SECTION VIII: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 18

Reflections on Trump 2.0, Africa and the struggle for agency in the emerging world reorder

Christopher Isike & Samuel Oyewole
African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS-UP),
Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Overview of Trump 2.0

The return of Donald J Trump (Trump 2.0) as the President of the United States (US) has significantly transformed both the domestic and external politics of the world's most powerful nation, with notable implications for the emerging global order, disorder, and reorder. Indeed, Trump 2.0 signals the intensification of a deeper structural shift in world politics: the weakening of liberal internationalism, the resurgence of economic nationalism, the fragmentation of global governance, the return of great power competition and the emergence of a more uncertain and contested global order. In contrast to his predecessors and the well-known traditions of the US, Trump has introduced unprecedented openness and transparency to foreign policy, with previously secret diplomatic communications, negotiations and interactions becoming more openly available to the media and public and therefore more easily scrutinised by them. In many cases, however, these diplomatic engagements have been conducted in ways that convey strategic messages and reflect emerging global geopolitical realities, while challenging some fundamental principles of diplomacy and the US-centric world order that emerged after World War II and survived the Cold War.

In just about ten months into his second administration, Trump has significantly shaped US foreign policy and the emerging world order through his approach to trade, tariffs, immigration, alliances, multilateralism, foreign aid, climate change, critical minerals, democracy, military power, peace and conflict

resolution, among others. When dealing with its trading partners, including Canada, Mexico and China, the new administration employs tariffs to address imbalanced trade relations and reinvent the national economy, as well as to compel political compliance. In the fight against illegal or irregular immigration, Trump imposed a stringent immigration policy with a militarised border and internal policing, leading to mass arrests and deportations of suspected offenders. While this policy is intended to remove illegal immigrants from the US and deter further inflows, the way it has been implemented is seen as questionable in human rights terms and against the rule of law, alarming tourists and threatening the ability of the US to attract global intellectuals and innovators.

The Trump administration has pursued a complex admixture of nationalism, unilateralism, bilateralism and transnationalism in US international relations. Trump has prioritised an America First policy that focuses on domestic benefits in ways that reshape globalised value systems and the traditional rule-based international order. He has reviewed US global commitments and defunded USAID, along with multilateral organisations on climate change, health and culture, with notable consequences for most African and developing countries. With little or no pretence of commitment to, and open denunciation of, global goods, Trump has unapologetically pursued US interests in global affairs. His transactional and deal-making approach has swung US foreign policy away from socio-cultural favouritism of democratic states and rule-based order towards personal idiosyncrasy and rational predictability based on the business logic of loss and gain. This development has improved US relations with the Gulf states, Argentina, Hungary and Russia, while relations with traditional allies, such as Canada and Europe, are rocky.

On the security front, Trump has displayed an inclination towards peace and a disposition for war He has argued that the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts happened because of the weakness of his predecessor and promised to end them immediately. In his commitments to peace, he has made notable efforts to resolve these two conflicts with varying degrees of success. Additionally, Trump has played a role in resolving conflicts between India and Pakistan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and Iran (2025), Thailand and Cambodia and Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the military operations of the US in Iran, Yemen, Venezuela and Nigeria shows a inclination for war. The expansionist and imperial ambitions of Trump over Canada, Greenland, Gaza

and Panama also question his peaceful disposition and tend to rationalise and further embolden Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine, Benjamin Netanyahu's war in Gaza and Lebanon and Xi Jinping's expansionist ambition in Taiwan.

Trump is geopolitically disposed and increasingly informed about great power competition, as he comes to terms with China as a near-peer competitor. Through regulations, tariffs and sanctions, Trump has intensified efforts to contain the rise of China and its access to advanced technologies, while also reducing US reliance on its competitors (Momoh and Oyewole 2026; Wehner 2026; Bowen 2026). However, this measure has sometimes backfired, as when China imposed reciprocal measures against the US, notably in the areas of critical minerals and soybeans, with mutually painful socioeconomic effects. In response, the US has intensified its partnership with Japan, South Korea and Australia, among others, to advance its China strategy. In addition, Trump recognises Russia, as well as China and North Korea, as emerging nuclear threats to the US. As a result of these factors, Trump favours a renewed arms race, including the testing of nuclear weapons in violation of the great power moratorium maintained since the 1990s.

Overall, across the chapters in both volumes of this book, one central argument emerges clearly: Trumpism is not an anomaly but a symptom of systemic transformation. As several contributors correctly note in their chapters, Trump's isolationist and transactional tendencies may inadvertently hasten the emergence of a post-unipolar order. By undermining multilateral institutions, weakening traditional alliances, weaponising tariffs, politicising aid and retreating from aspects of global governance, the United States risks eroding the very liberal order it once led. In this sense, Trump 2.0 may contribute less to American restoration than to the diffusion of global power.

Indeed, Trump 2.0 must be understood within the context of an emerging global system in which power is increasingly diffused, strategic alignments are fluid and states are compelled to navigate overlapping spheres of influence amid deepening uncertainty. At one level, the return of Trumpist foreign policy thinking signifies continuity with earlier patterns of American unilateralism and exceptionalism. The 'America First' doctrine reflects a persistent scepticism towards multilateralism, international institutions, climate commitments, migration regimes and global governance frameworks. Yet Trump 2.0 is also qualitatively different from Trump 1.0. For example, since then, the international environment has profoundly changed. The war in Ukraine, intensifying US-

China rivalry, the ongoing US-Israel war in Iran which has destabilised the Middle East, the militarisation of technological competition, disruptions in global supply chains and renewed great power contestation over critical minerals and strategic maritime routes have fundamentally altered the geopolitical terrain.

Implications for Africa's agency

It is against this fast-evolving world order that this book offers a concise yet diverse perspective from the least-heard voices and the most underestimated continent in international relations: Africa. The book begins with a simple but profoundly important premise: Africa is neither absent from global politics nor silent about the transformations reshaping the international system. Africans observe, interpret, contest and respond to world affairs from diverse historical experiences and strategic locations. Yet African perspectives are too often marginalised within mainstream analyses of global order and United States foreign policy. This book intervenes precisely at that intellectual and political juncture.

The contributors demonstrate that Trump's 'America First' doctrine has profound implications not only for America's allies and rivals, but also for Africa's place in the evolving global system. Whether through tariff wars, immigration restrictions, critical minerals competition, aid retrenchment, geopolitical realignments, climate scepticism or transactional diplomacy, Trump 2.0 is accelerating pressures that compel African states to rethink long-standing assumptions about global partnerships, development trajectories and strategic dependence.

Yet this book does not present Africa merely as a victim of external forces. On the contrary, one of its most significant contributions lies in foregrounding African agency in a rapidly changing world. The chapters collectively reveal that Africa is increasingly navigating a world no longer defined solely by Western dominance. The rise of BRICS, the expansion of South-South co-operation, growing Chinese influence, renewed Russian engagement, surging Gulf investments and shifting middle-power politics are creating new strategic opportunities, but also dilemmas, for African states. Trump 2.0 enters this already volatile geopolitical environment as both disruptor and accelerator.

The two volumes of this book cover the different ways and dimensions by which Trump has shaped and reshaped US foreign policy and the world order,

particularly from African perspectives. Initiated by the ACSUS-UP, the book project began three weeks into Trump's second administration (February 2025). The last contribution to the two volumes was received seven months later (September 2025), while this concluding chapter was completed in November, with some revision thereafter. In offering an early prognosis of Trump 2.0 and its consequences for US foreign policy and world order, contributors have had to evaluate the pros and cons of engaging early with evolving issues. Data inadequacy, shortage of materials, time constraint, trend uncertainty and event trajectory unpredictability make a conclusive analysis of increasingly dynamic themes and fast-moving events challenging. However, contributors have drawn from historical data and Trump 1.0 records, along with early indicators of US foreign policy under the new administration and the resultant international reactions and responses, to illuminate paths to understanding the emerging world order and Africa's position in this context.

There is broad consensus among the contributors that Africa is facing a fragmented world order, characterised by uncertainty, as the structural reordering of the post-US hegemony continues to evolve. The emerging order has created notable disorder in Africa, with spiralling decline in US foreign aid, preferential trade relations, climate funding, medical and humanitarian support, democratic crusade, value-based capacity building and rule-based engagements on the continent. Opinions vary on whether this development is an opportunity or a challenge for Africa. Many contributors view Trump 2.0 and its effects as one of the biggest challenges that African countries have needed to confront, as its ramifications stretch from political stability, peace, conflict and security to socioeconomic and human development questions. In contrast, others consider Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and the associated world (re)order, a rare opportunity to develop and demonstrate the potency of African agency for addressing regional development and security questions without undue external intervention, and in playing a major role in international relations. The extent to which Africa can convert this challenging period into opportunity is a subject for future research. What is clear, though, from the two volumes of this book is that Trump 2.0 and the emerging world order create a paradox for Africa.

On the one hand, a fragmented international order increases vulnerability. African economies remain deeply exposed to external shocks, commodity dependence, debt pressures, technological asymmetries and geopolitical

manipulation. Trump-era protectionism threatens export markets. Immigration crackdowns affect remittances, mobility and educational exchanges. Reductions in aid and development assistance risk weakening already fragile sectors across parts of the continent. Moreover, the intensifying US-China rivalry could transform Africa into a theatre of strategic competition in ways that are reminiscent of earlier eras of external domination. On the other hand, systemic transition also creates room for manoeuvre. A recurring insight across the book is that the decline of Western hegemony creates strategic openings for Africa to co-ordinate its continental and regional platforms, diversify partnerships, strengthen bargaining capacity and pursue greater autonomy in global affairs.

In essence, Trump's retreat from aspects of international leadership has, ironically, created diplomatic and economic spaces for African states to deepen engagements with alternative centres of power, while simultaneously rethinking continental integration and self-reliance (Isike and Schoeman 2023; Amusan and Oyewole 2017; Ekpo et al. 2026). This is particularly evident in the discussions on economic nationalism, critical minerals, industrialisation and trade. Africa's vast reserves of cobalt, lithium, manganese, platinum and rare earth minerals position the continent at the centre of the global energy transition and technological competition. Yet the chapters caution against reproducing historical extractive patterns under new geopolitical conditions. The central challenge for Africa is not simply participation in global supply chains, but moving from extraction to beneficiation, industrialisation and technological sovereignty.

Similarly, the analyses of immigration and security reveal how Trump 2.0 sharpens the contradictions of globalisation. While capital, technology and military influence move relatively freely across borders, African migrants continue to encounter securitised mobility regimes and exclusionary nationalism. The implications extend beyond migration itself: they speak to enduring inequalities in global citizenship, labour mobility and human dignity within the contemporary international system.

The security-focused chapters also expose the geopolitical selectivity embedded in contemporary global governance. From the Sahel to the Indo-Pacific and Western Sahara, security partnerships increasingly reflect strategic competition rather than principled commitments to peace, democracy and development. Trump 2.0 reinforces this trend by privileging transactional alliances and short-term strategic interests over normative internationalism.

This has important implications for states in Africa seeking sustainable security partnerships amid rising global instability.

This aligns with most contributions in the two volumes of this book, which contend that African agencies are mainly responsible for or at least complicit in the numerous developmental and security challenges, as well as the continent's responses to the harsh realities of Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and the current world (re)order. At the same time, African agencies, national governments and regional initiatives are underdeveloped, under-resourced, unprepared, overestimated and underperforming in the face of increasingly complex development, security and international affairs. Alas, in the face of such complexity and uncertainty, Africa remains largely reactive and not proactive. As such, while the US and many other great and medium powers across the world have developed and pursued their own strategies towards Africa, the continent and its member states lack any notable strategy or coherent framework of engagement in the international system. Consequently, the situation of the continent reflects the saying that 'those who stand for nothing fall for anything'.

Concluding remarks and broad recommendations

This book set out to interrogate the implications of Donald Trump's second administration for Africa and the wider international system. Across its chapters, a central theme emerges with striking clarity: Trump 2.0 is not merely about the return of an individual leader to the White House. Rather, it represents the possible consolidation of a broader historical transition in world politics—one marked by the erosion of liberal internationalism, the intensification of geopolitical competition, the resurgence of transactional diplomacy and the acceleration of a fragmented and contested world order. In this context, perhaps the most intellectually significant contribution made by this book is its insistence that Africa must not merely react to global reordering but must actively attempt to shape it.

This requires moving beyond dependency-oriented foreign policy frameworks towards strategic pragmatism rooted in continental priorities. The future of Africa in the emerging order will depend less on the benevolence of great powers than on the continent's own institutional coherence, diplomatic co-ordination and developmental vision. Several chapters therefore correctly

emphasise the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area, regional integration, industrial policy, economic diversification and collective bargaining mechanisms. These are not simply economic instruments; they are geopolitical necessities in an age of intensifying strategic competition.

Likewise, the book highlights the need for African states to avoid binary geopolitical alignments. The contemporary international system no longer fits neatly into Cold War categories of bloc politics. Africa's strategic interests are better served through flexible multi-alignment, issue-based coalitions and calibrated diplomacy that maximises opportunities across competing centres of power while safeguarding continental autonomy.

Of note, the book also contributes to the decolonisation of international relations scholarship. Too often, analyses of global order treat Africa as peripheral to the 'real' business of world politics. In rejecting this epistemic marginalisation, the book demonstrates that African scholars are not merely consumers of theory produced elsewhere, but active interpreters of global transformations capable of generating original analytical insights into power, order, resistance and agency.

Trump 2.0, therefore, forces Africa to confront difficult but necessary questions: Can the continent convert geopolitical competition into developmental leverage? Can states in Africa resist becoming proxies in great power rivalries? Can continental institutions provide coherent strategic direction in an increasingly fragmented world? Can Africa transform demographic growth, natural resource wealth and strategic location into genuine geopolitical influence? While these questions remain open, what is clear, is that the old certainties are fading. The liberal international order that emerged after the Cold War is under immense strain. Multilateralism is weakening. Economic nationalism is rising. Strategic distrust is deepening. Global governance institutions are increasingly contested. The world is moving towards a more fragmented, unstable and competitive order, the final shape of which remains uncertain.

In this interregnum, Africa occupies a pivotal position as it is no longer merely an object of humanitarian concern or development discourse. Africa is becoming central to debates on energy transition, digital infrastructure, migration, climate justice, maritime security, global markets and institutional reform (Adekeye et al. 2024; Isike 2022). This centrality creates both opportunity and danger. Without strategic co-ordination, Africa risks renewed external exploitation under the guise of partnership and investment. But with coherent leadership and

continental vision, Africa can leverage this moment to redefine its role in world politics. Ultimately, the message of this volume is both cautionary and hopeful.

Trump 2.0 may deepen disorder in the international system, but it also exposes the fragility of old hierarchies and opens new possibilities for global reconfiguration. Whether Africa emerges from this transition more dependent or more autonomous will depend fundamentally on the choices made by African leaders, institutions, intellectuals and societies themselves. The task before Africa is therefore not simply to survive the new world (re)order, but to shape it. To do this, the book arrives at five broad recommendations. First, there is a need to strengthen the African Union and regional economic communities as platforms for collective bargaining and policy co-ordination. A change of mindset is needed for these agencies to develop, activate and demonstrate their capacity to take responsibility and play appropriate, leading roles in addressing African challenges. Expecting so much from and relying so heavily on external players to address African problems exposes the continent and makes it highly vulnerable to the uncertainty of international developments, as is evident in the case of Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and associated order. This requires holistic reflection, adopting a whole-of-government approach, reassessing all sections and mobilising the continent's human and material resources, guided by research-driven strategies for development, security and foreign relations.

Second, and relatedly, Africa, through its regional structures/platforms needs to develop Common African Positions (CAPs) and frameworks of engagement with the US and all great powers (Isike 2022; Isike and Oyewole 2024). This includes the formulation of policy and strategic documents to guide the continent's relations with these powers. Such CAPs will offer all 54 countries in Africa the opportunity to benefit from bloc bargaining in international relations, especially in engagements with the US and other powerful economies. While it is challenging for individual African states to influence the direction of US interests and foreign policy under Trump 2.0, especially on key issues, they still have considerable latitude to influence developments on the continent, because of the bargaining power inherent in operating in a bloc. For example, a CAP on superpower access to the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) can become a useful leverage for obtaining favourable concessions on security. Such a CAP will also accelerate the implementation of ACFTA as a mechanism for reducing structural dependency and expanding intra-African economic resilience.

Third, beyond political co-operation and sociocultural solidarity, there is an urgent and overriding need to further prioritise and pursue intra-African financing, investment, trade, migration, climate support, research, capacity building, technological transfer and peace and security initiatives at the local (subnational), national, bilateral and multilateral (subregional, continental and global) levels. The work of Afrexim Bank and the African Development Bank should be supported and upscaled to drive this imperative.

Fourth, the continent needs to actively and constructively diversify its international relations while minimising dependency on any one of the great powers. While Africa is encouraged to find ways to improve relations with the US under Trump 2.0 and beyond, the continent also needs to expand its engagements with other major powers in Europe, as well as China, India and Japan, and to explore opportunities for strategic co-operation with middle and emerging powers as well as small states globally.

Finally, all states in Africa must invest in knowledge production, technological capabilities and diplomatic expertise, capable of engaging an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. In this process, Africa is strongly encouraged to sponsor research aimed at creating knowledge that will help foster evidence-based policy engagement with great powers (Abrahamsen 2017; Kupe and Isike 2022). Beyond supporting universities across the continent to establish study centres that study major international powers such as the US, China and Russia, national governments should actively fund these centres to produce the requisite knowledge for partnering as equals with these powers. Increasingly, there is a need for Africans to turn a critical analytical African focus on nations and societies that are major world powers and important actors in Africa's present and future. Obtaining a critical analytical understanding of another society such as the US, with its complex and complicated history, is also a way of gaining a better understanding of ourselves as Africans and of developing pan-Africanist agency and common positions in the continent's dealings with the external environment, and, in particular, an actor as important and prominent as the US.

Ultimately, the political choices made in African capitals will determine whether Africa remains on the margins of a changing world order or whether it shapes it. Great power competition alone does not produce development, sovereignty or transformation. These outcomes require visionary leadership, institutional coherence, social investment and continental solidarity. During

the interregnum wrought, the weakening old order persists, and uncertainty will define global politics. Alliances will shift as institutions get contested, and economic nationalism will continue to rise, leading to the intensifying of strategic competition. Yet amid this turbulence lies the possibility of reimagining Africa's place in the world. The central message of this book is therefore both cautionary and hopeful: Trump 2.0 may deepen global instability, but it may also accelerate the decline of hierarchical global arrangements that historically marginalised Africa. Whether this transition results in renewed dependency or enhanced African agency will depend on the continent's capacity to act collectively, strategically and autonomously in an increasingly fragmented world.

References

Abrahamsen, R. 2017. Africa and international relations: Assembling Africa, studying the world. *African Affairs*, 116(462): 125–139. *https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw071*

Amusan, L. and Oyewole, S. 2017. The quest for hegemony and the future of African solutions to African development problems: Lessons from headways in the African security sector. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52(1): 21—33. https://doi.org/*10.1177/0021909614560242*

Bowen, Y. 2026. Assessing China's united front strategy under Trump 2.0: The case of the Liberation Day tariffs. *Asian Affairs*, 57(2): 247-260. h*ttps://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2026.2630889*

Ekpo, C., Oyewole, S., and Isike, C. (2026). Trump 2.0 and the dynamics of the US soft power in Africa, International Review of Sociology. *https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2026.2710610*

Ekup-Nse, A.D. 2024. *Policy Brief 4: The US-Africa leaders' summit: A review.* Pretoria: African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of Pretoria. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.up.ac.za/acsus/news/policy-brief-4-us-africa-leaders-summit-review*. (Accessed 20 March 2026).

Isike, C. 2022. US-Africa summit: Four things African leaders should try to get out of it. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/analysis-us-africa-summit-four-things-african-leaders-should-try-to-get-out-of-it-20221214*. (Accessed 20 March 2026).

Isike, C and Schoeman, M. 2023. Group hegemonic leadership as an analytical

framework for understanding regional hegemony in Africa. *African and Asian Studies,* 22(1-2): 8–38. *https://doi.org/10.1163/15692108-12341579*

Isike, C. and Oyewole, S. 2024. *Donald Trump will put America first: what does that mean for Africa?* [Online]. Available at: *https://theconversation.com/donald-trump-will-put-america-first-what-does-that-mean-for-africa-244050.* (Accessed 20 March 2026).

Kupe, T and Isike, C. 2022. South African universities are training their gaze on the United States: Why it matters". *Daily Maverick,* 28 April. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-28-south-african-universities-are-training-their-gaze-on-the-united-states-why-it-matters/*. (Accessed 20 March 2026).

Momoh, Z. and Oyewole, S. 2026. Asia in the Eyes of America: Adventure into Washington's Economic Nationalism. *Asia in World Politics: Essays in Honour of Professor Jide Owoeye at 70,* edited by L. Amusan. (ed). Ibadan: College Press. pp. 65—84. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/406177069_Asia_in_the_Eyes_of_America_Adventure_into_Washington's_Economic_Nationalism.* (Accessed 25 April 2026).

Wehner, L. E. 2026. The narration of status in far-right populist foreign policy: The United States of Trump 2.0. *Journal of International Relations and Development,* 29(4). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-026-00370-3