolarity will once again impact the dynamics and functioning of the AU. However, exactly how this shift will impact the AU and the benefits and threats it will present to the organization remains understudied (Abrahamsen et al., 2023) To help provide more knowledge around this, the remainder of this paper will analyze the opportunities and challenges facing the AU in achieving the objectives set out in Agenda 2063 in the context of the current multipolar shift of the international order.

To help answer this question the paper will proceed as follows. Section two will provide a conceptual and theoretical overview of international orders, hierarchies and the elements that comprise the new multipolar order. Section three will provide a history of how the structures, norms, and values of the Cold War and post-Cold War international orders had distinct impacts on the OAU/AU at the time. Section four will provide an overview of the AU as well as discuss the key objectives that are listed in the 2063 agenda. Section five and six will conduct an in-depth analysis on specific Agenda 2063 objectives and discuss the potential opportunities and challenges that the current shift to multipolarity will bring to the AU in attempting to achieve them. Two specific objectives will be focused on in this paper. These are: (1) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law and (2) Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner. These two areas have been selected for analysis as they are key underlying principles of the AU and its objective to create a more prosperous Africa. The AU embedded liberal norms and values into its organizational structure and views improving democracy and good governance across the continent as a pre-requisite to achieving greater peace and security demonstrating its importance to the organization (African Union, 2015). Establishing greater African unity has been a key principle of Pan-Africanism and African regional organizations since the 1960s. Given the small size of many African states, achieving greater continental unity has been argued to be the only way that Africa can increase its power and secure its rightful place in international relations (African Union, 2015). The importance of these areas makes evaluating them in the light of a multipolar international order crucial as this impact could have far reaching consequences on the future of African prosperity, development and role in international politics.

II. International Order in International Relations

The concept of international order lacks a single definition. However, when analyzing definitions from the literature, similarities begin to emerge. Ikenberry (2001) defines international order as “governing arrangements among a group of states, including its fundamental rules, principles, and institutions” (p. 23). Closely related, Cooley and Nexon (2020) define it as a “relatively stable patterns of

relations and practices in world politics” (p. 31) while Mazarr (2016) says an order is “the body of rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among the key players in the international environment” and is “a stable structured pattern of relationships among states” (p. 7). Allan et al (2018), alludes to both of these concepts in their discussion by stating “International orders are constituted by an underlying structure of institutions, rules, norms, and discourses that structure and shape state practices” and “The patterns of behavior can pertain to the conduct of war and diplomacy, financial systems, trade regimes, development strategies, humanitarian action, and so on” (p. 845). While far from an exhaustive list, these few definitions present key elements that are often discussed when attempting to describe what an international order is. First, they discuss that the rules, norms, and institutions which shape state practices and interactions are the underlying principles of the international order. Secondly, there is an emphasis on both stability and patterns of behaviour. Based on the combination of these two principles, Allan et al (2018) discuss that to have an international order, practices among states, institutions, and other actors must not only be tied together through common norms, values, and principles, but there must also be stable patterns of behaviour and practice across different areas. Thus, to have an international order, there must be some form of rules, norms, institutions, and values that govern states and provide patterns of stable behaviour.

While the description above provided insight into the factors required for an order to be in place, it fails to describe what different international orders looks like in practice. Cooley and Nexon (2020) discuss that there is no single type of international order, and that different forms of orders with varying underlying norms, values and institutions have been recognized throughout history. One of the most well-known methods of analyzing international orders is through the concept of polarity. At a high level, polarity is a neo-realist concept that analyzes the number of great-powers of a period which are key to structuring the international order (De Keersmaeker, 2017). Beginning in the 19th century there have been periods of what scholars define as multipolar, bipolar, and unipolar international orders (Cooley, 2020). Each of these different orders involved a set of unique norms, values, and institutions which created

distinctive governing mechanisms between states of the time. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of World War II, the international order was shaped by colonial powers (Thompson, 1986). Colonialism was the dominant practice during this period (Acharya et al., 2023) as these powers attempted to expand their power and control through establishing colonies around the world. Events such as the infamous Berlin Conference which saw European colonial powers stake their colonial claims across the continent of Africa created what some described as a core-periphery international order that was shaped through imperial policies (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). Following the end of World War II, this international order began to erode (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). The end of the War shifted dominance from the former European colonial powers to the new great powers of the United States and the Soviet Union during what would become known as the Cold War Era. During the Cold War, a bipolar international order was formed where rather than having multiple dominant powers, there were only two (Wagner, 1993). Instead of colonial powers competing, this bipolar international order was largely shaped around two competing spheres of influence based on the American and Soviet respective ideologies of democratic liberalism and communism (Mearsheimer, 2019). Furthermore, the dominant structure of imperialism gave way to the idea of state sovereignty and self-determination which helped generate an international movement towards decolonization (Suri, 2006). The collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War ushered in an era of unipolarity and American hegemony which led to liberal democratic norms such as democracy, market deregulation, individual human rights, and humanitarian interventionism shaping the entire international order (Ikenberry, 2018).

The current decline in American hegemony and rise of power and influence from non-Western states are once again pushing the international order towards multipolarity. As American power and the dominance of the LIO weakens, other powers have attempted to introduce their own rules, norms, values and institutions which challenge the LIO (Acharya, 2017). Examples include China's state-led development model and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which have been established as alternatives to Western promoted neoliberal values and institutions. Thus, rather than a single

international order that is dominated by Western liberal values, the new multipolar world could be comprised of liberal and illiberal norms and rules of the multiple powerful states that have an impact in shaping it (Cooley & Nexon, 2020).

Power, Hierarchy, and International Order

Traditionally, international relations have been seen as anarchic. International relations have been defined as anarchical as the international system that lacks any form of central governing authority (Waltz, 1979). One of the critical factors that leads to the idea of anarchy in the international system is sovereign equality of all nation states (Donnelly, 2006). Waltz (1979) argues that international politics are in contrast to a hierarchical domestic structure as each state “is the equal of all the others” and “none is entitled to command; none is required to obey” (Waltz, 1979, p. 88). This anarchic view of international relations has continued to be the dominant paradigm within the field, especially among neo-realist scholars (Parent & Erikson, 2009). However, within the last 20 years, scholars have increasingly began challenging the notion that hierarchy and anarchy are dichotomous concepts (Donnelly, 2006; Lake, 2009; Mattern & Zarakol, 2016; Zarakol, 2017). Some scholars argue that instead, hierarchy can occur within an anarchical international system (Donnelly, 2006; Lake, 2009). Hierarchy can be defined as:

“a social arrangement characterised by stratification in which, like the angels, there are orders of power and glory, and the society is classified in successively subordinate grades. This hierarchy is commonly assigned in terms of politico-strategic power, yielding the traditional groupings of Great Powers, medium powers, and small powers. It may equally be described in economic terms, yielding the stratification into first, third and fourth worlds. Outside a statist perspective, it may be analysed in terms of centres or cores, semi-peripheries, and peripheries. Its key theme is that disparities in capability are reflected, more or less formally, in the decision making of the society of states” (Clark, 1989, p. 2).

When understanding this definition, the sharp difference between anarchy and hierarchy is removed.

Unlike Waltz’s solely anarchical description of international politics which limits states functional

differences, this definition recognizes them as it places states into different functional classifications which is associated with a hierarchical system (Lake, 2009). The factor that separates these states into different classifications is based on power, whether that be military, economic, political, or cultural (Clark, 1989). It has been well documented that throughout modern history, great powers have enjoyed the ability to both establish and manage a variety of international orders (Donnelly, 2006). Largely due to this unequal power, a scenario of superordinate and subordinate states is created (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016). In this structure, power asymmetries have created a scenario where subordinate or weaker states choose to give up some level of their freedom to the superordinate states in order to receive certain provisions that they wish to obtain (Lake, 2009). The willingness to accept these hierarchies can occur in different ways. Lake (2009) discusses that authority occurs when the subordinate power provides some sort of consent to a superordinate power. This grants the hierarchical relationship some level of legitimacy. However, in other circumstances the hierarchical relationship is established through coercion rather than authority (Donnelly, 2006). While Lake's (2009) concept of authority is a unique form of hierarchy, he even acknowledges that "authority relationships are not devoid of coercion" (p. 8).

The level of hierarchy and need for coercion in the international order are determined by numerous factors. First are the norms, values, and institutions that great powers prefer and intend to implement. As previously mentioned, international orders are not monolithic. They can take multiple forms and be based around different rules and institutions. Ruggie (1992) displays this when discussing that while the LIO undoubtedly was created to benefit the United States, they chose to implement elements that to some extent constrained American power to be at the core of their hegemonic order to help increase the legitimacy and compliance of other states. A second important factor in impacting the hierarchy of the international order is the number of great powers present. A unipolar world sees a single hegemonic power dominate the international order. These international orders possess a strict hierarchy as no other states have the capabilities to challenge the power possessed by the hegemon (Donnelly, 2006). Conversely, an international order that sees two or more competing great powers – bipolarity or

multipolarity – tend to be less hierarchical as powerful states are unable to secure absolute power over the international order while subordinate states have less incentive to comply as goods can be provided by numerous actors (Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Donnelly, 2006). As a single powerful state is unable to gain a monopoly on power in a multipolar system, there is often a greater variety of legitimate governance models, norms, and institutions with multiple states securing some level of power and influence in this system (Väyrynen, 1995). While a less hierarchical multipolar order can provide weaker states with greater leverage as they can work with a variety of more powerful partners, it does not guarantee that the rules, norms, and institutions that underlie it will always be more beneficial.

III. Africa, the OAU/AU and International Relations

The OAU, Bipolarity and the Cold War

The OAU was established in 1963 as a Pan-African organization that aimed to achieve greater continental unity among African states (Organization of African Unity, 1963). While the goal of uniting people of African descent date back the early 20th century, modern political African unity and integration became a major emphasis of Pan-Africanism beginning in the late 1950s (Aniche, 2020). Notable Pan-African thinker and first leader of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah was concerned that the balkanization of Africa would leave small and weaker African states vulnerable to neo-colonial control from more powerful states, especially former European colonial powers (Nkrumah, 1965). To overcome this challenge, Nkrumah called for the creation of the United States of Africa which would create deeply embedded economic and political integration across the continent (Nkrumah, 1963). He argued that a united continent would provide Africa with greater power and ability to pushback against neo-colonial influence (Nkrumah, 1963). Despite not going as far establishing Kwame Nkrumah's vision of a Union of African States, the OAU recognized the importance of creating greater unity and solidarity to strengthen the African voice on the international stage as well as minimize the amount of foreign intervention on the continent (Organization of African Unity, 1963). This recognition led to the principle of an "affirmation of a policy of non-alignment with regard to all blocs" (Organization of African Unity, 1963, p. 4) being

implemented into the OAU charter. However, despite the stated intentions to establish greater unity and maintaining non-alignment, the bipolar international order and great power competition of the Cold War would ultimately embroil Africa in conflict which the OAU largely failed to address.

During the bipolar era of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and United States had far superior economic and military capabilities power compared to other nation states (Wagner, 1993). This power, along with the intense geopolitical competition between the nations drove the creation of two independent international orders which both superpowers attempted to grow through expanding their influence and control over weaker nations (Warner, 2013). This became particularly relevant across the continent of Africa where the United States and Soviet Union competed to gain support from newly independent African states. The Soviet Union, in an attempt to promote and spread a socialist economic model, became prominent supporters of decolonization and provided support to liberation movements and parties across the continent (Matusevich, 2009). Fearing this Soviet influence and the spread of communism across Africa, the United States became increasingly engaged with the continent and attempted to increase its influence with African states through providing large sums of foreign aid (Schmidt, 2013). As geopolitical tensions increased, both superpowers became increasingly involved in the internal affairs of African states minimizing the effectiveness of the newly established OAU (Kalu, 2018).

Despite recognizing the dangers of foreign involvement, multiple factors led to the OAU and individual African states being unable or unwilling to resist foreign interference during the period. During the bipolar period of the Cold War, African states were economically and militarily weak and became heavily reliant on foreign aid and other forms of economic support from either the United States or the Soviet Union (Aluko, 1981). Without this support from one of the superpowers, many African leaders would have lacked the economic and military capabilities to remain in power. A lack of military power and economic under-development created vast asymmetry in relations with the United States and Soviet Union (Akindele, 1985). This scenario led to African states becoming highly dependent on foreign aid which provided external partners the ability to influence African states' policy (Akindele, 1985). In many

circumstances this paralyzed the decision making process of the OAU as states were unable to overcome this ideological divide to come to consensus on continental issues (Aluko, 1981). Additionally, it also led to flouting of OAU principles in favour of decisions that appeased external partners (Harshe, 1988). For example at the Libreville OAU summit in 1977, a resolution was passed that called for all states to “refrain from having recourse to foreign intervention in the settlement of conflicts between African States” and called for all foreign powers, particularly major states “to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of African States” (Organization of African Unity, 1977, p. 5). However, only one year prior to this resolution, at the 1976 summit, 22 of the 44 OAU Members supported the Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola. Furthermore, during the 1977 Ethiopian-Somali conflict, numerous African states once again supported Soviet-Cuban involvement (Akindele, 1985). Both of these cases highlight the prioritization of foreign partners rather than adhering to the OAU charter and declarations which limited the effectiveness and impact of the organization.

As much as foreign powers interfered in the internal affairs of African nations, it would be ill-conceived to believe that African states lacked any agency in their relationships with great powers during the Cold War. States and leaders quickly recognized that they could receive material support from the great powers so long as they offered ideological alignment. In some circumstances, countries and groups would play the United States and Soviet Union off against each to receive higher amount of economic and military support. Suri (2006) discusses that in Angola and Ethiopia, local groups and leaders would intentionally seek foreign intervention in order to gain substantial material support from the United States and Soviet Union. African countries also had greater leverage regarding the conditionality of foreign aid provided from either superpower. With both the United States and Soviet Union competing for ideological support, African states used the threat of switching alliances to reduce the conditionality of the aid they were provided (Dunning, 2004). In many circumstances, so long as there was loose ideological alignment with the great power providing support, African states were able to govern as they wished. This was demonstrated by the United States support of numerous African dictators and autocrats throughout the

Cold War solely because they were anti-communist (Schmidt, 2013b). Overall, while the ideological competition during the Cold War became embedded within the OAU limiting its effectiveness, the bipolar figuration of the period offered African states some leverage as they were able to secure resources and limit conditionalities through playing off the superpowers of the time.

Post-Cold War Era and Unipolarity:

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of unipolarity. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no longer a second superpower that could compete with the material and ideological power of the West. This hegemonic power allowed the United States to construct a new hierarchical international order (Ikenberry, 2010). Within this hierarchy, the United States, with support from its Western allies, was the sole power that could provide a legitimate form of economic, military, and political support throughout the world (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). This new-found American dominance and shift from a bipolar to unipolar order brought significant changes to African states and the OAU/AU's place within the international hierarchy. As the great power competition that dominated American and Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War came to an end, Africa lost much of its relevance as there was no longer a need to court African states to secure ideological support (Magbadelo, 2005). This loss of engagement pushed the African continent to the periphery of the new international order. African states also lost the political leverage they had during the Cold War as there was no longer the possibility to play off the rival superpowers against one another to gain concessions and resources (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). Furthermore, socialist states relying on foreign aid from the Soviet Union lost their main source of economic support while the United States also chose to cut funding to autocrats that they were solely supporting due to their anti-communist stance (Somerville, 2000).

Given the loss of political leverage and alternative partnerships, African states had no option but to rely on the United States and other Western nations for foreign aid and material support which came with increasingly stringent conditionalities. African states were forced to adopt policies that aligned with the liberal values of the Western led LIO which included introducing neoliberal economic policies despite

the ill-effects they had on the economic development of many African nations (Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021). Arguing that the economic structural reforms mandated by the Bretton Woods institutions as apart of the Washington Consensus exacerbated Africa's economic difficulties, the OAU adopted the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa in 1980 (Organization of African unity, 1980, p. 5). The plan sought to reduce Africa's economic dependence on the international community through committing to actions such as increasing economic self-sufficiency, growing intra-African trade and deepening economic integration across the continent which ideally would lead to substantive economic advancement across the continent by the year 2000 (Organization of African unity, 1980). Despite the lofty intentions of the Lagos Plan, many of the stated strategies were never implemented or achieved. While many African states failed to implement elements of the Lagos plan into their domestic policies, the impact of Western neo-liberal economic reforms continued gaining traction globally (Kawonishe, 2002). The increasing prominence of market-oriented economic policies forced African countries to adopt the required economic structural reforms rendering the OAU almost helpless against the neo-liberal values of the unipolar era (Abrahamsen et al., 2023).

In addition to economic reforms, Western nations also advanced democratic norms across Africa. The fall of the Soviet Union ended support for Marxism and socialism across the continent which allowed Western powers to mandate African states to implement democratic reform in order to receive required aid and support (Bates, 2010). The impact of the American led unipolar world order and the key values of the LIO also had an important influence over the new design and functioning of the AU. This is reflected in the organization's Constitutive Act which embeds the promotion of democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights as one of its key principles (African Union, 2001). Furthermore, despite the Cold War ending, foreign military intervention did not cease on the continent. The growing liberal emphasis on individual human rights helped lead to the establishment of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm which allowed foreign intervention in a sovereign state if they were not upholding basic human rights (Bellamy, 2009). Using the R2P norm as justification, Western states and international

organizations increased military interventions throughout Africa (Schmidt, 2018). Despite these interventions being launched under the notion of R2P, many garnered immense controversy with some arguing that these interventions were excuses for Western governments to overturn regimes they deemed as being unfriendly to the West (Nuruzzaman, 2022). This occurred in Libya when NATO forces went beyond the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate and ignored requests from the AU in eventually overthrowing Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (Brockheimer et al., 2016).

The impact of American hegemony and the unipolar LIO on Africa has been mixed at best. While some norms such as protecting individual human rights and democracy promotion have been supported and adopted by the AU, there is no denying the inequality of the LIO's hierarchy. The United States and remainder of the West, as just demonstrated, regularly used its superior economic and military power and capabilities to enforce changes on African countries regardless of their value to African states or the AU. The structure of critical international institutions such as the UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank does not allow for African states to have equal voices on important decisions directly impacting the continent. The UNSC does not have a permanent African voice with veto power while the IMF and World Bank uses weighted voting systems which are largely controlled by Western powers (Vestergaard & Wade, 2013). Furthermore, many pressing issues on the African continent, such as poverty and underdevelopment, which were caused and exacerbated by colonialism and the Cold War have been largely unaddressed under the LIO (Campbell, 2008). This clear global hierarchy and inequality under American hegemony has helped drive many African countries to call for greater equality and reform of the current international order.

IV: The African Union and Agenda 2063

Launched in 2002, the AU was established to correct the failings of the OAU. The OAU desired to establish greater unity and integration across the continent (Organization of African Unity, 1963). However, this dream of greater unity went largely unrecognized due to the OAU's principles of territorial sovereignty and non-interference. Many newly independent states were reluctant to cede any of their new-

found sovereignty to a new continental organization (Kufuor, 2005). This fear of losing sovereignty led to the OAU ensuring that the recognition and respect for territorial sovereignty and non-interference were key priorities of the organization (Organization of African Unity, 1963). While the OAU demonstrated some success in dealing with inter-state conflicts and border disputes, the stringent following of the non-interference norm rendered the organization ineffective in responding to intra-state conflict including failing to intervene in situations of grave human rights violations (Murithi, 2007). The organization also had largely failed to advance development and improve economies and as highlighted in the previous chapter, prevent the Cold War rivalry and superpower intervention from creating a divide between African states. Due to these normative and structural limitations, by 1980, OAU analysts were already suggesting that substantial reform to the organization was needed in order to address these downfalls (Packer & Rukare, 2002). Despite numerous resolutions agreed to during the 1990s which attempted to reform the OAU to respond to the challenges of the new post-Cold War international order, the organization was unable to make any practical changes as African states continued to suffer from economic difficulties and conflict (Fagbayibo, 2022a). As it became increasingly clear that the OAU was unable to respond to current African challenges, multiple African leaders began pushing for a new continental organization that was designed to meet the new needs of the continent (Okumu & Atta-Asamoah, 2023). Inspired by Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance idea which called for a renewal of the African identity and for Africa to take its rightful place in the world, discussions around the forming of a new organization emerged (Mathews, 2008). In 1999 Muammar Gaddafi called an extraordinary summit to discuss the strengthening of the continental organization which resulted in the decision to establish the AU (Organization of African Unity, 1999) and would officially be launched in 2002.

The newly established Constitutive Act of the African Union (CAAU), set principles and provisions that were dramatically different from the OAU (Okumu & Atta-Asamoah, 2023). As alluded to earlier, the CAAU is based on liberal values and norms that dominated the international order during the period. One of the most prevalent of these is found in Article 4(h) which grants the AU the ability to

intervene within the internal affairs of a member state in order to prevent situations such as “war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity” (African Union, 2001, p. 7). This provision of non-indifference presented a radical shift from the hard stance of non-interference that was recognized by the OAU. Other liberal values embedded within the CAAU include promoting democratic principles and the rule of law, protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, and promoting participation of African peoples in AU activities (African Union, 2001). Given both the spread and confidence of liberal values and norms following the end of the Cold War, founders of the AU saw it necessary to adopt these principles as a basis for the newly established values of the organization (Okumu, 2009). The AU also sought to turn Africa into an influential, and united player in international politics ensuring that African countries could take their rightful place within international politics after being pushed to the periphery of the international order following the Cold War (African Union, 2001). Achieving a larger role in international politics would be achieved through working towards greater African unity and solidarity when dealing with international partners and organizations.

While the AU had recognized some successes during its first ten years of existence, many issues continued to plague the organization. By 2012, Africa was still facing high levels of poverty and conflict. Critics began arguing that like its predecessor, the AU was incapable of addressing the urgent needs on the continent (Murithi, 2012). It was argued that the AU was too slow in addressing outbreaks of conflict and violence (Murithi, 2012) and that similarly to the OAU, states were not willing to cede any national sovereignty to the organization making it challenging to establish common positions and ensure implementation of policies (Welz, 2013). Some also discussed that the AU was still driven by and for elites and did not address the true problems of African peoples (Apuuli, 2016). For many it seemed that once again, the principles of Pan-Africanism would fail to be implemented at the institutional level within the AU (Murithi, 2012). Due to the difficulties the organization was facing in addressing many of the challenges it set out to tackle, AU officials and some African leaders began recognizing that change was

needed in order for the organization to increase its relevance on the continent and ensure development, unity, and prosperity for Africans (African Union Commission, 2015).

Agenda 2063:

Certain African leaders recognized that AU priorities had to be adjusted in order to bring change to the African continent in the areas of economic and social development, political stability, and continental unity (Bischoff, 2023). They were seeking to revive Pan-African ideals in a way that would transform the direction of the continent and the AU (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). In 2013, during the 50th anniversary celebration of the OAU/AU, the AU released the 50th anniversary Solemn Declaration. This declaration recalled and recognized the historical role the OAU played in fighting against colonialism and the importance of the AU in continuing to fight to assure Africa's rightful place in the world (African Union, 2013). Furthermore, the document re-declared the objective of the AU in achieving "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena" (African Union, 2013, para. 7). Largely guided by the principles laid out in the CAAU, the declaration listed eight specific goals and ideals that that AU would seek to achieve (African Union, 2013). This led to the beginning of the creation of Agenda 2063. Following the 2013 Solemn Declaration, consultations were conducted to determine the specific goals the AU would seek to achieve as well as create an overarching strategy to ensure these goals would be delivered during the 50-year timeline the Agenda set out. Striving to ensure that the Agenda would be inclusive and driven by African citizens, the consultation process included a wide variety of people and groups. Beyond government officials, stakeholders consulted included the private sector, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, academics, youth and women groups as well as general public opinion (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). In total 11 specific stakeholder groups in addition to other members of the general public were consulted and had some level of input on the Agenda (African Union Commission, 2013).

Following two years of planning and consultations, the final version of Agenda 2063 was released in September 2015. At the heart of Agenda 2063 are seven overarching aspirations that are designed to

create a prosperous Africa that takes its rightful place and becomes a powerful force in the international system (African Union, 2015). Largely inspired by and based off of the principles listed in the CAAU, the priorities of the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration and the AU Vision statement, the seven overarching aspirations are: (1) A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, (2) An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance (3) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, (4) A peaceful and secure Africa (5) An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics (6) An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children and (7) Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner (African Union, 2015). While continental frameworks were not new to the African continent, Agenda 2063 is significantly more detailed in designing how its aspirations will be met (DeGhetto et al., 2016). To accompany the seven listed aspirations, Agenda 2063 outlines 20 specific goals related priority areas that must be met and targeted (African Union Commission, 2015). These goals and priority areas, which are directly linked to one of the seven aspirations, were established to ensure that the AU and other stakeholders had specific, tangible outcomes to guide them as they work towards achieving the broader aspirations (DeGhetto et al., 2016). Additionally, Agenda 2063 also established key continental flagship projects and programmes (African Union, n.d.d). These projects cover an array of areas including science, technology, infrastructure, history and culture, and are designed to increase the development, security, and integration of the African continent (African Union, n.d.d). Ultimately, Agenda 2063 intends to transform the African continent and allow it to recognize what is stated as a "Pan African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena." (African Union, 2015, para. 4).

In addition to laying out the key aspirations needed to be met to transform Africa, Agenda 2063 also discusses different continental and global trends that are taking place which will impact its ability to

recognize its desired transformation (African Union, 2015). Within the global contexts trend, one of the highlighted elements is “the move towards multi-polarity with strong elements of uni-polarism remaining” (African Union, 2015, p. 12). Since Agenda 2063 was released in 2015, many of the remaining elements of unipolarity have dwindled while features of a multipolar international order have become increasingly prominent (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). Given this shift, to achieve its Agenda 2063 aspirations, the AU and other relevant stakeholders will need to manage the elements of an increasingly multipolar world as the power of America and the West continues to diminish. As discussed in previous sections, the unique elements of both the bipolar international order of the Cold War and unipolar international order following the Cold War directly impacted Africa and its place within the international community. The shift to greater multipolarity will be no different. This will inevitably present both opportunities and challenges to the AU in achieving its Agenda 2063 objectives.

V. Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner

Aspiration seven of Agenda 2063 outlines the AU’s vision for Africa within international politics through two interrelated objectives. First, the AU is striving for Africa to become an influential and powerful force within international politics. Provision 60 states that by 2063, Africa will become “A major social, political and economic force in the world, with her rightful share of the global commons (land, oceans and space)” and “An active and equal participant in global affairs, multilateral institutions, and a driver for peaceful co-existence, tolerance and a sustainable and just world” (African Union, 2015). The second element to aspiration seven is to create greater unity and solidarity across the African continent in international issues. The importance of establishing unity is directly stressed in Agenda 2063 with provision 59 stating “We affirm the importance of African unity and solidarity in the face of continued external interference including, attempts to divide the continent and undue pressures and sanctions on some countries” and provision 61 which states that Africa will “continue to speak with one voice and act collectively to promote our common interests and positions in the international arena” (African Union, 2015, p. 10). This aspiration is deeply rooted in the Pan-African objective to achieve

unity across the African continent and is expanding on the original ambition of unity that has been a primary objective of African regional organizations since the inception of the OAU. Being the only organization that represents every African country, the AU is the most important player in working towards achieving these objectives (Fagbayibo, 2022b). As the international order continues to shift towards greater multipolarity, the AU will face new opportunities and challenges that will impact the organizations work towards establishing greater unity and influence within international politics.

The AU's Role in Establishing Continental Unity in International Politics

Traditionally, foreign policy and external relations have been deemed to be the responsibility of the state (Gwatiwa, 2020). This fact remains true on the African continent where the current intergovernmental design of the AU ensures that African states have the ultimate control over their external relations. However, as discussed above, African unity and cooperation in international affairs are critical elements to achieving prosperity for all Africans and is a key responsibility for the AU (Murithi, 2010). The responsibility of the AU in representing the continent internationally and establishing united positions is legally mandated within the institution's CAAU. Article 3(e) of the CAAU states that the AU is to “encourage international cooperation, taking due account of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (African Union, 2001, p. 5) while article 3(i) asserts the AU must “establish the necessary conditions which enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations” (African Union, 2001, p. 6). These provisions within the CAAU and the further reinforcement of them within Agenda 2063 provide the AU with a legal mandate and thus, a level of agency to represent Africa in international affairs (Gwatiwa, 2020).

While the CAAU provides the AU with the legal mandate to represent African interests on the global stage, the organization lacks the supranational capability to implement foreign policy decisions on behalf of its members. To overcome this challenge, the AU uses Common African Positions (CAPs) and collective diplomacy to establish African decisions in international politics (Gwatiwa, 2020). CAPs allow for African states, regional economic communities, and other relevant stakeholders to conceive a

collective foreign policy strategy that will represent Africa's united position on international issues (Edozie & Khisa, 2022). Specifically, the AU uses CAPs as a way to forge unity among African states on particular issues in order to help strengthen Africa's voice on the global stage (Edozie & Khisa, 2022). African states have a long history of practicing collective diplomacy beginning with the formation of the African bloc at the UN General Assembly (Zondi, 2013). This collective strategy of bloc politics would continue to be the primary strategy behind Africa's multilateral engagement and eventually lead to the creation of the first CAP in 1987 which addressed Africa's external debt crisis (Organization of African Unity, 1987). Since 1987, CAPs have been documented to cover areas including UN reform, climate change, and migration to only name a few (Edozie & Khisa, 2022). In addition to CAPs, other diplomatic activities of the AU also work towards achieving greater unity in international affairs. The AU is a permanent observer to the UN in New York which works to advise and coordinate the efforts of the UN's Africa bloc (Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, n.d.). In addition to the UN in New York, the AU also has permanent representation to the UN and WTO in Geneva, the United States, the E.U., the Organization of African and Caribbean States (OACPS), and League of Arab States where the organization works to represent and unite the continent on issues involving each of these partners (African Union, n.d.-b). The AU also currently has formal external partnerships with nine other regions, organizations and countries through which it attempts to coordinate and unite African perspectives in its relations with these different partners (African Union, n.d.-a).

AU's Successes and Challenges in its External Relations

From its inception to the present day, the AU has had a mixed record in its ability to unite and represent Africa in the international arena through both its CAPs and external partnerships. There have been numerous thematic areas where the AU has managed to successfully unite the continent in forging a single issue when participating in international negotiations. Arguably the most successful example, in terms of forging African unity, was the Ezulwini Consensus. The Ezulwini Consensus was a CAP established in 2005 that called out specific actions of UN reform that must take place to provide greater representation and voice to the African continent (African Union, 2005). This reform called for a variety

of sweeping changes to the UN system which included the request for Africa to obtain two permanent seats with veto rights at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (African Union, 2005, p. 9). While the AU was successful in uniting the continent and establishing a common position on the issue, they were unable to make any material change to the structure of the UNSC. The AU's failure in being able to sway permanent members to support the Ezulwini Consensus, despite their unity on the matter, demonstrated Africa's space on the periphery of the international hierarchy of the period. The continent's overall weakness gave permanent members the perception they could resist the AU's demands without consequence. In addition to pushing for UN reform, the AU has also had some level of success in creating unity and influencing global environmental politics demonstrated by the 2009 CAP on climate change (Brown, 2012) and more recently in the fight against Covid-19 where the AU took a leading position in coordinating a coherent response among African countries and advocating for greater international cooperation on the global stage (Nash, 2023; Witt, 2020).

Despite recognizing some success, the AU continues to face struggles in its attempts to create unity and exert influence globally. One of the most prominent struggles that the AU has faced is the lack of willingness of African states to surrender some aspects of their national sovereignty to the AU. As the AU has yet to gain supranational status, the organization has historically been unable to do much beyond facilitating the creation of CAP's (Zondi, 2013). Even if a CAP is agreed to, the implementation and ultimate ownership of the position continues to lie with the nation state (Fagbayibo & Staeger, 2024). Furthermore, national interests often take the priority when internally negotiating CAPs (Zondi, 2013). Given the different needs among African states, attempting to guard national interests often makes it incredibly difficult to reconcile differences within the continent in order to establish united positions (Fagbayibo & Staeger, 2024). The most powerful and influential states can also have an outsized role in establishing common positions (Gwatiwa, 2022). Thus, when there are diverging perspectives, powerful states have had tendencies to abandon the collective African position if there is belief they can better achieve their domestic interests through another method (Welz, 2013). The AU has also struggled to

create a role for itself when working in international settings largely due to its weak negotiating power compared to other states. This was witnessed in 2011 when the Arab League of States and NATO ignored AU requests to avoid intervention in Libya (Bischoff, 2023). Related to this, the rivalry between African states along with power imbalance between the AU and some of its partners has opened up the continent for manipulation from more powerful partners (Gwatiwa, 2023).

This brief, high-level overview has demonstrated that while the AU, at times, has taken a leadership role in uniting and representing Africa on the global stage, it also faces immense challenges due to diverging national interests, a lack of authority, and a historically marginalized role in international affairs. As the international order continues shift towards greater multipolarity, the AU will face new challenges and opportunities. While greater multipolarity could increase the opportunity for the AU to play a more powerful role in international politics, the increased number of powers seeking influence in Africa could further diverge an already fragmented continent. This could create the possibility that African states once again become divided in the midst of another great power conflict, limiting the ability of the AU to achieve greater continental unity.

Opportunity: Increased Power in International Politics

Potentially the most noteworthy opportunity that the AU could take advantage of with the shift towards multipolarity is the ability to increase their power and influence in the international arena. The shift to a multipolar order already has and will continue to erode this rigid post-Cold War international hierarchy. As previously discussed, conceptually, a multipolar world should reduce the strict hierarchical nature of the American-led age of unipolarity as it de-centers power away from a single source. As the world moves towards a period where there are multiple centers of power, maintaining a strict hierarchical international order becomes increasingly difficult as countries have a wider array of potential partners and relationships (Scott, 2013). The idea of a less hierarchical and more equal international order has attracted an increased calling for a multipolar world, particularly across the Global South. The importance of the shift towards multipolarity has been adopted into high-level government policies, documents, and

statements across a number of non-Western nations. In March 2024, when outlining China's broad diplomatic vision moving forward, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, called for "An equal multipolar world means equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal rules for every nation. Certainly a few powers should not monopolize international affairs" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024, para. 3). Russia continues to emphasize working towards greater multipolarity which, in 2023, included a joint statement with African nations that called for cooperation between the partners in creating a more multipolar world (Minango, 2023). India's national statement at the 2024 Non-Aligned Movement Summit called for a "multipolar world with a reformed United Nations at its core" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024, para. 3) when discussing actions needed to address today's complex global challenges.

It is important to note that China, Russia and other emerging powers are not necessarily altruistic in their promotion of a more multipolar world. Despite making claims that the goal of multipolarity is about creating a more equal international order, the primary focus for China, Russia and other emerging states is to increase their own power and status as well as ensure their own preferences are inserted into the international system (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). To demonstrate this, in 2001, Russia and China signed the Sino-Russian Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation which included a statement that said both states would work to promote a "just and fair new world order" (China Report, 2001). Despite this statement, in 2005, both states rejected the AU's Ezulwini Consensus to expand the UNSC (Edozie & Khisa, 2022) demonstrating that the promotion of multipolarity is more about increasing their own power rather than ensuring that all states have greater equality and opportunity in the international system. Countries in the West have been apprehensive in their support of a multipolar world. Western nations have been critical of groupings and programs that they deem as being a threat to the current LIO. For example, United States officials have regularly criticized China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) referring to it as debt trap diplomacy and form of neo-colonialism (Himmer & Rod, 2022). As wealthy Western nations along with their preferred norms and values were placed at the top of

the hierarchy of the post-Cold War unipolar order, a shift to a more multipolar world would directly challenge the power and control they previously had (D. C. Murphy, 2022). The threat of losing influence and power has been a factor in leading Western states to be reluctant of a shift towards multipolarity (Papa, 2014). Despite this reluctance, some Western states have begun to acknowledge that the world is shifting towards a period of multipolarity. In fall 2023, Josep Borrell released a statement discussing how the world is increasingly becoming multipolar and recognized that Global South countries are seeking greater levels of sovereignty and identity. (Borrell, 2023). As non-Western states continue to increase power and become legitimate alternative options of material and ideological support, the United States and other Western countries risk alienating and losing support from Global South countries if they are unwilling to offer them the opportunity to increase their role in certain global settings (E. Cooper & Ashford, 2024). While still reluctant to give up power, Western powers now need to actively compete with China, Russia and other emerging states for control and influence in a multipolar world. This combination of factors presents an opportunity for the AU to increase their power within international politics. With both Western and non-Western powers seeking new alliances and partners amid the rising geopolitical competition of the multipolar order (Ikenberry, 2024), the AU and African states could take advantage of this new dynamic through requesting a larger role in certain international forums as a condition for their partnership or support in some areas. Re-gaining this leverage to play off powerful parties against one another or adopt neutral stances on some issues could allow the AU to gain more influential roles and increase its power on the international stage in the multipolar era.

One of the most notable and important opportunities for Africa and the AU to increase its role and influence in international politics is through its accension to the G-20 as a full member in September 2023. While the AU had been bargaining for full membership to the G-20, recent calls from Joe Biden and Narendra Modi for the organization to officially join the group helped finally secure the seat for the organization (Le Monde, 2023). Receiving full membership to the G-20 presents an important step for the AU to work towards achieving aspiration seven of Agenda 2063. The G-20 is comprised of the world's

largest economies which make up for 80% of global GDP, 60% of the world's land area, and 75% of all international trade (Namatovu, 2023) and focuses on a wide array of policy areas including economic, health, trade, and climate (McBride et al., 2023). Despite its noted geopolitical tensions on certain issues (Linscott, 2023), the size and economic power of the combined membership allow the organization to have a crucial role in the global governance system. Furthermore, as frustration continues - especially within the Global South – with the inequities of formal UN institutions and system, there is an argument that the G-20 will play an increasingly important role in international politics as it provides a more equal and representative setting for Global North and South states (A. F. Cooper & Thakur, 2012). Given the important role the G-20 can have in global governance, gaining full membership to it provides the AU with an excellent opportunity to represent Africa's interests and influence international policy in the most pressing areas affecting the continent and the globe. Additionally, by granting membership to the AU rather than an individual African state, the AU gains the legal mandate to speak on behalf of the entire continent through establishing and promoting common positions (Kinkoh & Staeger, 2024). This will allow the AU to raise and increase prominence of the most pressing issues affecting the African continent such as debt relief, development, and global health governance (Engel, 2023) which otherwise may not have been a priority area of concern for other Members. Membership at the G-20 will also require the AU to address issues that it previously has never had to address (Djilo & Handy, 2023). While it will take time and potentially be challenging to establish common positions on these issues, it will for the first time allow the AU and Africa to have a voice and express their perspectives on topics where previously they were unable to gain a seat at the negotiating table.

Opportunity: New and Diversified International Partners

The increase in geopolitical tensions has seen current and emerging powers renew or establish new interest in the African continent which could allow the AU to diversify its alliances and increase influence within its current and new partnerships. While manifesting in different ways, summit diplomacy has become a popular method for external states to demonstrate their engagement and interest in establishing deeper connections with the continent (Soulé, 2020). In the past two years, Africa has had

numerous high-level summits with global partners. This includes the first high level summit since 2014 with the United States, (Usman et al., 2022), the second Russia-Africa summit (Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, 2023), the sixth E.U.-Africa summit (European Commission, 2022a), and the first ever Saudi-Africa summit at the end of 2023 (Wilson, 2024). 2024 will see a further increase in international activity for the continent with high levels summits scheduled with China, the U.K., Italy, South Korea, and India (Vines, 2024a). The escalation of summit diplomacy has been attached with high-ranking diplomatic visits to the continent with American Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov each visiting Africa in 2023. Kenyan President, William Ruto visited the White House in May 2024 marking the first head of state visit of any African country to the United States since 2008 (Nyaoga & Tripp, 2024), where Biden confirmed Kenya as a major non-NATO ally (Cabral, 2024). Both India (Nantulya, 2023b) and Brazil (Vines, 2024a) have also stated that their relationships with Africa will be a crucial part of their foreign policy strategies moving forward. Outside of these countries, other emerging powers such as Turkey (Özkan & Orakçı, 2023), Indonesia (Dorigné-Thomson, 2023), and the UAE (Economic Intelligence Unit, 2024) have also increased engagement with the continent in recent years.

Importantly, the increased engagement with Africa has come with more than just statements at summits. Many of these countries listed have been acting on their claims of prioritizing Africa through growing trade, development, and/or military connections (Moyo, 2021). While China, the E.U., and the United States continue to be Africa's most important economic partners (Luke, 2023), other emerging economies have also demonstrated their commitment to deepening ties with the continent. While Russia's trade with Africa is miniscule compared to China, the E.U, and the United States, it has still doubled its total between 2015 – 2022 reaching roughly \$20 billion (Abrahamsen et al., 2023). Russia also serves as Africa's largest arms dealer providing roughly 44% of all arms on the continent between 2017-2021 (Wezeman et al., 2022). India's trade with the continent has grown 18% annually since 2003 and reached \$103 billion in 2023 (Nantulya, 2023b). In addition to trade, India has dramatically increased its

investment into Africa reaching a total of \$74 billion in 2023 placing it as one of the top five investors into the continent (Naidoo, 2023). Turkey's trade with the continent has increased from \$5.4 billion in 2002 to over \$40 billion in 2022 (Turkey-Africa Business Economic Forum, n.d). Furthermore, middle powers such as Turkey, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have increased military ties with countries in East Africa and the Sahel (T. Murphy, 2023).

This increased and diversified global engagement offers significant opportunity to Africa and the AU. One of the biggest challenges Africa faced during the unipolar period was the lack of diversification in its international partnerships. As the United States and its Western allies controlled the only true source of economic and military power, African states and the AU took a subordinate role in their partnerships with these nations and were obliged to enact reforms set by the West as a conditionality for receiving support (Dunning, 2004). This hampered Africa's influence and role with its international partnerships and the larger international system. Greater multipolarity and the dispersing of global power may help minimize the subordination and paternalism that Africa has faced under American hegemony. The period of multipolarity may offer Africa a variety of powerful and legitimate global partners. Like bipolarity of the Cold War when Africa was able to leverage the rivalry between the Soviets and Americans to gain concessions and support from the superpowers, the AU will have the ability to use a diversity of potential partners as leverage. This ability enhances potential African agency in domestic and international economic, political, and security relations as it will have the ability to select partners it believes will help best advance its objectives rather than being dependent on highly conditional partnerships with Western nations and financial institutions (Moyo, 2021). A key example of partner diversification is Africa's engagement with China's BRI. The BRI is one of China's premier foreign policy strategies which has focused on providing loans for large infrastructure development projects across much of the Global South (Jie & Wallace, 2021). China's funding under the BRI is promoted to be unconditional in order to help compete against conditional Western financing (Madeira et al., 2023). This unconditional funding has attracted large interest from African countries with 53 signing up to be BRI partner countries (Madeira et

al., 2023). In response to the BRI, the E.U. launched the Global Gateway Initiative while the United States mobilized the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment program as competing infrastructure development options (Auth, 2024; Heldt, 2023). To be certain, an increase in potential international partnerships does not necessarily equate to more equal partnerships for the AU. The vast difference in economic capabilities between the AU and its many of its partners continue to make the organization dependent on financial support to fund many of its projects and programs. The AU itself is still largely dependent on external donors to fund the operations of the organization (Engel, 2019). As geopolitical competition increases and states are vying for greater power, states may look for ways to increase their own power in relationships rather than look to secure win-win situations for both parties (Mkhize & Lawrence, 2023). However, even in absence of greater equality, the presence of a larger number of legitimate partners still increases the AU's leverage as the organization gains some ability to forum shop and look for which partnership will best suit them in different circumstances (Soulé, 2020). As seen with the example above, while African states are still reliant on external funding for large infrastructure projects, the presence of multiple programs from different states grants the AU more options which they can use to gain some leverage and concessions from their partners. This could allow the AU to increase its negotiating power in its relationships with external partners allowing the organization to enhance its agency and improve on its ability to pushback against donor demands that may not reflect the best interests of the African continent.

The increased role and power the AU has gained with its membership to the G-20 along with diversification of global partners should present the AU with an opportunity to enhance Africa's voice and role in the international arena. African states and the AU no longer are dependent on conditionality-based agreements with Western powers as China, Russia, India, and other emerging powers can offer alternative solutions that may better suit the African continent. With this being said, the abundance of states seeking greater influence in Africa presents a double-edged sword for the AU. As more nations become interested in the continent, the AU could face increased difficulties in uniting Africa on global issues, thus creating

the risk that the continent becomes caught up in a great power conflict similar to the events of the Cold War.

Challenge: A dis-united Continent

As the international system becomes growingly fractured, the enlarged number of global powers looking to increase their influence in Africa has the potential of further dis-uniting the continent as African states look to pursue their independent national policy interests rather than continental interests driven by the AU. A key example of the AU's struggle to represent the continent and establish a single, united position has been witnessed with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the days immediately following the Russian invasion, the AU attempted to establish itself as a representative voice for the continent. On February 24, 2022, the Chair of the African Union, Macky Sall, and Chairperson of the Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, released a joint statement calling "the Russian Federation and any other regional or international actor to imperatively respect international law, the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine" (African Union, 2022, para. 2). Further, in June 2022 both Sall and Faki Mahamat travelled to Russia to discuss the harmful impact that the Russian fertilizer and grain blockade is having on African countries in another attempt to have the AU represent and speak on the behalf of Africa (AfricaNews, 2022). Despite these leadership efforts, the AU has failed to bridge the diverging views of African countries in order to establish a united position outside of the joint statement calling for the general adherence of international law in respecting Ukraine's national sovereignty.

The first area this divergence has been recognized is through voting positions within the UN. As of now, there have been six major UN General Assembly votes regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Götz et al., 2023). In contrast to the other UN regional groupings primarily comprised of states from the Global South – the Asia-Pacific and Latin American and Caribbean – who largely voted in unison with the West and supported the resolutions condemning Russia, African states are sharply divided with a large number of states abstaining or voting against the resolutions (Götz et al., 2023). Specifically, Resolution ES-11/1 which condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and called Russia to withdraw its troops and

end the invasion (United Nations, 2022), saw 28 out of 54 African states vote in favour of the resolution while 17 abstained, eight chose not to submit a vote and one – Eritrea – voted against it (United Nations Digital Library, 2022a). Only ten African states voted in favour of ES/11-3 which called for suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council (United Nations Digital Library, 2022b) and while ES/11-6 which called for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine saw a high of 30 African states voting in favour of the resolution, Mali and Eritrea voted against the resolution, seven states did not cast votes and 15 abstained which made up 47% of all abstentions (United Nations Digital Library, 2023). This division of voting within the UN highlights the fragmentation of African states over this conflict. While abstaining from voting could be part of a larger hedging strategy in which African countries strive to avoid being pressured into siding between the great powers of today (Spektor, 2023), Russia's historic engagement and partnership with numerous African states also appear to be influencing some states' voting decision (Götz et al., 2023). Stager (2024) noted from an interview with an observer of AU Affairs that these differing perspectives of African states has been an important factor in preventing the AU from establishing a united CAP on the invasion of Ukraine.

In addition to differing perspectives, some African states have attempted to address the Ukraine invasion through measures that are largely independent from AU involvement. Most notably, in June 2023, leaders from South Africa, the Comoros, Egypt, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia held what they described as separate peace talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin (Nzuki, 2023). Although Comoros president, Azali Assoumani, who was the AU Chairperson attended the meetings, they lacked formal AU involvement (Staege & Kinkoh, 2023). Staege and Kinkoh (2023) discuss that the trip, which involved the release of a 10-point plan for peace, was not coordinated through formal AU channels. The choice by these states to formally exclude the AU from the mission directly competes with the organization's leadership on the international stage and shows that African countries still lack a willingness to delegate traditional foreign policy responsibilities to the AU (Staege, 2024). This reluctance to delegate foreign policy decisions to the AU as well as the divergence of positions on the

Russian invasion of Ukraine severely constrained the AU's ability to represent a united African position on the issue despite its initial attempts to do so.

One of the most worrisome possibilities for the AU during the continued shift to multipolarity is that a return of geopolitical competition and great power politics divides the continent into competing factions. As competition increases between the United States and China, both sides could seek to gather allies and grow their influence which could divide the continent into pro-West and pro-China camps. However, unlike the Cold War which saw great power competition between only two states, a large number of states are seeking to increase their power and influence in Africa which could lead them to continue seeking a larger role across the continent. As individual African states maintain control over their foreign policy and international relations, some leaders and groups, especially those that oppose the liberal values of the AU, may choose to pursue international relationships that strengthen their own state or personal goals rather than aligning with a united AU position (Cilliers, 2024a). This could fragment the continent if African states begin to prioritize their external partners rather than working through the AU to establish united positions. There are already some cases across the Africa where this fragmentation is occurring. The current conflict in Sudan has become a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Mohammad, 2024). While leadership aspirations between Hemeti and General Burhan are an important factor, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been actively providing their respective recipient party with military and economic support in an attempt increase their influence and access to natural resources in the country (Bissada, 2024). Despite some efforts to conduct high-level peace talks, the AU has been unable to make any progress on ending the conflict or convincing the foreign powers to stop funding the war (Kinkoh, 2024). This conflict has stark similarities with civil wars during the period of the Cold War as the AU is unable to challenge the financial and military support being provided by Saudi Arabia and the UAE despite the humanitarian harm and dividing nature the war is having on the region. The current Sudanese conflict only represents a single example of the division that Gulf states have sowed across the Horn of Africa. Geopolitical conflict between the Gulf states have

recently spread to Africa where countries in the Horn have been forced to pick sides in the conflict in order to continue receiving funding and support (Ding, 2024). This has both increased the risk of conflict as well as divided the region and reduced the autonomy of African states (Ding, 2024).

Additionally, in recent years, Russia has increased its activity in the Sahel which includes providing military support to Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger who recently left ECOWAS to form the Alliance of Sahel States (Ojo & Ezenwa, 2024). While this not only hinders the promotion of democratic norms – which will be discussed in the subsequent section – it also significantly weakens and divides the former united ECOWAS into two blocs. This action is directly at odds with Agenda 2063 which aims to use regional economic organizations as key building blocks to eventually establishing greater continental unity (African Union, 2015). Additionally, in attempt to retain their powerful position in the international order, some of the E.U. and United States increasing interest on the continent is directly related to the geopolitical conflict with China and Russia rather than supporting the legitimate needs of African states. This partly explains the frustration of the two powers at numerous African states for refusing to align with them on the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Staeger, 2024). The role and influence that other new emerging powers such as India, Brazil, and Turkey are seeking will only further complicate an already complex web of relationships across the continent.

While the increased attention that Africa has recently received presents an opportunity for the AU to harness its increasing prominence in order to establish African unity and influence on the international stage, substantial hurdles still remain. As analyzed in this section, individual positions of African states are starkly divided on many global issues across the continent, and the increased number of foreign actors attempting to gain influence seems to be further contributing to this divide. Furthermore, many African states are still largely unwilling to coordinate their foreign policies with the AU and in many circumstances would still rather conduct their foreign relations independently from AU oversight. The combination of these scenarios could further hamper the AU's ability to unite and represent the continent. If African states continue to refuse granting the AU greater authority over the continent's external

relations, the continued preference to act on national rather than continental interests may divide the continent into dis-united groupings. This will make the AU's job of forging greater power under a single African voice incredibly difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

VI. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law

Establishing democracy and a respect for human rights across the continent is the focus of aspiration three in Agenda 2063. This is recognized with provision 27 which states “Africa shall have a universal culture of good governance, democratic values, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law” (African Union, 2015, p. 5) which links the establishment of democratic values with obtaining the respect for universal human rights. Provision 30 further expands on the focus of these areas stating that “Africa will be a continent where the institutions are at the service of its people” and “Institutions at all levels of government will be developmental, democratic and accountable” (African Union, 2015, p. 5). Outside of aspiration three, the importance of establishing a democratic Africa based on universal human rights is also discussed under Aspiration four which focuses on creating a peaceful and secure continent. Under this aspiration, provision 35 recognizes that establishing good governance, democratic rule, the respect for the rule of law and human rights are pre-requisites for creating a peaceful and secure continent (African Union, 2015). The focus on these areas across multiple aspirations within Agenda 2063 demonstrates the AU's recognition and prioritization of creating an Africa with entrenched democratic institutions that uphold human rights for all. However, despite the AU's focus on democracy and human rights promotion within Agenda 2063 and the myriad of institutions, documents and statements across the organization prioritizing these values, many Africans are not granted these values and rights as authoritarian regimes and democratic backsliding plague the continent (Arriola et al., 2022). While the focus of democracy and human rights in Agenda 2063 will help ensure they remain a key priority of the AU moving forward, the influences from a shift to multipolarity may only further increase the difficulty of the AU in achieving them.

Democracy in Africa – 1950 – 2001

Democracy was largely absent during the Cold War period as the African continent was dominated by single-party states, authoritarian regimes and military rule (Lancaster, 1991). During the 1940s and 1950s, French and British colonial authorities began implementing forms of their respective political systems across their African colonies which would include regular multiparty elections (Ellis, 2000). As these forms of multiparty political systems were already implemented, newly independent African states during the 1950s and early 1960s chose to adopt these arrangements as their political systems (Krennerich et al., 1999). This saw a handful of states hold multiparty elections within the first few years of becoming independent (Krennerich et al., 1999). However, this brief period of multiparty democracy would be short-lived as the promotion of African nationalism and the rise of one-party states would come to dominate African politics for much of the Cold War.

After breaking free from oppressive colonial rule, newly independent African states had the challenge of constructing united nations that were often comprised of a plethora of different ethnic groups (Nzongola, 2006). In effort to avoid fragmentation across ethnic lines, many African leaders adopted an African Nationalist ideology in attempt to create unity among their diverse populations. African nationalism was initially born out of the fight to gain independence from colonial rule (van Walraven, 1999). While African nationalism was not homogenous across the continent, the overarching goal of freedom and liberation was at the forefront of many African nationalist movements. However, as states gradually gained independence, new leaders had to shift focus from liberation to unity and management of newfound states (Walraven, 1999). Given both the fissures of nationalist movements and tensions among different ethnic communities, there was fear among African leaders that these internal divisions would undermine national unity efforts (Kilson, 1962). Seeing disunity as a potential factor leading to instability, most African states chose to emphasize and focus on the need for national unity. In many instances, African leaders used national unity rhetoric as justification to secure greater political control of the state and erode the rights of rival political parties and individual political freedoms (Cheeseman, 2015a). This led to a rise in authoritarian regimes which often took the form of one-party states or

military rule (Cheeseman, 2015b). Furthermore, the attraction of socialism also contributed to the establishment of single-party rule in numerous states (Kilson, 1962; Walraven, 1999). The Cold War also had an important role in undermining democracy across the continent as the Soviet Union and United States were willing to provide support to authoritarian and military leaders so long as they supported their promoted ideology (Cheeseman, 2015b). Foreign interference, the rise of one-party states and authoritarian leaders, a lack of economic and social development, and overall instability across many African states helped lead to a wave of coups across the continent during the Cold War (PSC Insights, 2023). From 1956 – 1989, there were a recorded 141 coup attempts across Africa with 67 of them being successful (McGowan, 2003). Whether in the form of a civilian-led single-party state or military regime, the Cold War era in Africa was marked by authoritarian regimes that provided little, if any political space for civilians, civil society and opposing challengers to operate.

The 1980s began to see a shift in governance models throughout Africa which can be attributed to several domestic and international factors. Beginning in the late 1970s, low commodity prices led to a trade shock across African states whose economies were reliant on the export of a select few commodities (Smith, 2021). The drop in commodity prices led to a decrease in export revenues which pushed many African governments into large deficits (Cheeseman, 2015a). On top of the global financial situation, economic mismanagement from many African leaders further exacerbated economic struggles. Many large economic and infrastructure projects failed to bring significant economic value where in other cases, corrupt government officials used debt-financed projects to enrich themselves rather than focus on true development objectives which only further increased state's debt burdens (Smith, 2021). After years of growing deficits and continued borrowing, many African states were facing a severe debt crisis (Danso, 1990). Throughout the 1980s, frustration began mounting among African people as economic and social conditions continued to decline across the continent. During this period, African GDP growth declined and social services such as healthcare and education deteriorated as government revenues went towards paying off growing debt rather funding necessary public services (Danso, 1990) This frustration with the

deteriorating economic and social conditions boiled over at the end of the 1980s where a wave of widespread popular protests took place across the continent with many of them calling for political reform (Bratton & van de Walle, 1992).

While many leaders initially attempted to repress these protests, the simultaneous end of the Cold War and expansion of the American led LIO increased the pressure for authoritarian and single-party states to democratize. Towards the end of the 1980s, internal economic difficulties of the Soviet Union led the country to dramatically decrease foreign aid to Africa. This reduction in Soviet aid meant that African socialist states lost their primary source of economic support (Magbadelo, 2005). This loss of foreign aid and the looming economic consequences it would bring were exacerbated by the ongoing domestic protests as authoritarian leaders lost any potential ability to contain the ongoing popular dissent by providing financial support to citizens (Cheeseman, 2015a). As domestic and international calls to democratize increased and African authoritarian rulers faced growing isolation and economic hardship, it became increasingly difficult for them to resist change. Eventually these factors led to many authoritarian leaders reintroducing multiparty elections and legalizing opposition political parties throughout the 1990s (Lynch & Crawford, 2011). Between 1990-1995, 38 of 47 sub-Saharan African countries held multiparty elections (Manning, 2005) and by the end of the 1990s, only a small-number of African states were not multiparty democracies (van de Walle, 2001).

African Union and Democracy Promotion – 2001 - Present

Building off the momentum of the wave of democratization during the 1990s, the AU attempted to establish itself as a leader in the promotion of democracy and human rights from its inception. As highlighted in previous chapters, the rise of American hegemony and the LIO in combination with the promotion of Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance, which was based upon democratic and liberal values, ensured that the AU and its CAAU had a strong liberal foundation. Article 3(g) of the CAAU states that one of the primary objectives of the AU will be to "promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance" (p. 5). In addition to this, article 4(m) of the CAAU lists the "respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law an good governance" as one of the

guiding principles for the organization (African Union, 2001, p. 7). In further promotion of democratic norms, the CAAU also sought to delegitimize unconstitutional changes of government. Article 4 (p) states “condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments” as one of the main principles of the AU (African Union, 2001, p. 7) while article 30 grants the AU power to suspend the membership of States that gain power through unconstitutional means.

To build on the democratic principles and objectives laid out in the CAAU, the AU has established a number of normative and institutional frameworks on democracy and good governance (Matlosa, 2023). Since the organization’s inception, three instruments have been adopted which aimed at promoting the democratic principles laid out in the CAAU: (1) the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections, (2) the Guidelines for African Union Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions, and (3) the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance (Matlosa, 2023). The Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections reinforced the importance of democratic elections and laid out the key principles that African countries should abide by when conducting them (Organization of African Unity, 2002a). Article 5 of this declaration also requested that the OAU/AU be directly involved in the monitoring of elections through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Secretariat and Member state (Organization of African Unity, 2002a). The Guidelines for AU Electoral Observation and Monitoring established the obligations and guidelines of AU electoral monitoring and observation missions based on principles laid out in the Principles Governing Democratic Elections (ACHPR, 2002). This included the criteria for determining the nature and scope of AU electoral observation and monitoring as well as the mandate and code of conduct for AU observers (ACHPR, 2002). NEPAD’s Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance saw AU Members recommit themselves to democratic and good political governance (Organization of African Unity, 2002b). Importantly, Article 6 of the NEPAD’s Declaration stated that AU Members states would work together to create the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (Organization of African Unity,

2002b) which was established in 2003 as an instrument that would voluntarily allow other AU Members states to monitor and evaluate other government's performance (African Union, n.d.-c).

While these declarations are important elements in attempting to establish democratic norms, the foundation to the AU's promotion of democratic governance is held in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) (Matlosa, 2023). Originally designed to be another declaration (Wiebusch et al., 2019), the AU commission argued that a legally binding text would provide more value given the number of declarations that had already been made on the topic (African Union, 2004). This paved the way for the originally planned declaration to be adopted as a Charter in 2007 which officially came into force in 2012. Overall, the ACDEG lists AU approaches and responses to handling issues related to democratization, rule of law, good governance, and human rights on the continent (Wiebusch et al., 2019). This charter was a critical milestone in the AU's democratic leadership and promotion as rather than previous voluntary declarations made by States, the legally binding nature of the ACDEG provided the AU with the legal ability to enforce the provisions within the Charter. Reflecting principle 4 (p) in the CAAU, Article 23 of the ACDEG states that the AU has the power to suspend and apply sanctions to signatory States and governing officials "following illegal means of accessing or maintaining power constitute an unconstitutional change of government" (African Union, 2007, p. 9). This includes actions such as coup d'états, refusal to hand over power after losing a free and fair election as well as amendments to the constitution which infringe on democratic changes of government (African Union, 2007). The vast array of instruments promoting democracy, good governance, rule of law, and human rights demonstrate the AU's commitment to the liberal values and its desire to be a normative leader for the continent in this space. However, in many circumstances, the values promoted by the AU through this set of declarations and instruments do not always reflect the actions taken by African leaders.

Across the continent, current and hopeful heads of state continue to push back against the democratic norms and values promoted by the AU. Africa remains one of the most autocratic regions globally. As of 2023, 39 of 54 African states were classified as electoral or closed autocracies

demonstrating the high level of repression and lack of political and civil liberties that African citizens are granted (V-Dem Institute, 2024). 18 states classified as authoritarian according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2023 Democracy Index have ratified the ACDEG demonstrating the disconnect between the AU's stated liberal objectives and their ability to enforce the democratic agreements that the organization has created. Furthermore, since the beginning of 2020, Africa has already witnessed nine successful coups creating a fear that illegal seizing of power and military rule could once again become common place across certain regions of the continent (Vines, 2024b). Despite the variety of instruments at its disposal, the AU has been unable to prevent or address the rising number of military coups and unconstitutional changes of power the continent is witnessing.

This increasing pushback against democracy is not unique to the African continent. Globally, all regions are witnessing a period of democratic backsliding which could continue in a multipolar world (Meyerrose, 2021). Autocratic and illiberal states are increasingly pushing back against the liberal elements of the LIO (Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Lake et al., 2021). These states have worked both internally and externally of the LIO and its respective institutions to challenge its liberal underpinnings. Internally, non-liberal states are taking more active and leadership roles within UN institutions in an attempt to reshape its liberal normative frameworks. A key example of this is China's increased activity within the UN Human Rights Council where they are attempting to shift the understanding of human rights away from a liberal perspective to their own state-centered understanding focusing on development rather than individual rights (Gerrits, 2020). Externally, states have established new international institutions and regional groupings such as the AIIB, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which are designed to be competitive alternatives for states that do not align with the liberal values at the core of UN and Bretton Woods institutions (Kim & Kim, 2023). This legitimization of illiberal norms and governance in a multipolar world system along with growing geopolitical competition could increase the difficulties of the AU in achieving their democratic Agenda 2063 objectives as it could allow African autocrats to find a growing number of international partners that will provide support and even actively

promote their regime (Maphaka et al., 2024). China, Russia, Western states and other emerging power could all undermine the AU's Agenda's 2063 aspirations of improving democracy, good governance, and human rights through both tacit and active methods

Multipolarity and Challenges to Democracy in Africa: China

China is one of the premier states in attempting to legitimize alternative forms of governance outside of democracy. As a single-party authoritarian state, many of China's domestic interests and values such as authoritarianism, state sovereignty, and collective and state-centered human rights are in direct tension and often irreconcilable with the liberal values that have been embedded into the post-Cold War LIO (Kim & Kim, 2023). In an effort to protect its own domestic interests as well as increase its influence abroad, Beijing has introduced a variety of programs and institutions that aim to promote these illiberal norms and values globally (Economy, 2024). One of the most important programs in helping achieve this goal is the BRI.

One of the prominent features of the BRI is its unconditionality policy meaning that the beneficiary nation does not have to make any political reforms to receive funding (Gilpin, 2023). This no-strings attached approach aligns with China's non-interference policy as well as directly challenges funding from Western donors and Bretton Woods institutions whose aid has traditionally been conditioned on democratic reform (Dunford, 2020). Unconditionality has been seen as one of the most advantageous elements to Chinese funding across Africa as it allows states to avoid the strict reforms often required by Western donors (Jenkins, 2022). Some democratic supporters have argued that China is actively promoting authoritarianism by offering these unconditional loans to (Ginsburg, 2021). In counter to this, others argue that Chinese aid does not work to actively undermine democracy as the unconditionality policy and respect for non-interference allow all recipient countries, including democracies, to choose their own governance system (Jenkins, 2022). There may some truth to this statement. As of 2023, 53 of 54 African states are part of the BRI program (Bhattacharya, 2023), demonstrating that China is willing to work with and fund all forms of government across the continent, including more liberal and democratic

African states. Thus, the unconditionality and non-interference policy applies equally to all states regardless of their governance structure. Furthermore, China does not restrict recipients from partnering or receiving Western backed funding meaning African states can still receive aid from Western states and institutions (Wang, 2023). However, even if China does not actively promote authoritarianism through its BRI funding, it would be naïve to assume that Chinese funding has no impact on democratic values. With the willingness to provide unconditional economic support through the BRI, African authoritarian regimes have gained the ability to turn towards Chinese aid to receive funding while being able to continue their authoritarian practices which tacitly undermines the AU's Agenda 2063 democratic aspirations.

Conditionality has been found to have had some level of positive impact on improving political and civil liberties in recipient countries. Dunning (2004) found that foreign aid provided during the post-Cold War unipolar era had a positive influence on improving freedom and democracy across the African continent. A crucial factor of this relationship was the lack of alternative funding partners. With the Soviet Union's demise, African authoritarian leaders were no longer able to play the superpowers off against each other to receive largely unconditional foreign aid (Dunning, 2004). This loss of leverage forced African states to comply with Western demanded reforms in order to continue receiving funding. The no-strings attached policy of Chinese funding through the BRI directly impacts and limits the effectiveness of democratic conditionalities as it once again offers African authoritarian regimes the opportunity to continue to receive funding without having to implement democratic reform. Li (2017) highlights this effect in her study which found that since the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit, the effectiveness of Western aid conditionality on democracy promotion has dramatically diminished, particularly in African states that receive a large amount of funding from China. Furthermore, while China may be willing to provide support to all African countries, authoritarian regimes have a greater reliance on Chinese funding. From 2000 – 2020, the nine states that had Chinese funding comprise over 50% of their total international loans all were rated as being closed or electoral autocracies (Meister et al., 2023; V-Dem Institute, 2024). Autocratic countries such as Sudan, South Sudan, Angola and Zimbabwe,

whose share of Chinese loans was over 50% respectively, are known to take advantage of Chinese funding in order to avoid Western democratic conditionalities (Hodzi, 2018).

Furthermore, the contract and negotiation process of China's BRI also undermines the AU's goal of good governance in African states. It has become well known that the process of negotiating and carrying out infrastructure agreements under the BRI are incredibly opaque (Hillman, 2019). This lack of transparency is an intentional design of the program and seen as a benefit from Chinese donors as it allows them greater flexibility around the building process (Lema, 2023). This lack of transparency undermines democratic promotion through two different channels. First, it allows corrupt authoritarian regimes the ability to receive economic funding without having to improve transparency which would be required when working with Western states or Bretton Woods financial institutions. By not facing requirements improve transparency, corrupt African officials then have an increased opportunity to engage in rent seeking behaviour and other forms of corruption. This corrupt behaviour has been noted in numerous projects across the continent that are associated with the BRI (Alden et al., 2021). Thus, while it may be fair to say that funding through China's BRI does not actively promote authoritarianism, its unconditionality principle and lack of transparency have been used by authoritarian African regimes to secure economic support while subsequently being able to continue their autocratic practices which directly undermines the AU's democratic objectives.

In addition to an increase in tacit support of authoritarian practices, China is also working to actively promote authoritarianism across Africa. As China's power continues to increase, it is actively attempting to spread its state-development model across numerous African countries in effort to increase its legitimacy in the international system (Hodzi, 2018). This model focuses on significant government involvement in development, as well as promotes the value of a strong single party state and attempts to delegitimize what the Chinese Communist Party describes as liberal human rights norms (Mandelbaum & Weiffen, 2023). China is actively promoting this authoritarian model across Africa through multiple channels. One of the strategies China has implemented is establishing training programs designed to educate African leaders on the China-model of governance. In 2022, the Chinese backed Nyerere

Leadership School opened in Tanzania and will work with partners from Southern African governing liberation parties in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Nantulya, 2023a, para. 2). While each of these countries are multiparty democracies – with a wide spectrum of electoral legitimacy - the ruling liberation parties connected to the school have been in power since gaining independence from their colonial power or white minority rule (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2023). The promotion of the single-state model across these nations has been noted in recent years given the number of fraudulent elections and high-level cases of corruption that have occurred. In Zimbabwe, the 2023 election was marred with irregularities and concerns surrounding its legitimacy which led to electoral observers from the South African Development Community stating that the election “fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)” (South African Development Community, 2023, p. 10). In Mozambique, the ruling FRELIMO party was accused of manipulating elections results through credible reports of ballot stuffing and other fraudulent electoral activities (Siegle & Cook, 2024). While Namibia and South Africa are and continue to be ranked as some of Africa’s strongest multiparty democracies, serious concerns of large-scale corruption within both the ANC and SWAPO continues to create situations of poor governance in both states (Nantulya, 2023a).

A second critical element of autocracy promotion that China is exporting to the African continent are censorship strategies and techniques (Nathan, 2016). China’s surveillance technology, which has provided the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with an unprecedented ability to survey and censor its citizens has been stated to infringe on the basic human rights of its citizens (Gravett, 2022). As of 2020, it was reported that 16 African countries were using some form of Chinese surveillance tools (Jili, 2022). Notable examples include Ethiopia and Kenya where both countries have invested in substantial amounts of Chinese digital surveillance technology which have been known to exacerbate human rights violations and particularly in Ethiopia, help secure greater power for its illiberal regime (Jili, 2022). In Uganda, authoritarian leader, Yoweri Museveni has used Chinese spyware to spy on political opponents

(Woodhams, 2020) which has further reduce political space in the country. As China continues to actively promote this authoritarian model, partnering African states not only receive strategies and resources to repress political participation but they also further legitimize these authoritarian practices which once again directly contradict the AU's democratic objectives (Nantulya, 2024).

Multipolarity and Challenges to Democracy in Africa: Russia and Emerging Authoritarian Powers

Russia, in its desire to increase its influence in the multipolar world, is also looking to spread its values and norms in Africa which presents another threat to democracy on the continent. Similar to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin views the LIO as being unequal as well as threatening to the Russian regime. Putin views the era of multipolarity as an opportunity to revive Russian influence that has been lost in the last 25 years as well as embed its own values and norms in the international system to help protect its power domestically (Gerrits, 2020). In attempt to renew its historic Cold War ties, Russia has increased its influence on the African continent in recent years hoping to pushback against Western influence and promote its own illiberal norms and values. While strategies differ from those of China, Russia's actions could severely undermine the AU's democratic objectives on the continent (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021).

To counter their weaker economic position on the African continent, Russia has prioritized providing military and security assistance to African countries, particularly to authoritarian and military regimes. Russia has provided this assistance through arms sales of which Russia is Africa's largest provider (Marten, 2019). Moreover, Russia has also taken an important military presence through supporting the Wagner Group which has now officially been brought under the Russian's formal military system (Minde, 2024). Prior to formally being brought under control by the Russian military, the Wagner Group was a semi-private military organization which operated as a "quasi-state agent of influence in foreign policy" for the Russian state (Pokalova, 2023, p. 3). The Wagner Group is connected to a number of countries across the continent and as of February 2023 reportedly had linkages to 23 African states (Ferragamo, 2023). Over the past few years, the Wagner Group and Russian military have expanded its influence across the Sahel, most notably in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (T. Murphy, 2023). Each of these states have experienced a coup over the past three years and are currently ruled by military juntas of

which Russia and the Wagner Group have provided support for (Ojo & Ezenwa, 2024). In each state, Russia and the military regimes have established close partnerships with the Russian military replacing French and American forces who were forced to withdraw their troops amid a wave of rising anti-West sentiment being witnessed across the Sahel (Ojo & Ezenwa, 2024).

While the recent uprising of coups in the Sahel have had several causal factors, Russia's willingness to offer support to African military regimes actively undermines democracy across these states and broader Sahelian region. By aiding these military regimes through the provision of weapons and military personnel, Russia not only legitimizes and supports their unconstitutional takeover of power, but also helps ensure the regimes have sufficient resources to remain in power. This supports their larger mission to attack the LIO through the destabilization of democratic institutions and propping up of undemocratic regimes (Siegle & Smith, 2024). Having Russian backing helped in the decision by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to leave ECOWAS as it guaranteed these regimes will still have the military assistance required to remain in power once they leave the regional bloc. This adds an additional layer of democratic destabilization as it questions the unity of ECOWAS which Agenda 2063 lists as a critical component to helping support unity and democracy in the region (African Union, 2015). In addition to undermining democracy, the support of these military regimes also increases the potential of human rights violations across the region. As the regimes attempt to retain power, reports have already found that arbitrary arrests and violence against civilians has increased (Kasambala, 2023). As unrest rises the longer these regimes stay in power, there is the risk that these violations will only increase moving forward. Finally, Russia's willingness to provide support to authoritarian and military regimes has the potential to lead to a further spread of coups across an already unstable region. With Russia demonstrating their willingness to support the military juntas in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, military officials in neighbouring countries could be incentivized to attempt to illegally secure power knowing they may have legitimate support if they succeed.

Outside of Russia, other emerging illiberal powers are also actively undermining democracy across the continent. The Gulf States including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar as well as Turkey, in bids to increase their power and influence across the continent have actively supported undemocratic and military regimes. Growing activity of the Gulf states across the Horn of Africa not only creates a risk of dividing the region between rival Gulf powers but also has helped erode democratic activity. As highlighted with the ongoing Sudanese Civil War, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have both provided direct economic and military support to Sudanese leaders who are attempting to secure control of the country through undemocratic means. Turkey has also actively sought out relationships with undemocratic regimes in the Sahel to help fill the power vacuum left behind by the forced exit of Western states. In July 2024, Turkey signed a agreement with the Nigerien ruling military regime which agreed to provide increased cooperation and support in the areas of energy, intelligence, and defence (Hayatsever, 2024). Along with support from Russia, Turkey's partnership with the Nigerien military junta provides the autocratic regime with external support to help them retain power while also providing some legitimacy even while facing suspensions and sanctions from the AU.

Multipolarity and Challenges to Democracy in Africa: Western States

As the world shifts to a multipolar international order, Western powers could potentially join authoritarian states at undermining the AU's democratic objectives. As discussed previously, the emergence of alternative funding partners willing to provide African states with unconditional support has reduced the effectiveness of Western conditional aid as African regimes gained the ability to turn towards these states if they did not wish to implement the reforms demanded by the West. Furthermore, as a growing number of powers attempt to increase their power and influence across Africa, it is going to be increasingly difficult for Western states to maintain the same level of access and control over the continent that they had during the unipolar era (Cilliers, 2024b). This diminished effectiveness of conditional foreign aid along with growing geopolitical competition may see the United States and other Western powers prioritize securing African allies and access to resources rather than promoting democratic norms and values. For example, in recent months, the United States has increased its

engagement with Angola and Mozambique by providing financial support towards large energy and critical mineral projects (Brodo, 2024). This is notable as both Angola and Mozambique are classified as electoral autocracies according to the V-Dem institute (V-Dem Institute, 2024). The Angolan and Mozambique ruling regimes have both been noted for harsh crack downs on political oppositions and have had elections in recent years that are marred by irregularities (see Mucari, 2019 for Mozambique and Pearce, 2022 for Angola). Despite these concerns, the United States is going ahead and increasing its engagement with both of these regimes highlighting how the geopolitical competition with China – who is a significant partner of Angola and Mozambique – may be taking precedence over the support for democratic values in some circumstances. Additionally, the rise of populism and rising frustration with the LIO inside of Western states may also drive these countries to increase their support for authoritarian leaders, particularly in the area of migration. In response to this anti-migrant backlash, the United Kingdom's Conservative government agreed to a deal with Rwanda to send people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom to Rwanda while their case is being evaluated (McKinney et al., 2024). While the newly elected Labour party has since overturned this decision, it still demonstrates how Western states, particularly those with conservative or right-wing ruling parties, are increasingly turning against democratic principles of the LIO in favour of pursuing national interests which may include supporting authoritarian regimes Africa.

Overall, as the international environment of the multipolar order offers African authoritarian regimes with a growing number of willing international partners, the AU's already flawed democratic instruments could become increasingly weakened. While not the sole reason, this ability for authoritarian African leaders to secure a growing amount of external support has played an important factor in the AU's failure to respond to the recent wave of coups and unconstitutional changes of power across the continent (Djilo & Handy, 2024; Maphaka et al., 2024; Obi, 2014). As the structure of the AU allows African states to retain sovereign control over their governance systems, the organization may face growing challenges

to implement its Agenda 2063 democratic aspirations as illiberal African regimes can increasingly rely on both non-Western and to some extent Western unconditional support.

VII. Conclusion:

The shift to multipolarity will bring both opportunities and challenges to the AU in achieving its Agenda 2063 objectives. As a multipolar international order will see numerous states gain a more powerful position within the international system, the strict hierarchy of the American-led LIO will most likely continue to erode. Not only will this increase the leverage of the AU and African states as they are able to diversify their international partners, it also could provide them with greater power in international politics as their opportunities to participate and potentially influence international policy are increased. A key example of this is the AU gaining a permanent seat at the G-20. For these reasons many African states and the AU itself have supported a shift to a multipolar international order. However, simply viewing a shift to multipolarity as solely positive for the AU is overly simplistic and ignores the number of potential challenges multipolarity will create for the organization. As a growing number of powers continue vying for greater influence on the continent, African states could once again prioritize relationships with foreign partners rather than the AU leading to a fragmented and dis-connected that resembles the Cold War era. This threat has been highlighted with the Russian invasion of Ukraine where African states were unable to establish a united vote at the UN and marginalized the AU in their talks with Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, the Sudanese Civil War as well as rise in coups across the Sahel and the exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS not only undermine African unity, but have all been supported and exacerbated from external powers highlighting the potential division that multipolarity can bring. Additionally, despite the AU attempting to be a leader of democratic principles and norms across the continent, Africa has witnessed democratic backsliding in recent years which the organization has been unable to address. A multipolar world could further increase these challenges as illiberal African states may increasingly turn towards working with China, Russia and other authoritarian emerging powers whose unconditional aid and active promotion of authoritarianism are helping undermine democratic values across the continent.

Western states may also be increasingly willing to forgo democratic conditions and support authoritarian African regimes in order to counter the influence from illiberal regimes which reflects similar behaviour from the Cold War period.

With national governments already reluctant to transfer elements of their national sovereignty to the AU, the opportunity to diversify their international partners and increase external support regardless of their governance system could further incentivize African states to retain maximum levels of sovereignty. This action could come at the expense of greater continental unity promoted and led by the AU. Thus, a new multipolar international order could potentially weaken the organization, and its overarching Pan-African vision as individual African states may choose to pursue national interests rather than unite to achieve broader continental objectives. This situation creates a critical juncture for the AU. As demonstrated in this paper, greater multipolarity could allow the AU and the African continent as a whole to secure greater power and influence on the global stage. However, as recognized by Kwame Nkrumah, this power can only be obtained if the African continent unites under a single Pan-African vision. Without this unity, the continent once again risks becoming divided amongst itself while African people remain oppressed under authoritarian leaders and regimes. It remains to be seen how the new multipolar world will impact Africa. However, if the AU wishes to achieve its Agenda 2063 objectives and take advantage of the potential opportunities that may be presented under the multipolar order, it must find a way to unite the continent and resist the democratic backsliding that is occurring. Failing to do this may lead to the Agenda 2063 objectives being nothing more than a dream.

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