



## **Reimagining African Sovereignty in a Multipolar World: Strengthening Diplomacy, Security, and Global Influence**

### **1. Background and rationale**

The African continent stands at a crossroads of profound transformation in both internally and international contexts.<sup>1</sup> The global political order is increasingly destabilized by the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China, with trade tensions escalating into broader strategic competition. Simultaneously, the Russia–Ukraine conflict has reignited great power confrontation and warfare in Europe a forgotten recurrence not seen since the end of the Second World War in 1945. Coupled with the reality that Africa is subjected to trade within a system of rules that put their exports at an unfair advantage. These developments signal a shift toward a more fragmented and multipolar international system, where traditional alliances are being recalibrated, and the legitimacy of multilateral institutions is under strain. With international law and the role of the United Nations frequently questioned, weaponized and or in some cases circumvented by powerful states under the guise of billion-dollar investment pledges. Just from 2024, the investment pledges including Africa-China summit (US\$50 billion to Africa over the next three years), United States’ (US) pledge of US\$55 billion over three years to shared priorities and the African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063. Japan has committed US\$30 billion, and Russia has proposed several collaborative and consultative security arrangements<sup>2</sup>. Although these partnerships may reflect Africa’s growing prominence in the international fora, and its strategic approach to achieving continental objectives through multilateral cooperation, it does not suggest the cessation of foreign interference on the continent<sup>3</sup>.

Foreign influence in Africa affects the economy, politics, security, culture, and digital space. Global powers shape trade, build infrastructure, control debt, and use diplomacy, aid, and military ties to gain political influence. Cultural and ideological influence continues through language, media, and education, while digital infrastructure and data

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<sup>1</sup> Caromba, L. 2022. Towards a Pragmatic Pan-Africanism. In, Caromba, L. and Omar, Y.A. Eds. *Reflections on Africa’s Place in the World*. Johannesburg: Mabungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA).

<sup>2</sup> <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-s-foreign-policy-must-focus-on-continental-needs>

<sup>3</sup> Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). 2025. ‘SAIIA/ DIRCO Joint Seminar South Africa’s Diplomacy in a Turbulent Geopolitical Era,’ Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://dirco.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/9-SAIIA-DIRCO-Seminar-copy.pdf

governance are increasingly controlled by foreign tech firms. These layered influences often compete with African agency, shaping national priorities, governance models, and development pathways across the continent. In South Africa, a recent visit to the United States led to parliamentary debate after the delegation appeared to commit to allowing Starlink to operate in the country, raising concerns that South Africa may be yielding to U.S. pressure despite the company's non-compliance with Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) requirements.<sup>4</sup> While it has not been officially bypassed, the Minister is creating a pathway for Starlink to circumvent the requirement that foreign companies sell 30% of the equity in their local subsidiaries to historically disadvantaged groups. This has drawn public criticism, reflecting both the intense external pressure South Africa faces and the delicate balance between upholding transformation policies and responding to geopolitical and technological interests.<sup>5</sup> This highlights how foreign influence can challenge domestic transformation policies and national sovereignty in decision-making on the continent.

Furthermore, the escalating tensions between the global north and the emerging global south powers in Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and others (BRICS+) ensuing courting of Africa by major and middle powers<sup>6</sup>, a continuation to influence Africa's strategic choices. For Africa, the reconfiguration of global power dynamics, the persistence of intra-state conflicts, climate vulnerability, digital disruption, and the resurgence of military coups have all reshaped the foreign policy and diplomatic priorities of African states.

While regional and continental frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promise a new era of cooperation and integration, implementation challenges persist. But South Africa's presidency of the G20 in 2025 coinciding with the African Union's newly established permanent membership in the G20 offers an unprecedented opportunity for Africa to shape global policy discourse from within one of the world's most influential multilateral platforms. This dual representation amplifies Africa's voice in matters of global economic governance, climate justice, health security, and reform of international institutions. It also demands that African diplomacy be more coordinated, assertive, and forward-looking. In this context, it is imperative to convene thought leaders, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to reflect on and recalibrate Africa's diplomatic and foreign policy

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<sup>4</sup> Prinsloo, L, and Cele, S. (2025). 'SA lawmakers slam Starlink plan over 'back door' entry,' *Moneyweb*, 27 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/south-africa-lawmakers-slam-starlink-plan-over-back-door-entry/>

<sup>5</sup> Dlodla, N and Acharya, B. (2025). 'South Africa is not changing policy to suit Musk's Starlink, minister says', *Reuters*, 27 May 2025, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/south-africa-not-giving-special-dispensation-musks-starlink-minister-says-2025-05-27/>

<sup>6</sup> Cilliers, J. and Maru, M. T. 2025. 'Africa's foreign policy must focus on continental needs to more effectively boost its influence in global affairs,' Institute of Security Studies (ISS), Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-11-27-africas-foreign-policy-must-focus-on-continental-needs/>

architecture. Under the theme: *Reimagining African Sovereignty in a Multipolar World: Strengthening Diplomacy, Security, and Global Influence*.

### **3. Objectives**

- To critically examine the major diplomatic and foreign policy challenges facing African states in 2025.
- To assess Africa's role and agency in global governance and multilateral forums, especially within the G20 framework.
- To explore strategies for conflict prevention, regional integration, and collective security.
- To promote African-centered narratives in international relations and diplomacy.
- To strengthen networks between academia, policy institutions, and foreign ministries on the continent.

### **4. Subthemes**

The conference subthemes are as follows.

- Geopolitical Alignments and Africa's Strategic Autonomy
- South Africa's G20 Presidency and the AU's Role in Global Economic Governance
- Peacebuilding, Security, and Counterterrorism in Post-Coup Environments
- Climate Diplomacy and the Politics of Green Transition
- AfCFTA, Migration, and Regional Integration
- Digital Diplomacy, Cybersecurity, and Data Sovereignty
- Africa and the Reform of Global Governance Institutions (UNSC, Bretton Woods, etc.)
- Youth, Gender, and Inclusive Foreign Policy
- Maritime diplomacy and sovereignty
- Diaspora and Cultural Diplomacy: Reclaiming the African Narrative

### **5. Target Audience**

- African foreign ministers and diplomats
- AU and Regional Economic Community (REC) representatives
- Academics, students and researchers in International Relations and African Studies
- Civil society and youth organizations
- Think tanks and policy institutions
- International development partners and multilateral institutions
- Media and cultural diplomacy practitioners

### **6. Expected outcomes**

Enhanced understanding of the evolving diplomatic landscape in Africa

- Strengthened collaboration between governments, academia, and civil society
- Concrete policy recommendations for regional and continental actors
- A published conference proceedings document for policymakers and researchers
- A framework to leverage South Africa's G20 Presidency for collective African benefit.

## **7. Conference details**

The conference will be held over 2 days between **20 and 21 October 2025**, and will include:

- Plenary keynote sessions
- Thematic panel discussions
- Closed-door policy roundtables
- Youth and diaspora engagement forums
- Publication of a post-conference report and policy brief

**View call for papers for more information.**

## **Contact information**

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