



I N S I G H T · D I S C O U R S E · A C T I O N

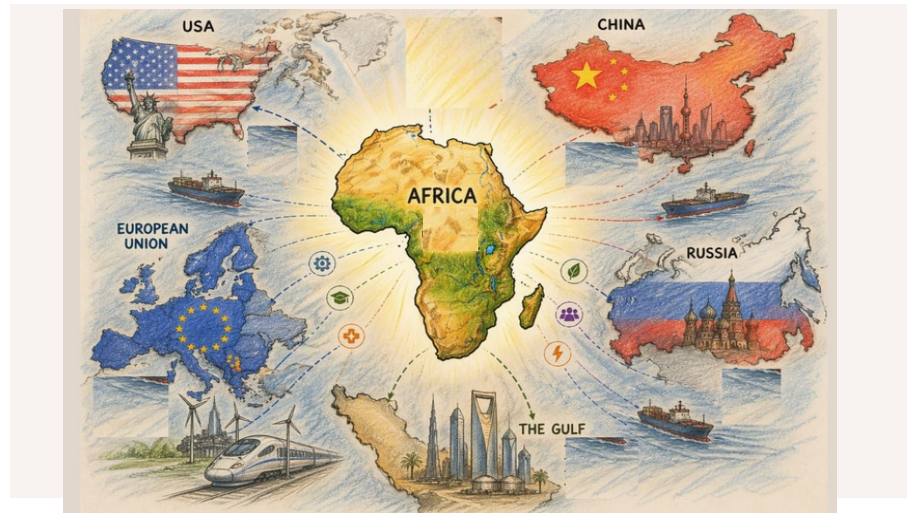
CDRC *Digest*

April 2026 Vol. 10 No. 4

Contents

Page 1

An African Response in an Era of Fractured Order: A Call for Courageous AU Leadership



CDRC is a non-profit, independent Ethiopia-based policy institute engaged in research and analysis. The Centre looks at opportunities and key challenges in the Horn of Africa, and focuses on policy ideas on development, sustainable peace and security.

The CDRC Digest is the Centre's monthly publication, endeavoring to provide an African perspective on political, economic and social developments as well as mechanisms of sustaining peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the African continent and beyond. The publication is based on dialogue, rigorous research and analysis.

A monthly publication of the Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC), in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia

CDRC Digest Team:

Abdeta Dribssa Beyene, Ph.D (Executive Director)
Amb. Kasahun Dender (Deputy Executive Director)
Wegene Mengistu (Senior Researcher)
Yidnekachew Mitiku Ph.D (Senior Researcher)

Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation
Ethio-China Friendship Avenue
Medina Tower 5th floor
Tel: +251 11 470 0370/73
Fax: +251 11 470 0359
Email: cdrc@cdrcethiopia.com
<http://www.cdrcethiopia.org>

© 2019 Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC)

An African Response in an Era of Fractured Order: A Call for Courageous AU Leadership

Introduction

At pivotal moments in history, institutions are not judged by their ability to manage routine affairs, but by their capacity to interpret change, anticipate risk, and articulate a compelling vision for the future. Africa now stands at precisely such a moment of reckoning. The global order that underpinned international relations for much of the post-Cold War era is no longer merely evolving—it is fragmenting. This fragmentation is driven by intensifying geopolitical rivalries, the selective and often instrumental application of international law, the normalization of military force as a tool for resolving entrenched disputes, and the growing use of economic and technological instruments as levers of power.

Multilateralism, once upheld as the central mechanism for collective security and equitable development, is increasingly hollowed out. It is invoked rhetorically but undermined in practice, as major powers prioritize strategic competition over cooperative problem-solving. The cumulative effect is a world system in transition—less predictable, less rule-bound, and more contested.

Africa has faced such moments of systemic transition before. In 1990, at the twilight of the Cold War, Salim Ahmed Salim, then Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), offered a landmark assessment of global transformation and its implications for the continent. His report was not merely descriptive; it was seeped in normative values, calling for intellectual clarity and strategic repositioning. African leaders responded, on balance with foresight. The subsequent decade witnessed a process of institutional reimagining that culminated in the transformation of the OAU

into the African Union (AU), alongside the establishment of key normative and operational frameworks, including the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

Today's upheaval, however, is more complex and structurally disruptive. Unlike the relatively linear transition from bipolarity to unipolarity, the current moment is characterized by overlapping crises, diffuse centers of power, and rapid technological change. It demands not incremental adjustment, but a bold rearticulation of Africa's place in the world.

A World of Power, Not Principle

The erosion of the so-called rules-based international order is no longer a matter of debate, is an observable reality shaping global behavior. International norms and legal frameworks are applied unevenly, often subordinated to the interests of powerful states. Institutions that once served as arbiters of legitimacy are increasingly paralyzed by geopolitical divisions, reducing their capacity to manage conflict or enforce accountability.

In this emerging environment, power—not principle—has become the dominant organizing logic. Strategic competition among major powers now spans multiple domains simultaneously: military posturing, technological supremacy, financial influence, and control over critical supply chains. These rivalries are not confined to traditional battlegrounds; they extend into cyberspace, outer space, and the governance of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Economic instruments have become central to this contestation. Sanctions regimes, export controls, access to capital markets, and the politicization of sovereign debt are increasingly used to exert pressure and shape the behavior of states. What was once considered the domain of neutral economic interaction is now deeply embedded in geopolitical strategy. For developing regions, including Africa, this creates new forms of vulnerability—particularly where economies are highly dependent on external financing, commodity exports, or imported technologies.

At the same time, technology has emerged as both an enabler of development and a vector of dependency. Control over digital infrastructure, data flows, and technological standards is becoming a key determinant of global influence. The risk for Africa is not only exclusion from these systems, but incorporation into them on unequal and externally determined terms.

Rather than coalescing into a stable multipolar order governed by shared norms, the international system is fragmenting into fluid and often competing spheres of influence. Alliances are increasingly transactional, driven by immediate interests rather than long-term commitments. Ad hoc coalitions replace institutionalized cooperation, and strategic ambiguity becomes a defining feature of global politics. In such a system, predictability declines, and smaller or less cohesive actors face heightened exposure to external shocks and pressures.

For Africa, the implications are profound. Fragmentation at the global level can easily translate into fragmentation at the continental level—through competing external partnerships, divergent national alignments, and inconsistent policy responses. This risks undermining hard-won gains in continental integration and collective agency.

Africa cannot afford such fragmentation. In a world defined by asymmetry and contestation, unity is not an aspiration—it is a strategic necessity.

From Sudan to the Sahel: The Cost of Marginalization

Across the African continent, a troubling and increasingly entrenched pattern has come into view—one that raises fundamental questions about agency, ownership, and leadership in the management of Africa's own security and political crises. From Sudan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from Libya to the Sahelian belt stretching across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the African Union (AU) has too often appeared not as the central architect of solutions, but as a peripheral or secondary actor in crises unfolding squarely within its own strategic domain.

This marginal positioning is not merely symbolic—it has practical consequences. In several major conflict settings, peace processes are initiated, convened, or heavily influenced by parties outside the continent, often reflecting the priorities and timelines of external stakeholders rather than those of the affected societies or the continent as a whole. Multiple and sometimes competing diplomatic tracks emerge, driven by bilateral interests, ad hoc coalitions, or external mediation frameworks. These parallel processes frequently operate with limited coordination, thereby diluting coherence and undermining the possibility of a unified African position. In such contexts, the Peace and Security Council (PSC)—originally conceived as the operational vehicle of Africa's collective security architecture—has, in several high-profile crises, been reduced to a reactive body, responding to developments rather than shaping them.

The strategic costs of this marginalization are profound. First, it weakens Africa's collective bargaining power. When external actors dominate mediation and negotiation processes, African priorities risk being sidelined or selectively incorporated. Second, it fragments continental diplomacy, as individual member states or sub-regional blocs pursue divergent approaches aligned with different external partners. Third, it creates space for external actors to shape political and security outcomes in ways that may not align with long-term continental interests, including state-building, sovereignty, and sustainable peace.

Equally alarming is the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government across the continent, a trend that signals a troubling reversal of hard-won normative progress. Not long ago, coups d'état were widely regarded as vestiges of a turbulent past—aberrations that Africa had collectively rejected in favor of constitutional order, electoral legitimacy, and rules-based governance. Today, however, military takeovers and extra-constitutional transitions are re-emerging with increasing frequency, particularly across parts of West and Central Africa. This pattern is not episodic; it reflects a deeper erosion of political norms and institutional resilience.

At the domestic level, these developments are rooted in persistent structural challenges. Weak state institutions, deficits in governance, contested electoral processes, and widening socio-economic inequalities have eroded public trust in civilian authorities. In several contexts, prolonged insecurity—whether driven by insurgencies, terrorism, or communal violence—has further undermined confidence in governments' ability to provide basic security. Within such environments, military actors often present themselves as corrective forces, claiming to restore order, stability, and national cohesion.

Yet this narrative, while resonant in moments of crisis, obscures a more complex and concerning reality. Constitutional manipulation—through term-limit extensions, legal reinterpretations, or procedural engineering—has increasingly contributed to political tension and public discontent. Such practices weaken the legitimacy of constitutional rule and create openings that coup plotters can exploit, often positioning themselves as defenders of popular will against entrenched elites. In this sense, unconstitutional changes are not only imposed from above; they are sometimes enabled by the gradual hollowing out of constitutionalism itself.

At the same time, external dynamics are playing a growing and often underappreciated role. The involvement of foreign security actors—including state-backed forces and private military entities—has, in certain contexts, altered internal power

balances and prolonged conflicts. These actors may provide short-term regime security or tactical advantages, but they frequently do so at the cost of long-term institutional development and sovereignty. Their presence can entrench parallel chains of command, reduce transparency, and create new dependencies that complicate both political transitions and peace processes.

Moreover, the intersection of internal fragility and external engagement has contributed to the internationalization of what are fundamentally domestic governance crises. Competing external interests—whether strategic, economic, or ideological—can reinforce divisions, incentivize hardline positions, and reduce the space for inclusive political settlements. In such settings, coups and extra-constitutional transitions are no longer isolated events; they become embedded within broader geopolitical contestation.

The cumulative effect is a dangerous feedback loop. Governance deficits create instability; instability invites both military intervention and external involvement; and these, in turn, further weaken institutions and delay the restoration of constitutional order. Breaking this cycle requires more than condemnation of coups after the fact. It demands a renewed commitment to constitutionalism in both form and substance, strengthened institutional capacity, and a more coherent continental approach to managing external security engagements.

Without such recalibration, the normalization of unconstitutional change—whether through overt military seizure of power or more subtle forms of constitutional distortion—risks becoming entrenched, with profound implications for Africa's political stability and long-term development trajectory.

The AU's normative framework was explicitly designed to guard against such regression. Instruments such as the Lomé Declaration established a clear and uncompromising standard: zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government. This principle became one of the defining pillars of the AU's post-OAU identity,

signaling a continental commitment to constitutionalism, rule of law, and democratic governance.

Today, however, this normative foundation is under visible strain. Arguments advanced by some member states—and at times reflected within segments of the AU Commission—have called for flexibility or contextual reinterpretation of these standards, often citing complex domestic realities, popular sentiments, or security imperatives. While it is true that political transitions are rarely linear and that rigid frameworks may not capture every nuance, the danger lies in the gradual erosion of principle through exception. Once norms are subjected to selective interpretation, their authority diminishes.

Norms cannot endure under conditions of inconsistency. Their strength lies precisely in their predictability and universality. When rules are applied unevenly—strictly in some cases, leniently in others—they cease to function as binding standards and instead become discretionary tools shaped by political convenience. This undermines not only the credibility of the governance framework but also the trust that member states and citizens place in continental institutions.

The consequences of such erosion are far-reaching. If unconstitutional changes—whether through overt military intervention or more subtle forms of constitutional manipulation—become normalized, the long-term stability of the continent is placed at risk. Political uncertainty becomes entrenched, institutional development is stunted, and cycles of instability are perpetuated. More fundamentally, the legitimacy of the continental project itself is called into question.

Under this condition, public confidence in the AU would correspondingly be weakened. Across many African societies, there is a growing perception that critical decisions affecting national trajectories are increasingly shaped beyond the continent's borders. This perception—whether fully accurate or not—reflects a deeper concern about ownership and voice. It signals a gap between institutional aspiration and political reality. Ultimately, this

erosion of credibility is not solely the product of structural limitations; it is also a reflection of political hesitation. Where decisive, unified, and principled leadership is absent, space is inevitably filled by others.

Reversing this trend requires more than procedural reform. It demands a reinvigoration of political will, a reaffirmation of normative commitments, and a deliberate effort to reposition the AU as the primary platform for addressing Africa's most pressing challenges. Without such a shift, marginalization risks becoming not an exception, but a defining feature of Africa's engagement with its own future.

From Reaction to Strategic Design

The central question confronting Africa at this historical juncture is both simple and profound: will the continent continue to respond to crises largely defined, framed, and mediated by external actors, or will it assume the responsibility of collectively designing its own strategic posture? This is not merely a question of institutional preference—it is a question of agency, sovereignty, and long-term positioning within an increasingly competitive and fragmented global system. A reactive posture inevitably confines Africa to the margins of decision-making, while a strategic posture enables it to shape outcomes in line with its own priorities and interests.

Encouragingly, Africa is not starting from an institutional vacuum. Over the past two decades, the continent has developed a robust architecture of frameworks and instruments intended to guide its transformation and strengthen its collective capacity. Agenda 2063 articulates an ambitious and comprehensive long-term vision for inclusive growth, sustainable development, and continental integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a powerful geoeconomic platform to enhance intra-African trade, build regional value chains, and reduce vulnerability to external shocks. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) offers an institutional framework for conflict prevention, early warning, crisis response, and post-conflict reconstruction. Meanwhile, the African Peer Review Mechanism

(APRM), though underutilized, remains a uniquely African instrument for promoting governance accountability, peer learning, and policy convergence.

Yet the existence of frameworks, however well-conceived, does not in itself guarantee transformation. Without political consolidation, alignment, and sustained commitment, such frameworks risk becoming declaratory—ambitious in language but limited in impact. The gap between institutional design and actual implementation has become one of the defining challenges of Africa's integration project. It is within this gap that fragmentation persists, opportunities are lost, and external actors find space to exert disproportionate influence.

A useful comparative insight can be drawn from recent reflections on European competitiveness led by Mario Draghi. That analysis highlights a critical and broadly applicable lesson: structural underperformance is often not the result of a lack of ideas, resources, or institutional frameworks. Rather, it stems from fragmentation, slow and cumbersome decision-making processes, and insufficient political coordination. Even within highly institutionalized and economically advanced systems, strategic drift can emerge when coherence is absent and collective action is weak.

This lesson resonates strongly in the African context. The continent's challenge is not conceptual deficiency but executional fragmentation. Across institutions, regional economic communities, and bilateral engagements with external partners, a lack of coordination reduces scale, weakens bargaining power, and undermines strategic clarity. Different actors pursue parallel initiatives without sufficient alignment, resulting in duplication, inefficiency, and diluted impact. In a global environment where scale and coherence are critical sources of power, such fragmentation imposes significant strategic costs.

Recent institutional reform efforts within the African Union (AU), including those advanced under the leadership of William Ruto as Champion for Reform, reflect an important recognition: that

internal efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness must be strengthened. This acknowledgment is both timely and necessary. However, reform cannot be confined to administrative adjustments alone.

Over the past decade, many reform initiatives have adopted a predominantly technocratic orientation. They have focused on streamlining structures, merging departments, rationalizing summits, and improving bureaucratic efficiency. While such measures have addressed certain operational inefficiencies, they have not sufficiently engaged with the deeper political logic that underpins institutional design. Institutions are not neutral technical constructs; they embody political choices about priorities, mandates, and strategic direction.

This is evident, for example, in the historical design of the AU itself. During its transformation in 2002, deliberate decisions were made to establish distinct institutional pillars, including separate portfolios for Peace and Security, and Political Affairs. The former was intended to address conflict prevention, management, and resolution; the latter to advance governance, democratization, human rights, and the long-term vision of a common continental foreign policy. These distinctions reflected a clear understanding that security and governance, while interconnected, require different tools, approaches, and political processes. Subsequent mergers of these portfolios, undertaken without sufficient strategic reflection, risk diluting both functions and blurring institutional focus.

Similarly, earlier institutional innovations—such as the introduction of biannual summits under the chairmanship of Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005—were grounded in a recognition of the need for sustained political oversight during a critical phase of continental consolidation. These summits were not merely procedural gatherings; they served as mechanisms for maintaining momentum, ensuring accountability, and reinforcing collective direction. Reducing or altering such mechanisms without fully considering their political function risks weakening strategic guidance at the highest level.

It is therefore essential to recognize that the AU is not simply an administrative organization—it is a

political and integrational project. Its effectiveness depends not only on efficiency but on clarity of purpose, coherence of vision, and the willingness of member states to align national policies with continental objectives. Administrative reforms derive their value only insofar as they advance these broader strategic goals.

In this regard, financial autonomy remains a critical pillar of institutional credibility and effectiveness. Initiatives such as the proposed 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports were designed to reduce dependence on external funding and provide the AU with predictable and sustainable resources. However, incomplete and uneven implementation has significantly constrained their impact. As long as the Union remains heavily reliant on external partners for financing key programs, its strategic autonomy will remain limited, and its capacity to act decisively will be compromised.

Reform, therefore, must move beyond procedural adjustments to address the core political questions of alignment, coherence, and purpose. It must restore clarity to institutional mandates, reinforce the primacy of continental frameworks, and ensure that structures are designed to serve clearly defined strategic priorities. Above all, it must close the gap between ambition and execution.

Ultimately, it is implementation—not declaration—that will determine whether reform strengthens or dilutes the authority of the African Union. Without a decisive shift toward coordinated strategic action, Africa risks remaining reactive in a world that increasingly rewards those who can anticipate, shape, and lead.

Unity as Strategic Necessity

Africa today finds itself at the center of intensifying competition among global and emerging middle powers, each seeking to expand influence across strategic domains that are critical to the continent's future. Military partnerships are multiplying, often with differing doctrines and external command structures. Resource arrangements—particularly in energy, critical minerals, and agriculture—are increasingly shaped by long-term external demand.

Infrastructure financing, once framed primarily in developmental terms, is now deeply embedded in geopolitical calculations. At the same time, competing technological ecosystems—from digital infrastructure to data governance—are being introduced across the continent, each carrying implications for sovereignty, dependency, and long-term alignment.

This convergence of interests reflects a broader transformation in the global system, where Africa is no longer peripheral but central to emerging geopolitical and geoeconomic contestation. Yet this centrality does not automatically translate into agency. Without coherence, it risks producing the opposite effect: external actors engaging Africa not as a unified strategic entity, but as a fragmented landscape of individual states open to differentiated—and often competing—forms of engagement.

Fragmentation, in this context, is not a passive condition; it is an active vulnerability. It creates entry points for external influence to operate in ways that may undermine continental priorities, weaken bargaining positions, and entrench asymmetrical relationships. When African states pursue uncoordinated bilateral engagements without reference to shared frameworks, the cumulative effect is a dilution of collective leverage. Divergent alignments—whether in security partnerships, economic agreements, or technological standards—can gradually erode the possibility of a common continental position. In such an environment, Africa risks becoming not a strategic actor, but a strategic terrain upon which others compete.

To navigate this increasingly complex environment effectively, Africa must move decisively beyond rhetorical commitments to unity and toward operational cohesion. Unity, in this sense, is not an abstract ideal or a symbolic aspiration—it is a functional requirement. It must be expressed through coordinated diplomacy, where African positions are articulated with clarity and consistency across global forums. It must be reflected in collective bargaining, particularly in negotiations involving trade, debt, climate finance,

and technology transfer. It must also be embedded in shared strategic direction, where continental frameworks guide national decision-making rather than being treated as optional reference points.

The imperative for unity is not new. The founding leaders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) consistently warned that political independence, if not accompanied by continental cohesion, would leave African states exposed to new and more subtle forms of subordination. Their concern was that the formal end of colonial rule could give way to fragmented sovereignty, in which external influence would persist through economic dependence, political division, and strategic vulnerability. Those warnings, once associated with an earlier era, have regained renewed urgency in today's fractured global order.

Only through unity can Africa effectively defend its normative frameworks, including principles of sovereignty, constitutional order, and non-interference. Only through unity can it safeguard its strategic assets—its resources, markets, and demographic potential—from being leveraged in ways that do not serve long-term continental interests. And only through unity can it negotiate with external partners from a position of strength, ensuring that engagements are mutually beneficial rather than structurally imbalanced.

A Moment Comparable to 1990

History offers a powerful point of reference. When Salim Ahmed Salim articulated the implications of the global transformation in 1990, he did more than diagnose change—he catalyzed a process of institutional renewal. The eventual transition from the Organization of African Unity to the African Union (AU) was neither automatic nor inevitable. It was the result of deliberate political choice, informed by a recognition that existing structures were no longer adequate to meet emerging challenges. African leaders chose to act, and in doing so, they redefined the continent's institutional trajectory.

Today's transformation is arguably deeper, more complex, and more multidimensional. Climate

disruption is reshaping livelihoods, intensifying resource competition, and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Technological advancement is redefining economic structures, governance models, and even the nature of sovereignty itself. Demographic pressures—particularly the rapid growth of a young population—present both an unprecedented opportunity and a significant governance challenge. At the same time, geopolitical fragmentation is creating an external environment that is less predictable and more competitive, with fewer stable anchors.

These forces are not unfolding sequentially; they are interacting simultaneously, producing compound effects that are difficult to manage through fragmented or reactive approaches. In such a context, division is not merely inefficient—it is dangerous. If Africa remains fragmented, it risks being positioned primarily as an arena in which external actors pursue their rivalries, rather than as an architect shaping its own outcomes.

And yet, the continent is far from powerless. Africa today possesses significant strategic assets that were far less developed in earlier periods of transition. Its continental institutional framework—centered around the African Union—is more advanced and normatively robust than its predecessor. Its diplomatic reach has expanded, with African states playing increasingly visible roles in global governance forums. Its population is dynamic and youthful, offering the potential for innovation, productivity, and market expansion. Its global relevance is rising, not only because of its resources, but because of its role in shaping future economic and demographic trends.

The critical question, therefore, is not whether Africa has the capacity to act, but whether it can mobilize these assets coherently. Capacity without coordination yields limited impact. Potential without alignment remains unrealized. The challenge before African leadership is to translate these assets into collective power—through unity of purpose, clarity of strategy, and consistency of action.

This moment, like that of 1990, demands more than incremental adjustment. It calls for vision,

political courage, and a willingness to act decisively in the face of uncertainty. The choice, ultimately, is whether Africa will respond to transformation—or shape it.

From Diagnosis to Decision

This is not a moment for rhetorical recommitment or carefully worded declarations that signal intent without altering reality. It is a moment that demands principled, decisive, and sustained leadership. The diagnosis of Africa's position within a fragmenting global order is now widely understood; what remains is the far more difficult task of translating that diagnosis into coherent and enforceable action.

The African Union (AU) must, first and foremost, reassert its primacy in the management of peace and security processes across the continent. This requires more than participation—it requires leadership in agenda-setting, in defining the problem and mediation design, and the coordination of all diplomatic tracks. The AU must also reaffirm, clearly and unequivocally, its long-standing zero-tolerance policy for unconstitutional changes of government, ensuring that this principle is neither diluted nor selectively applied. At the same time, ongoing institutional reform efforts must move beyond structural adjustments and deliver tangible operational authority, particularly for core organs such as the Peace and Security Council (PSC). Above all, the Union must transition from symbolic unity to strategic coherence, projecting consistency in its internal deliberations and external engagements, thereby consolidating its position as the principal locus of continental decision-making.

Yet reaffirmation, while necessary, is not sufficient. What is required is a set of concrete, sequenced, and enforceable steps that bridge the gap between institutional aspiration and political reality.

First, the Assembly should establish a High-Level Panel on Africa in a Fragmenting Global Order. This Panel should bring together eminent African statespersons, experienced policy practitioners, leading scholars, and—critically—representatives of

youth and women. Its mandate should be comprehensive and forward-looking: to assess Africa's strategic position in light of intensifying geopolitical competition, the erosion of multilateral norms, and the internal constraints affecting the AU's governance and security architecture. It should also examine how Africa's external engagements—across security, economic, and technological domains—can be better aligned with continental priorities and more effectively coordinated under AU leadership. Such a Panel would serve not only as an analytical body, but as a catalyst for intellectual and political convergence.

Second, the process must be meaningfully inclusive. The participation of youth and women should not be treated as a normative obligation or symbolic gesture; it is a strategic necessity. Africa's demographic realities—marked by a rapidly expanding and increasingly politically conscious youth population—demand that policy frameworks reflect the perspectives, aspirations, and agency of broader societal constituencies. Similarly, the central role of women in peacebuilding, governance, and economic transformation must be institutionally recognized and operationalized. Without such inclusion, policy outcomes risk lacking both legitimacy and durability.

Third, the Panel should produce a forward-looking report anchored in actionable and prioritized recommendations. This report must move beyond descriptive analysis to articulate a clear strategic framework—identifying specific policy options, institutional reforms, and implementation pathways. It should then serve as the basis for convening an Extraordinary Session of the Assembly, dedicated exclusively to redefining Africa's collective posture within the emerging global order. Such a session should not be treated as a routine summit, but as a strategic moment of decision. Its outcomes must include a clearly articulated implementation framework, with defined timelines, institutional responsibilities, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure follow-through.

Fourth, the Assembly must adopt specific and time-bound measures aimed at restoring and reinforcing

institutional credibility. These measures should include, but not be limited to, the establishment of clear and predictable enforcement mechanisms for unconstitutional changes of government—ensuring that responses are consistent, rules-based, and insulated from ad hoc political considerations. Coordination between the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and international partners must be strengthened, with the AU firmly positioned as the central coordinating authority. Concrete steps toward financial autonomy are also essential, particularly through renewed and enforceable commitment to the 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports, which remains critical for reducing dependency on external funding. In parallel, the operational authority of the PSC must be enhanced, enabling it to act proactively rather than reactively. Finally, institutionalized review mechanisms should be established to ensure sustained political oversight, accountability, and compliance across all levels of the Union.

Beyond internal consolidation, Africa must also seize this moment to exercise intellectual and political leadership on the global stage. Just as the Bandung Conference galvanized a collective voice for newly independent states and reshaped the discourse of international relations, Africa today is uniquely positioned to convene a renewed Global South dialogue. Such an initiative could articulate shared principles on sovereignty, equitable development, reform of the international financial architecture, and the governance of emerging technologies. By doing so, Africa would not only amplify its own voice but also contribute to shaping a more balanced and inclusive global order.

Acting collectively in this manner would provide a measure of strategic insulation for individual states facing external pressure, while enhancing the continent's overall resilience. It would signal a decisive shift—from reactive adaptation to proactive agency; from fragmented engagement to coordinated strategy.

Conclusion: The Imperative of Courage

History rarely announces its turning points with clarity, yet today the signals of transformation are

unmistakable. The international system is undergoing a profound reconfiguration, and Africa stands at a crossroads where the costs of inaction are probably higher than the risks of bold decision-making.

When the rules-based international order retained a degree of coherence and predictability, Africa—despite structural disadvantages—was able to navigate within it, adapting pragmatically to its constraints while extracting selective gains. Even where the system was unequal, it provided a framework of reference: rules could be interpreted, institutions could be engaged, and diplomatic space—however limited—could be utilized. African states learned to maneuver within this environment, leveraging multilateralism, normative appeals, and coalition-building to “wiggle through” and advance their interests incrementally.

That environment is now eroding. What is emerging in its place bears closer resemblance to a Hobbesian landscape—one characterized less by shared rules and more by raw power, strategic competition, and shifting alignments. In such a context, predictability diminishes, norms are selectively applied or ignored, and institutional guarantees weaken. The implication is profound: there are fewer stable rules to adapt to, fewer neutral arenas to appeal to, and fewer assurances that restraint will be reciprocated. In effect, the strategic environment itself has become more fluid and contested.

Under these conditions, a strategy based primarily on adaptation is no longer sufficient. If there are no consistent rules to navigate, then incremental adjustment risks becoming passive drift. Waiting for clarity in a system defined by ambiguity may, in fact, deepen vulnerability. Inaction—often justified as prudence—can inadvertently translate into strategic exposure, as external actors shape outcomes in the absence of a coherent African position.

This is precisely why the current moment calls for a shift from reactive accommodation to deliberate strategic choice. In a rules-fragmented environment, agency must be asserted rather than

assumed. Bold, collectively anchored decisions—whether in aligning external partnerships, enforcing continental norms, or consolidating institutional authority—may carry short-term risks, but they also create the possibility of shaping the emerging order rather than merely absorbing its consequences.

Such boldness need not imply recklessness. It requires clarity of purpose, internal cohesion, and a willingness to prioritize long-term continental interests over short-term national calculations. It also requires recognizing that uncertainty, while destabilizing, can create openings. Periods of systemic transition are not only moments of risk; they are also moments when new hierarchies, norms, and alignments are formed. Those who act with coherence and conviction during such periods are more likely to influence the outcome.

For Africa, the strategic choice is therefore not between risk and safety, but between proactive positioning and passive adaptation. In a world where the rules are no longer fixed, waiting for their re-emergence is unlikely to yield an advantage. Acting collectively, with clarity and purpose, offers a more credible pathway to securing both

autonomy and influence in the emerging global order.

The choices made now—on unity, on the defense of norms, on the safeguarding of sovereignty, and on the exercise of leadership—will shape the continent's trajectory for decades to come. Africa can either remain exposed to the turbulence of external competition, adjusting reactively to forces beyond its control, or it can emerge as a coherent and influential actor capable of shaping those forces in line with its own interests and values.

Today's leaders carry a distinct historical responsibility. Like those who navigated the transitions of earlier eras, they are called upon to demonstrate not only political skill, but vision and courage. The era of selective application, fragmented positioning, and passive adjustment must come to an end.

In its place, a new era must be forged—defined by principled leadership, unity of purpose, and strategic clarity. An era in which Africa does not merely respond to the world as it is, but actively participates in shaping the world as it ought to be.