POLICY BRIEF

THE IMPERATIVE FOR AND OUTLINE OF A NEW PARADIGM FOR AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN A FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

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I. INTRODUCTION

The global order is going through a historic transformation. There is a profound shift in the structure of the power relations between states.[1] While the state system remains the basis of the global order, the role and power of the state have hugely diminished. Of particular significance is the fact that the old order is in the process of giving way to an emerging order characterised increasingly by multipolarity.[2] Major power rivalry and geopolitical tension are on the rise. Unilateral action and protectionism are gaining momentum. The United Nations (UN) faces an existential crisis.[3] International law is under enormous assault.[4] All of these pose a direct and serious risk to Africa.

In the face of these intersecting crises, various parts of the world are engaging in identifying ways of repositioning themselves. The urgency and imperative of such repositioning is particularly compelling for parts of the world that depend heavily on international cooperation and multilateral diplomacy for advancing the interests and well-being of their peoples. For Africa, which was on the receiving end of geopolitical rivalry most recently during the Cold War, the current state of the global order is raising the specter of the repeat of turning the continent into a mere object of major power competition bereft of its own agency, as events in various parts of the continent such as the Sahel and Horn of Africa illustrate.[5] These conditions together with the increasing major impacts to Africa of developments in the international arena and African Union's (AU) membership in the G20 have made it clear that Africa's interests could not be protected without a collective approach to Africa's international engagement in the international arena and with various powers.

This policy brief presents a brief assessment of the current state of Africa's engagement with major powers and its readiness for advancing its interests in view of the deep shifts in the global context. Based on such assessment and having regard to the efforts of other parts of the world for repositioning themselves, the brief outlines the kind of major strategic shifts that Africa needs to adopt promptly for repositioning itself for the new international order and to ameliorate the perils the state of the world poses to

1 *Amani Africa (August 2024), Africa and the Reform of the Multilateral System: Report of the Joint Namibia-Amani Africa High-Level Panel of Experts, https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/AFRICA-AND-THE-REFORM-OF-THE-MULTILATERAL-SYSTEM.pdf*

2 *Trita Parsi (3 February 2025), What Rubio said about multipolarity should get more attention, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/marco-rubio/*

3 *Richard Gowan (16 April 2025), To survive its existential crisis, the UN must learn from the past, World Politics Review https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/united-nations-trump-crisis/*

4 *Amani Africa (April 2025), 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions: Preserving our common humanity in a time of major crises of compliance, https://amaniafrica-et.org/75th-anniversary-of-the-geneva-conventions-preserving-our-common-humanity-in-a-time-of-major-crises-of-compliance/; Linda Kinstler (26 June 2025), Are we witnessing the death of international law?, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2025/jun/26/are-we-witnessing-the-death-of-international-law*

5 *Solomon Dersso (10 February 2022) Brace yourselves for a new Cold War, ACCORD, https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/brace-yourselves-for-a-new-cold-war/*

Africa.

II. AFRICA'S STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE IN CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS

On 3 April 2025, General Michael Langley, the head of the U.S. Africa Command, gave a testimony[6] to the United States (U.S.) The Senate Armed Services Committee, which is emblematic of how Africa is viewed and the lens through which the engagement of major powers is shaped, considers four key factors: demographics, strategic interests, economic interests, and security interests. With a population projected to account for 25 per cent of the global total by 2050, and currently home to the world's largest youth demographic, the continent is becoming a dynamic engine of global labour consumption and a hub of innovation.[7] Rapid urbanisation and sustained economic growth—reflected in the presence of 11 African economies among the world's 20 fastest-growing in 2024—further reinforce this trend.

In the context of the major shift in the international order, Africa's demographic and diplomatic weight is translating into greater influence in multilateral governance structures. Apart from AU's ascent as full member of the G20, two of AU member states (Egypt and Ethiopia) joined the BRICS, expanding membership of African states in the group to three along with South Africa. The fact that Africa represents 28% of the votes in the UN General Assembly and the African three members in the UNSC (A3) operate as a block have also increasing the significance of the votes of African states in the UN General Assembly and in UNSC. *The Economist* reported that more than 320 foreign diplomatic missions were opened in Africa between 2010 and 2016[8] and the number of Africa's partnerships have also increased.

However, this growing importance is being reframed through a lens of great power rivalry. Langley characterises Africa as a 'nexus theatre,' where the strategic interests of the U.S., China, and Russia increasingly collide.[9] Within this framework, partnerships are seen less as vehicles for mutual development and more as instruments in a global zero-sum game. This competitive posture echoes Cold War logic, risking the reduction of African states to passive theatres of proxy influence rather than active partners in shaping their own destinies.

While the tectonic shift in the power structure and relations of the world constitutes the backdrop to the return of major power rivalry globally, a major driver of this rivalry on the continent is also Africa's immense resource wealth, which has acquired particular significance in the context of the global critical mineral rush. Central and Southern Africa are rich in critical minerals essential for emerging technologies, many of which underpin modern defence and energy systems. With China dominating global critical mineral processing, the U.S. views African access

6 U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee. (2025). General Langley opening statements. Retrieved from https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/testimony/generallangley-opening-statements?download=1

7 Africa Centre. (2025). What to expect from Africa-China relations in 2025.

8 https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/03/07/the-new-scramble-for-africa

9 U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee. (2025). General Langley opening statements. Retrieved from https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/testimony/generallangley-opening-statements?download=1

to essential minerals as vital to ensuring secure and diversified supply chains. Resource security thus emerges as a core motive in America's strategic calculus, with Africa framed as both opportunity and vulnerability in an era of technological competition.[10]

Despite the marginal threat that Africa's security situation poses directly to the US and its interests, security concerns provide the final—and perhaps longstanding—pillar of U.S. engagement, but largely as a hangover from the US war on terrorism. Langley invoked the threat of ISIS and al-Qaeda's expansion in Africa as a direct risk to U.S. homeland security, justifying ongoing military presence and bilateral security partnerships. Counterterrorism thus remains a potent rationale for maintaining influence, reinforcing U.S. military engagement under the guise of mutual security interests.

USMC Gen Michael Langley & Royal Moroccan Armed Forces IG Maj Gen Mohammed Berrid, attending Exercise African Lion 21, May 2025-AP

Together, these four dimensions—demographics, great power rivalry, resource competition, and counterterrorism—reveal a complex and at times contradictory set of factors shaping the engagement of major powers such as the US in Africa. They offer Africa both leverage and risk. While the continent's growing population and resource endowments create opportunities for more equitable partnerships, the framing of Africa as a strategic prize rather than a sovereign actor threatens to entrench dependency and erode agency. For African states, the challenge will be to navigate this landscape with clarity and cohesion, leveraging demographic and economic capital while resisting being drawn into the gravitational pull of external rivalries. Africa's future global agency will depend on its ability to convert its strategic significance into sustainable prosperity on its own terms.

III. CONTINENTAL DRIFT: OVERVIEW OF AFRICA'S FRAGMENTED EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT IN A WORLD OF DEEPENING GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY

Africa's engagement with the global order has grown increasingly complex and fragmented. Rather than projecting a coherent continental strategy, African states have adopted diverse regional and national postures, often at odds with each other. This lack of coordination undermines Africa's potential leverage in international affairs and exposes the continent to strategic manipulation by external powers. This section explores the patterns of divergence, the implications for Africa's strategic coherence, and more unified global engagement prospects.

At the regional level, Africa's external alignments can be considered as reflecting four broad strategic orientations. In the Sahel, the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States— comprising Mali, Burkina Faso,

10 Texas National Security Review. (2025). Rethinking U.S. Africa policy amid changing geopolitical realities.

and Niger—has marked a decisive turn towards an assertive sovereigntist posture determined to break from the stranglehold of the West and reclaim political, strategic and economic autonomy by establishing military partnerships with non-traditional actors in the region such as Russia.[11] In East Africa, countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda have adopted a model of balanced multi-alignment, simultaneously engaging with China, the U.S., and increasingly other global actors, particularly Gulf states, to maximise diplomatic flexibility and attempt at preserving policy autonomy.

Southern African states, on the other hand, maintain pragmatic economic partnerships with China, focusing primarily on infrastructure development and trade. At the same time, most of these states also maintain strong relationships with other global powers, similar to East African states. These engagements with China vary in depth, with some states demonstrating a higher degree of economic dependency than others. Meanwhile, North African countries largely sustain their historical ties with the European Union, albeit with growing efforts to diversify partnerships beyond traditional Western actors.

Seen through the lens of individual countries, such variations seem to make sense, but will not be enough to enable these states individually to make the most out of the ongoing global shifts. Collectively, these varied alignments reflect not strategic coordination but the absence of a unified continental posture, weakening Africa's collective voice in a multipolar world.

Beyond these regional orientations, individual African countries have crafted distinct diplomatic strategies based on their unique political circumstances and ambitions. Kenya provides a prime example of attempts at strategic manoeuvring, whereby it deepens its relationship with the US and the European Union while seeking to harness the opportunities from engagement with China, leveraging its regional stability and influence to negotiate favourable terms, despite being increasingly more aligned with the West as it became the only African country to establish the status of a non-NATO ally. Mali, (in close coordination with Niger and Burkina Faso), by contrast, has undertaken a sweeping ideological realignment, ending the firm grip France had over the economic, political and security policy, including by expelling French forces, severing ties with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and deepening military ties with Russia. Egypt has embraced a form of geostrategic hedging, simultaneously cultivating U.S. aid, Russian security partnerships, and Gulf investment through a highly transactional foreign policy approach. Burkina Faso, under the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré (and the AES leaders in general), is advancing more structured forms of economic and cultural nationalism, focused on sovereign resource management and a deliberate retreat from external dependency.

These national strategies, while rational from a domestic standpoint, collectively contribute to a broader pattern of strategic incoherence. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Africa's approach to resource diplomacy. Despite holding over 30 per cent of global reserves of critical minerals, African countries rarely negotiate as a bloc, nor do they have a common framework

11 West Africa Weekly (2025), Burkina Faso slams AFRICOM commander for 'regrettable and frivolous' claims about Burkinabe cooperation with China.

for leveraging their endowments for better terms and greater economic outcomes.[12] Instead, they compete individually for bilateral agreements at international summits in Washington, Beijing, and Moscow. This fragmented approach significantly reduces their influence individually and constrains Africa's bargaining power, dilutes its geopolitical influence, and reinforces patterns of dependency that favour external actors. Nothing exemplifies this better than how the DRC ended up entering into a resources-for-peace deal with Washington.

The failure of regional cooperation frameworks to recalibrate regional cooperation processes to changing regional and global geopolitical realities further accelerates fragmentation even within the same sub-region. A particularly stark illustration of this fragmentation occurred in January 2024, when Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger formally withdrew from ECOWAS. This marked a profound rupture in West Africa's institutional architecture. ECOWAS, long seen as a pillar of regional integration, had facilitated trade, coordinated security interventions, and provided a platform for diplomatic consensus.[13] The exit of three member states due to a lack of shared threat assessment and triggered by the imposition of severe sanctions by ECOWAS against Niger and attempts by major ECOWAS countries to use force, purportedly under external influence, exposed the vulnerability of even Africa's most mature regional bodies to unilateralism and ideological divergence. For Nigeria, the region's most significant economic and demographic power, the challenge now lies in navigating fractured regional alignments while preserving what remains of ECOWAS' influence, as the bloc is expected to revitalise its reform agendas.

This case encapsulates the broader problem facing Africa's international engagement: structural disunity. Competing ideologies, colonial-era linguistic divides, unaligned national interests, and the institutional weakness of continental bodies have resulted in a patchwork of 54 divergent foreign policy strategies. While global powers such as China publish coordinated Africa strategies and approach the continent with clear geopolitical intent, Africa lacks a comparable collective framework. This asymmetry leaves African states vulnerable to divide-and-rule tactics and diminishes their ability to shape the terms of engagement.

Underlying this structural problem is a deeper conceptual divide. While global powers often frame their engagement with Africa through a lens of strategic competition—focusing on resource access, security footprints, and geopolitical positioning—African states articulate aspirations for partnerships grounded in mutual benefit, national sovereignty, and sustainable development. This vision is commendable, but internal divisions consistently undermine it. The absence of unified messaging, coherent regional strategies, and consolidated negotiation platforms allows external actors to exploit Africa's fissures, often engaging individual states on terms that reinforce inequality and dependency.

Yet, the narrative of fragmentation is not without counterpoints. While it is dominant, it is not the only defining feature of Africa's international relations.

12 Council on Foreign Relations (2024) China in Africa: October 2024.

13 International Crisis Group. (2025). Eight priorities for the African Union in 2025.

Africa has shown, in moments of necessity and severity, that collective action is achievable. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)—the world's largest free trade bloc by membership—is a landmark achievement in regional economic integration. Similarly, the African Union's coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly through the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), demonstrated effective health diplomacy and logistical collaboration. These initiatives prove that when political will converges with institutional clarity and robust technical competence, Africa is capable of meaningful unity.

In conclusion, Africa's strategic divergence is not a foregone conclusion. The continent has already demonstrated that coordinated action is possible when shared interests are prioritised. However, moving from episodic cooperation to sustained strategic coherence will require a decisive shift away from bilateral opportunism and towards institutionalised collective engagement. If Africa is to convert its demographic and resource advantages into geopolitical power, it must embrace unity not just as a rhetorical ideal, but as a strategic imperative.

IV. 'WHAT IS TO BE DONE?': OUTLINE OF A NEW PARADIGM FOR AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Africa's continued strategic fragmentation poses a serious obstacle to its emergence as a coherent global actor. Achieving genuine strategic autonomy will require a decisive shift from individual opportunism and precarious nationalism to binding continental coordination, anchored in institutional transformation and supported by active grassroots engagement. As former senior AU officials, Said Djinit, Ibrahim Mayaki and El Ghassim Wane argued in a recent article,[14] if the fundamental changes of the end of the Cold War in the 1990 made collective action by Africa imperative through the report of OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim, it is even more urgent today in the face of more profound uncertainty and instability. This section seeks to provide an answer to the question of what is to be done and how.

Prioritising African-centric epistemology and vision

Correcting Africa's trajectory demands intellectual rebalancing—restoring African voices and perspectives long sidelined in strategic discourse. The conspicuous absence of African epistemologies and leading economic and strategic thinkers who have long championed African agency, continental integration, and post-colonial sovereignty in shaping the policy thinking and action of African states must be corrected. Strategic autonomy cannot be achieved through economic policy and security analysis from Western-based or dominated rating agencies, think tanks and financial institutions. It requires reclaiming Africa's own intellectual sovereignty cognisant of Africa's inseparability from and interdependence with other parts of the world and anchoring continental reform

14 *Africa at a turning point: Navigating peril and seizing opportunity in a changing global order, Amani Africa Ideas Indaba, (26 June 2025)* https://amaniafrica-et.org/africa-at-a-turning-point-navigating-peril-and-seizing-opportunity-in-a-changing-global-order/

in African-authored visions rather than risking reproducing dependency through borrowed frameworks. This intellectual transformation and autonomy must inform all subsequent institutional and policy reforms.

To this end, continental bodies such as the AU and ECOWAS should harness the voice of critical thinkers and Pan-African voices that articulate alternative pathways for autonomy and economic advancement and breaking from the continent's strategic fragmentation and continuing dependence. They should support and provide spaces to such voices through close coordination with pan-African thought leaders, think tanks and policy dialogue forums. A good example that illustrates how this can be done is the Tana Forum. Despite the setbacks it faced, Tana Forum was established and operated for several years as an independent pan-African platform for facilitating critical dialogue between African thought leaders and pan-African policy actors.

Leadership Reform and Continental Identity

One of the underlying factors behind Africa's fragmentation and lack of strategic coherence is the dearth of leaders possessing strategic foresight and pan-African vision.[15] While at times adept at pan-Africanist rhetoric, the current crop of leaders on the continent tends to be transactional, short-termist and bent on serving narrow political and individual interests over national and continental interests. This has become also true of leaders at the continental body, such as the AU.

Leadership transformation provides the essential foundation for institutional reorientation and coordination. A merit-based system of continental appointments, reinforced by Leadership Academies that train cadres in pan- African coordination, would shift focus from national prestige to continental strategy. As the debacle surrounding the appointment of AU Commission leaders illustrated, this requires a willingness to enforce agreed-upon processes of selection, as the Panel of Eminent Persons demonstrated and a commitment of member states to respect such standards by sending candidates that meet all the criteria for appointment, rather than based exclusively on profile and proximity to power.

Without leaders committed to a continental vision over individual and narrow political interests, it will not be possible to pursue and achieve strategic coherence and project Africa's influence on the global stage. Without such leadership, institutional reforms will remain hollow shells, and opportunities such as AU's membership in the G20 will only be symbolic.

Continental leadership must be restructured from 'contests of prestige and clout' to merit-based appointments focused on subject matter expertise, consensus-building skills, and coordination capability. In terms of balancing national and continental priorities, it requires the deployment of highly competent

15 *See Solomon A. Dersso (10 February 2022) Brace yourselves for a new Cold War, ACCORD, https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/brace-yourselves-for-a-new-cold-war/;*
(24 May 2013), African Union at 50 – Will the dream of unity ever be realised? https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/may/24/african-union-50-year-anniversary

diplomats able to identify ways of advancing continental commitments while safeguarding national interests.

Bottom-Up Mobilisation and Civil Society Engagement

Institutions alone cannot drive transformation. Susceptible to capture and manipulation, processes based exclusively on the elite are inadequate. Durable change must build from below, grounded in the creativity and activism of Africa's youth, civil society, and entrepreneurial networks, to end the legitimisation of pillage. Pan-African initiatives like AfriLabs, the African Youth Charter implementation network, Senegal's "Y'en a Marre," Burkina Faso's "Balai Citoyen," "Filimbi" and "La Lucha" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and AfCFTA-aligned small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) platforms demonstrate how bottom-up energy can shape continental discourse, sustain reform, and reinforce integration in practice, underpinned by societal awakening to Western hegemonic exploitation. The growing global influence of African culture and arts from cinema, fashion, music and literature should be harnessed to broader public engagement in and connection with continental processes.

Genuine autonomy will emerge only when empowered citizens and responsive institutions evolve together, linking top-down coordination with bottom-up mobilisation and collective action. This co-evolution between grassroots movements and institutional reform ensures that continental integration reflects popular aspirations and enjoys wider public support and engagement.

Binding Continental Coordination Mechanisms

At the heart of institutional transformation lies the need for credible and enforceable architecture. A Continental Strategic Council should be established to provide the foundation for unified engagement with external powers, equipped with graduated sanctions for non-compliance and financial incentives for coordination. Unlike existing AU structures that rely on consensus without consequences, this body must possess enforcement powers that make coordination profitable and fragmentation costly.

This council must transcend the voluntary cooperation characterising current continental institutions. It should possess robust technical capacity, institutional and diplomatic authority that commands respect, trust and collaboration and engagement from member states and mechanisms to prevent individual members from pursuing separate arrangements that undermine collective positions.

Financial Independence and Resource Sovereignty

An African Monetary and Development Fund represents the most crucial element of institutional reform, capitalising on the continent's resource wealth to mobilise development financing. There is a need to expedite the operationalisation of continental financial institutions to enable Africa to leverage continental funds for accelerating development projects, including narrowing the funding gap for infrastructural development critical to industrialisation and intra-African trade.

A Continental Resource Authority should coordinate the extraction and marketing of Africa's critical minerals through collective bargaining and standardised pricing. This transforms Africa's control over thirty per cent of global critical minerals from fragmented competition into unified leverage, enabling the continent to demand partnership terms that reflect its collective strength rather than allowing external powers to exploit individual vulnerabilities, perpetuating extractive and exploitative terms and dependency.

Pan-African Economic Integration and Value Creation

Africa must legislate significant value addition of raw materials before export and enforce compliance through collective economic sanctions. Countries violating these requirements must face continental economic consequences, ensuring standards that prioritise African economic development over external extraction interests. This shifts the continent from a commodity supplier to a manufacturer through coordinated policy implementation.

Economic integration must be deepened through accelerated AfCFTA implementation, guided by binding timelines and harmonised policies across Regional Economic Coordination Zones. This prevents external powers from exploiting individual markets while creating the scale necessary for meaningful economic independence. A Continental Infrastructure Master Plan should prioritise intra-African connectivity over externally driven projects designed for extraction, supporting development that serves African rather than foreign interests.

Towards a common foreign policy: Coordinated External Engagement

Africa's approach to international partnerships must be restructured to prioritise unified positions over fragmented bilateral deals. The emerging multipolar order, coupled with the increasing demand for Africa's critical minerals and the continent's diplomatic and political support, as well as the AU's membership in the G20, necessitates a collective framework for international relations. Continental Partnership Frameworks should replace the proliferation of 'Africa Plus One' summits, ensuring that major agreements— whether in infrastructure, mining, or security—are negotiated collectively. This shifts engagement from fifty-four individual negotiations to coordinated continental engagement that maximises collective leverage.

Similar to the Common African Defence and Security Policy, African states should develop, negotiate and adopt a common pan-African foreign policy. A Continental Strategic Assessment Centre should analyse global actors' strategies and coordinate Africa's response, helping the continent engage proactively rather than reactively. This corrects the current information asymmetry, where, for example, African partners such as China, the EU, and the US regularly release comprehensive Africa strategy documents. In contrast, African countries have little coherent strategy for engaging major powers, ensuring unified analysis and coordinated responses to external strategic initiatives.

Security Coordination and Collective Defence

The developments in various regions such as the Sahel, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes highlight the weaknesses and gaps in the prevailing peace and security order of the continent. Although African states adopted the Common African Defence and Security Policy within the AU framework, this policy is not reflected in the practice of member states, including in terms of the kind of security alliances and commitments they make with external powers.

Security coordination requires transformation from bilateral to binding multilateral defence agreements. For this, there is a need for the AU to initiate engagement with member states to align national defence and security policy and practice with the Common Defence and Security Policy. This ensures that individual countries engage in security cooperation with external powers while respecting the terms of the Policy. This will also shield individual countries from manipulation while eliminating opportunities for external actors to exploit individual security vulnerabilities. Continental security frameworks must prioritise collective defence over individual arrangements that fragment continental coherence.

Binding mutual defence obligations must replace the current patchwork of bilateral security arrangements that allow external powers to play African countries against each other through competing military partnerships. The AU STC on Defence and Security and the PSC should hold at least annual meetings to review the implementation of the Common Defence and Security Policy and discuss ways to address implementation challenges.

Transparency and Accountability Systems

Building on the AU legal instruments, such as the human rights instruments and the Anti-Corruption Convention, binding governance standards must mandate transparency in external partnerships, with compulsory disclosure of major deals to prevent fragmentation of continental coherence through secretive bilateral arrangements. This creates institutional mechanisms that prioritise continental and collective over individual optimisation while ensuring that external engagements serve collective rather than narrow political interests.

Continental accountability mechanisms must require disclosure of all significant external partnerships and prevent agreements that undermine continental coordination through mandatory review processes for significant bilateral arrangements.

Implementation Strategy and Political Economy

Implementation requires acknowledging that current elites often benefit from fragmentation through bilateral deals and personal relationships with external powers. Success demands creating incentive structures that make coordination more profitable than individual opportunism, while building coalitions of leaders who prioritise long-term continental influence over short-term bilateral individual gains.

V. CONCLUSION

Africa's current strategic fragmentation undermines its potential to emerge as a coherent and influential actor in global affairs. Despite its demographic and resource

advantages, the continent remains divided, with individual states pursuing uncoordinated partnerships that reinforce dependency and diminish collective agency. Transforming this fragmentation into continental power demands bold institutional reforms, unified external engagement strategies, and a reimagined partnership between states and society.

At the core of this transformation lies the need for intellectual decolonisation, committed pan-African leadership, and binding institutional mechanisms that go beyond the voluntary cooperation characterising existing continental frameworks.

A Continental Strategic Council with enforcement powers and financial incentives for compliance should harness consensus-based systems into credible coordination and binding outcomes. Equally urgent is the creation of a Continental Resource Authority to leverage Africa's vast critical mineral wealth through collective bargaining and standardised pricing, ending fragmented competition that perpetuates dependency. To achieve genuine autonomy, the continent must also operationalise its financial institutions that, thus far, remain on paper but are urgently needed for the changing global development system.

Ultimately, the choice before Africa is stark but achievable: embrace strategic coordination and continental sovereignty or remain a fragmented terrain for external rivalry and manipulation. Success requires institutional frameworks that make unity rewarding and disunity costly. Without such transformation, Africa will continue to be approached by global powers not as a collective force but as a collection of disparate states that can be manipulated into serving global powers, perpetuating its marginalisation in an increasingly multipolar world. What is needed is not only a new architecture of power, but also the political will to subordinate national opportunism to shared continental purpose, embracing Kwame Nkrumah's vision of non-alignment. The time to choose between fragmentation and future relevance is not now; it is long overdue.

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ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

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ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

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