

'Climate Change, Resources, Migration: Old and New Sources of Conflict in Africa?'

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Co-operation or Chaos – Which Kind of World Order?

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We live in a transitional era. Paradigms of world politics and world economy are shifting. The old world, as we knew it over the last 50 years, is passing by, but the contours of the new world are still in the making.

Periods of fundamental change and redistribution of power offer great opportunities to shape the common future by a common effort. But at the same time chaos and conflict loom. And it's still an open race which kind of future will emerge: an era of enhanced global co-operation, international rule of law and sustainable development; or decades of political, social and environmental turmoil.

The big bang for the emergence of the new universe took place 20 years ago, when the Soviet Empire collapsed. As a consequence of this collapse, not only the Cold War between the former allies came to its end. In parallel, also the bipolar world system disappeared, which structured global politics since the end of World War II, creating a volatile equilibrium of power, based on huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons, more than enough to wipe out human civilization once and for all, the bipolar system nevertheless represented a kind of perverse stability under the control of two superpowers.

When the mighty Soviet Union unmasked itself as a hollow colossus, no longer able to hold down the political and personal aspirations of the nations living under the red star, the United States seemed as the remaining one and only superpower. These were the years when conventional academic and political wisdom told us that the American Century was born, with the United States as a kind of re-incarnation of the Roman Empire on a global scale.

Unfortunately, President Bush junior and his neo-conservative entourage did believe in this stuff. It rapidly turned out to be a costly illusion – costly in terms of human, political, and financial damages. The invasion of Iraq was the climax and the turning point of American hubris – the end of the illusory idea that the US would be able to shape the world based on its military, political and economical dominance.

Redistribution of Power and Wealth

The collapse of the global financial markets, caused by the mortgage crisis in the US, adds an economical dimension to the decline of American supremacy. It marks the end of the neo-liberal era, a specific model of economic growth based on an unlimited accumulation of debt and the deregulation of markets. Wall Street is no longer the undisputed headquarters of the global economy, both in ideological and financial terms.

The recovery of the global markets largely depends on the new economic powerhouses in the former periphery. Particularly China and India have become the new growth engines which are expected to pull the world economy out of the mud. Investment patterns have changed: it's no longer only the US, Japan and Western Europe who invest in the global south. More and more it's the other way around: Failed steel companies and car makers in Europe are taken over by investors from the Gulf, by Chinese or Indian companies. In parallel, High Technology is no longer a monopoly of the old industrial powers. And China has become the biggest holder of United States treasury bonds. The world economy is undergoing a fundamental regrouping.

The new world order can no longer be described in terms of "centre" and "periphery". There is no longer a hegemonic centre of political and economical power, but a plurality of old and new powers, linked with each other in a complex structure of competition and co-operation.

Still, the United States is the most powerful nation, and that will remain to be the case in the years to come, regarding its political, economical, scientific and military potential. There are very few global tasks and problems which can be solved without the participation of the US. But even the future of the US depends on collaboration. The new American administration seems to have learned its lesson, reaffirming its alliance with Europe and at the same time reaching out to the emerging powers, particularly to China. The recent Sino-American Summit symbolised the new division of power in the 21st century, and the future relations between these two giants will widely determine if we are entering a period of peaceful co-operation or of armed conflict.

The End of Western Dominance

But of course the new world order is not only about the US and China. The Europeans will have to play their role as well as Russia, India and other regional powers, including South Africa. Regional organisations like ASEAN, the European and the African Union will gain weight. On a global scale, peace and stability over the next decades will widely depend on the successful integration of the emerging powers in a system of global cooperation and responsibilities. For almost 500 years, global politics and global economy have been determined by the West. The City of Cape Town is part of that story. This era is now over.

A first step towards a more inclusive and plural architecture will be the transformation of the G8 into the G20. From an African perspective, the composition of the G20 may reflect the ongoing disproportion of global governance structures. Indeed, even beyond the matter of fair representation it is quite short-sighted to have only South Africa on board, when issues like the reform of financial markets, the fight against poverty and a global strategy against climate change are at stake. Africa is not only part of these problems, it has to be part of the solution, speaking with its own voices and taking its responsibilities as fully fledged member of the international community.

If I got the meaning of former President Mbeki's "African Renaissance" right, it was precisely about Africa becoming again a self-reliant and self-confident subject of history, stepping out from the shadows of colonialism and taking over the responsibility for its own future. Vice versa, the old and new global powers have to relate to Africa as an equal partner instead of treating it as an object of resource extraction and paternalistic aid, which usually are complementary approaches.

Global Interdependence Requires Global Cooperation

Our experience today is one of the age of globalisation: it's a world of global interdependence, where economic, social and environmental crises spill over from continent to continent. Regardless of the origin of the financial crisis, its fallout affects countries all over the world. Even worse, countries which to date have only been objects of speculation now are devastated by declining prices for their commodities, the shortage of credit, the downturn of foreign investment and shrinking tourism. Concerning the climate crisis, it's again the poorest countries, those which hardly contribute to the pollution of the atmosphere, who are severely hit by draught, floods and hurricanes. The over-consumption of the affluent is hitting back at the poor.

Global crises do need global solutions. An interdependent world needs co-operation. Enhanced co-operation needs transnational institutions – on the regional, continental and global level. Common institutions must be based on common values. Without a shared sense of global fairness we will not reach a new comprehensive climate framework at the Copenhagen Summit in December, bridging the gap between the old industrial world, emerging powers and poor countries. That's the case too with regards to the reform of the global financial system, particularly the Bretton Woods Institutions. The developing world must have a greater say at the IMF and the World Bank. The days when the big lenders could impose harmful conditions on countries in crisis should be over. And last but not least, the United Nations has to transform itself according to the new global topography. The structure of the UN Security Council still reflects the world of yesterday. It can not fulfil its heritage as a board of trustees if it does not mirror the diversity and dynamics of today's world. Any regrouping of the Security Council without an adequate African representation would be a mistake.

Global Security at Risk

Concerning the global security agenda, we are entering a critical period:

The non-proliferation regime is at stake. New nuclear powers have entered the stage: India, Pakistan, probably North Korea. Iran is approaching the capacity to build the bomb. If that happens, we will face a new round of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, the world's most conflict ridden region. If we do not want nuclear armament to get out of control, we urgently need a new effort to revive arms control policies. The project of a world free from weapons of mass destruction must be put on the table, and it's up to the nuclear superpowers to reaffirm their obligation to diminish their nuclear capacities. At the same time, more determined diplomatic efforts are required to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran should be offered a security-pact and enhanced economic co-operation in exchange for the strict limitation of its nuclear programme to civil purposes, effectively monitored by international inspectors. Otherwise the Security Council must increase its pressure on the regime through more efficient economic and political sanctions.

Climate Change and shrinking natural resources are becoming a major source of instability and potential conflict. Battles over scarce water and land resources, oil and gas, or rare minerals are no science fiction. Resource conflicts are already heating up ethnic, religious, and political rivalries, e.g. in Sudan. If climate change runs out of control, it will cause more failed states, mass migration and social disintegration. Therefore it's of paramount importance to reach a consensus on a new, ambitious, and binding climate regime over the next months. We must reduce global CO2 emissions speedily and on a large scale, and it's obvious that the highly industrialised

countries have to deliver the lion's share of these reductions. But without the willingness of developing countries to restrict their emissions, too, it will not be possible to stop climate change.

In the past, environmental protection was thought to compromise economic growth and social progress. It is now ever more widely recognised, that the current model of economic growth has become counterproductive in environmental, social, and economic terms – it puts the welfare of nations at risk, leads to a dangerous race for shrinking fossil resources and destroys natural capital on which billions of people depend: fish, forests, clean water and fertile soil. Far from damaging the economy, investing in resource efficiency, energy savings, water treatment, waste recycling, public transport and renewable energy sources will lay the foundations for the 21st century's green economy.

The transition from fossil fuels to renewables will reduce our dependency on oil, redistribute revenues from the oil exporting countries to the consumer countries, and diminish the risk of violent resource conflicts. This historic shift requires broad international co-operation. A promising pilot project in this area is currently being developed by European and Middle Eastern partners. It's about the installation of highly effective solar thermal power stations in the Sahara on a large scale. The potential for solar power in the desert zones of North Africa is huge – more than enough to supply the energy needs of the respective partner countries as well as meet a substantial portion of Europe's electricity needs.

None of the major security risks of our time can successfully be resolved without enhanced international co-operation. Therefore, the concept of state sovereignty must be embedded into a concept of multilateral governance. This will not replace the nation state – as we can see in Europe, where the process of voluntary supranational integration has reached an unprecedented level. The European Union is still proceeding as a Union of States. But only through regional integration will Europe be able to play an active role in 21st century politics. I guess this will be the case with the African Union, too.

On the global level, the main risk lies in the return of geopolitical rivalry, which led to two world wars in the first half of the 20th century. Therefore we should not fall into the trap of a multipolar world, divided into competing blocs and separated spheres of influence. What we are looking for is a new model of global governance based on international law, human rights, and multilateral co-operation under the umbrella of the United Nations. The current economic and environmental crises are a test for whether we are able to find common solutions for common problems instead of pursuing narrow national interests at the expense of the common good.