# CHAPTER 4

## Strategically Leveraging the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77 to Build an Afro-Sino Coalition to Advance the Development of a Multipolar World Order

**Mandira Bagwandeen**
Stellenbosch University, South Africa

### Introduction

As countries around the world, especially in the Global South, attempt to navigate an international system in flux and shifting towards a multipolar world order, they face not only multiple climatic, environmental, security, socio-economic and health challenges, but also have to respond to growing geopolitical tensions between the US-led West and revisionist powers such as China (and Russia). The neoliberal international politico-economic order that the US and its Western allies built after the Cold War, largely for their own benefit, is fracturing as emerging and revisionist powers push for a multipolar world and for reforming global governance structures that are failing to respond equitably to the various polycrises affecting the world. Amid Africa's urgent need for fair and effective representation in global institutions that better reflect African interests and needs, without being pressured to choose sides in geopolitical struggles, many African countries are sticking to the Cold War-era strategy of remaining non-aligned. In this context, African countries are turning to the NAM and G77 – both of which served as crucial platforms to articulate Global South development interests and positions on geopolitical issues during the Cold War – to once again serve as bastions of non-alignment, specifically active non-alignment (also known as active neutrality).[1] Given China's ties to the NAM and G77, and its shared vision, shared with many African states, of a more inclusive and multipolar world, both these institutions

can serve as strategic platforms for Chinese and African efforts to build an Afro-Sino coalition to advance a multipolar world order that better serves and works in the interests of both regions and the wider Global South. However, how this coalition develops will reveal whether the principles of active non-alignment – especially Africa's autonomy and capacity to act independently – are truly upheld, or if African countries will once again be beholden to a dominant external partner. This time, that partner would be from the Global South, not the Global North.

Born from the Bandung Conference (also known as the Asian-African Conference) held in Indonesia in 1955, the NAM was officially established at the Belgrade Conference in Yugoslavia (now Serbia) in 1961. Since then, this intergovernmental organisation has mirrored the changing political and economic dynamics of the Global South (Xiong 2012). Initially the NAM was characterised as a loosely organised group of countries (sharing experiences of colonialism and Western subjugation) that aimed to assert defensive non-alignment as a tactical strategy to navigate the Cold War. Over time, it has evolved into a more proactive and 'offensive alliance network' practising assertive non-alignment (Xiong 2012). Beyond representing much of the developing world's stance on geopolitical issues, the NAM has increasingly focused on promoting economic cooperation among its members, seeking to promote trade, investment and development, and to address a wide range of global challenges, including (but not limited to) climate and environmental issues, terrorism, and social and humanitarian needs (Non-Aligned Movement n.d.). Of its 120 members, all 54 African states are members of the NAM, and several African countries have hosted NAM Summits, including Egypt (1964), Zambia (1970), Algeria (1973), Angola (1992), South Africa (1998), Zimbabwe (2003) and Uganda (2024). Uganda is currently the Chair of the NAM (from 2024 to 2027). This is an important role, as the chairing country helps set the agenda and guide the movement.

Supporting and complementing the NAM's efforts to promote economic and development cooperation among its members is the G77, an intergovernmental organisation of developing countries established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1964, during the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Considered the

economic arm of the NAM, the group has aimed to challenge Western-designed institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and to promote a more equitable international order. At the G77's first ministerial summit, hosted by Algeria in October 1967, the group adopted the Algiers Charter, advocating for sweeping reforms to address the challenges faced by developing countries in a global economic system leaning heavily in the West's favour (Adebajo 2024).

Although the G77 retains its name for historical significance, as of 2024 its membership totalled 133 states, with all 54 African countries as members (The Group of 77 at the United Nations n.d.). Several African countries, including Egypt (1971–1973; 1984–1985; 2018), Tunisia (1978–1979), Algeria (1981–1982), Tanzania (1997), Nigeria (2000) and South Africa (2006; 2015), have held the chairmanship of the G77. Alongside its chairmanship of the NAM, Uganda is chairing the G77 from 2024 to 2027; in January 2024, it hosted the Third South Summit, becoming the first African country to do so. These summits are the highest-level meetings of the G77. The first and second South Summits were held by Cuba (2000) and Qatar (2005). These summits bring together Heads of State and Governments to discuss key issues and set the group's strategic direction. Hosting a South Summit demonstrates a strong commitment to the G77's goals and provides the host country with an opportunity to showcase its leadership. Additionally, African countries are members of the G77 Bureau, which is the group's executive arm that supports the Chair in carrying out its functions, shaping the G77's agenda and priorities and facilitating communication among members. To promote geographical balance and represent the diverse interests of group members, the Bureau includes representatives from different regional groups within the G77.

The G77 continues to address the disadvantages and marginalisation developing countries face in the international economic system by advocating for and negotiating more equitable and favourable terms for these countries in global trade and finance. Although the G77 is not a United Nations (UN) organ or agency – rather, it is the 'largest intergovernmental organisation of developing countries at the UN'

(The Group of 77 at the United Nations n.d.) – it is deeply intertwined within the UN system and UNCTAD framework. It prioritises activities within the UN, especially those related to economic development, trade and international cooperation, and promotes South-South development cooperation. Essentially, the G77 functions as a platform for developing countries to coordinate their positions and negotiate collectively within the UN system (UN Chronicle 2014). Over the past decade, recent G77 Chairs – many of which were held by African countries – have criticised the Global North and the current international order more assertively. For example, Egypt accused American–Euro powers of having a 'monopoly' and of 'disregard' for Global South 'peoples and communities', and Guinea criticised the Global North for maintaining a 'system of exploitation' (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Escalating its longstanding criticism, Cuba branded the current system as 'unjust, irrational, and abusive' and as 'replicating a pattern of modern colonialism' (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Although the group may not broadly share such strong, assertive language, it speaks to increased tensions around UN reform, where Global North countries seek to maintain the upper hand (Baumann and Novoselova 2024).

In an effort to challenge the Western-dominated international system, the NAM and especially the G77 have nurtured a 'unique and enduring alliance' with China (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). This relationship, driven by vigorous North–South debates in the UN General Assembly, deepened after the G77 played a key role in de-seating Taiwan from the UN in 1971, allowing the People's Republic of China (PRC) to take over its seat (Baumann and Novoselova 2024). Considering itself the largest developing country in the world – although this is debatable depending on the indices used to measure development – China's interests closely align with those of other developing countries. As President Xi Jinping stated, 'As a developing country and a member of the Global South, China breathes the same breath with other developing countries and pursues a shared future with them' (Shin 2024). Like much of the Global South, China's history of Western subjugation, opposition to imperialism and hegemony, preference for multipolarity, and goals of economic development and prosperity have fostered close cooperation with the NAM and G77.

As China's political, economic and security power has grown over the years, its self-identification as the 'largest developing country' has steadily evolved, necessitating a more assertive yet pragmatic diplomatic strategy to reflect its emerging big-power status in global affairs (Hu 2016). To achieve this, China has largely positioned itself as championing developing economies in multilateral organisations and leading the Global South; effectively progressing from what Wang et al. (2022) describe as a participant-practitioner-leader matriculation in multilateral forums. Although China is neither an official member of the NAM nor a 'full member' of the G77, it closely monitors the developments of both organisations. However, the G77 is often referred to in events and official statements as 'The Group of 77 and China' or 'G77+ China', and the country is officially listed on the group's website as a member, even though it does not identify as such. This reflects the unique and close partnership between China and the G77, and the arrangement allows China to cooperate loosely with the group, giving it flexibility in its foreign policy and autonomy to pursue its own interests. China's close cooperation with the G77 enables it to increase its global influence (especially amplifying its voice on Global South issues and expanding its influence within the UN system), promoting its economic development model and agenda, as well as gaining diplomatic support. Indicative of its loose partnership with the G77, China often refers to itself as a 'friend' of the organisation, sometimes providing aid and financial assistance (The People's Republic of China [The PRC], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA] 2006; 2013). For example, to support Uganda in hosting the NAM and G77 summits in January 2024, China provided 70 SUVs to help transport delegates (Xinhua 2023).

China is so closely connected with the NAM and G77 that, during their respective summits, special representatives of the Chinese government are present and actively participate; their speeches often reaffirm China's support for the developing world and its alignment with the Global South. China is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council that is regularly invited to the groups' meetings. At the 19th NAM Summit and the G77's Third South Summit, both held in January 2024 in Kampala, Uganda, Liu Guozhong, China's Vice Premier, attended as China's special

representative. Moreover, the Kampala Declaration explicitly recognised China as a partner of the NAM and G77, stating that in ongoing efforts to promote 'engagements and partnerships between G77 and China and NAM … the ultimate purpose of enhancing coordination among both groupings and capitalizing on their synergies and commonalities of views … is to address matters of common interest to the Global South' (Non-Aligned Movement [NAM] 2024: 3).

China seems to strategically leverage these platforms to not only assert itself as the leader of the Global South but also use the Global South countries strategically by understanding and influencing their perspectives on geopolitical inflection points (such as the Russia–Ukraine war, the Israel–Palestine war, and the reformation of multilateral institutions), effectively positioning itself as the leader of a new emerging multipolar world order (Nyabiage 2024). China is well aware that the NAM and G77 represent more than half of the world's population and that, through strategic engagement with this 'critical mass', it could play a significant role in reforming the America–Euro-led international order (Nyabiage 2024). However, the NAM and G77 have produced mixed results and have mostly been unable to reshape the US-dominated post-Second World War economic order (Adebajo 2024). This is largely reflected in the UN Pact for the Future (2024), which aims to address global challenges and strengthen multilateralism but faced significant criticism for failing to adequately address the interests of the Global South. It fell short in several key areas – including provisions on concrete mechanisms for debt relief or restructuring, access to finance (especially for developing countries) to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – and it only marginally focuses on reform of the UN Security Council and Bretton Woods Institutions (Botticelli 2024; Motamedi 2024).

Beijing is acutely aware of Africa's 'massive voting clout' in international organisations. In 1971, of the 76 countries that voted at the UN General Assembly for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to replace the Republic of China (ROC) (Taiwan) as the sole legitimate representative of China at the UN, 26 African countries voted in favour of the PRC, accounting for just over a third of the votes. Besides showing support for African countries in other multilateral organisations such as the UN and

WTO, Beijing needs to cooperate, especially with the African members in the NAM and G77, to strategically influence these organisations' support for China's rise as a major power amidst changing geopolitical dynamics and an evolving international system. Since African countries form the largest regional bloc of non-aligned countries, it would be remiss of Chinese geopolitical strategists not to factor in the influence and weight of the NAM and G77's Africa group.

African countries can also leverage the NAM and G77 to shape and influence relations with China for their benefit. Through collective action within the NAM and G77, African countries can negotiate more favourable terms in their economic engagements with China, including trade agreements, investment deals and loan conditions. Aligning their interests and expectations pushes China to consider the concerns of a large bloc rather than individual nations. Africa as a whole can also advocate for common standards and principles to guide and improve China's relations with the region. This could involve environmental protection measures, labour rights and increased transparency in loan agreements. Such efforts would encourage China to adopt more responsible and sustainable practices in its investments and projects, helping to reduce potential negative impacts and ensuring that Chinese engagement supports Africa's long-term development (in line with the African Union's [AU's] Agenda 2063). In the spirit of South–South cooperation, African countries should strive for a more balanced relationship with China by advocating for genuine and more technology and knowledge transfer from China to advance their economies and address global challenges. Through the G77, the Africa group can facilitate dialogue with China on debt restructuring, relief, more sustainable lending practices and reforming the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. This could likely improve African countries' chances of obtaining better loan terms and reducing the risk of debt crises. Achieving tangible results will depend on the effectiveness of strategies used to engage with China within the NAM and G77 frameworks, and the ability of African countries to maintain unity and coordinate their actions within these organisations.

In the context of Africans advocating for a multipolar world order (echoing China) and simultaneously seeking to make significant

development strides while addressing multiple global challenges, African countries must be proactive in setting agendas and clearly voicing their concerns within the NAM and G77. To do this, open communication channels and diplomatic engagement should be maintained with all African members and the ex officio member, China. Overall, this will require robust African agency within the NAM and G77, especially when engaging with China to ensure that Africa en bloc is not simply being used to advance Chinese geopolitical and geostrategic interests.

## The Ten Bandung Principles and Sino-Africa relations

Chinese efforts to develop relations with African states date back to the Bandung Conference, attended by newly independent African and Asian states seeking to foster closer political, economic and cultural cooperation and collectively oppose colonialism. Many participating countries at the Bandung Conference were 'young nations with little to no military power, and thus no ability to form a bloc. However, by positioning themselves as a group and resisting the existing East–West blocs sustaining the Cold War era, Bandung [-affiliated countries] initiated a movement that mirrored the concept of multipolarity' (Mbaidjol 2018: 25). Until this conference, China had had minimal contact with Africa; Beijing had a relatively clean slate that it could use to build ties with African countries. Before the Bandung Conference of 1955, Zhou Enlai (then China's Foreign Minister) introduced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 1954. These included mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutually beneficial cooperation; and peaceful coexistence. Emerging after its Century of Humiliation – a period in China's history of intervention and subjugation by Western powers and Japan – the country 'needed to base its foreign policy around a set of principles that would embody its principled independence in world affairs. The Five Principles were borne of postcolonial solidarity, and Chinese leaders embraced them for both their moral weight and strategic flexibility' (Panda 2014). As China began evolving into a major power at the turn of the century, it continued referencing the Five Principles to justify its voting record at the

UN Security Council or to support its condemnation of interventionist Western powers.

All five of these principles were included in the Ten Bandung Principles – a framework for cooperation and solidarity that the NAM later adopted to guide its efforts in fostering cooperation among members not aligned with the US or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the Cold War. China used its experience of Western subjugation as a common denominator and prescribed to Zhou En Lai's Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and, by extension, the Ten Bandung Principles, to build relations with African countries in several ways:

## *Support for independence movements*

The founding of the PRC (in 1949) coincided with Africa's emergent independence movements from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s; this was a pivotal period for China–Africa relations (Alden and Alves 2008: 47). It presented China with an opportunity to align itself with Africa's pervasive anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiment of the time and challenge Western influence on the continent. As the Sino–Soviet split escalated in the 1960s, it affected China's engagement with Africa during the Cold War. In its ideological rivalry with the Soviets, China pushed its brand of communism and vied to become the primary supporter of anti-colonial movements; both China and the USSR competed for influence among newly independent African states. China promoted a different model of communism – one that was more attractive to developing nations. It encouraged self-reliance, rural development and anti-imperialism, contrasting with the Soviet Union's focus on industrialisation and state control. China's communist ideology resonated with many African nations' anti-colonial struggles, laying a foundation to forge ties based on shared experiences of oppression and the pursuit of self-determination. During this period, African countries did not exclusively align with China or the USSR; instead, many chose to diversify their partnerships – maintaining relations with both sides and avoiding over-reliance on either communist power. However, depending on the ideological prescriptions of a country's leaders and the military, and the development support

provided by either side, some countries leaned more towards either the USSR or China. For example, Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique were closer to the USSR, while Tanzania, Zambia, Mali and Guinea aligned more with China.

As gestures of solidarity and to garner supporters for China's brand of communism, Beijing offered political and military support to select African liberation movements, and development aid to newly independent African states. For example, China provided substantial support to Angola's Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA); Mozambique's Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO); Zimbabwe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU); Namibia's South West People's Organisation (SWAPO); and it was a staunch supporter of South Africa's African National Congress's (ANC) struggle against apartheid. China also actively backed African nations' diplomatic efforts on the international stage, pushing for their recognition as independent states. At the time, given China's domestic and international political situation, its outreach to African countries served two primary goals: supporting Beijing's 'diplomatic battles' with Taiwan was key to avoiding a Two China Policy, and African backing was vital for China to gain UN membership (Alde and Alves 2008: 62).

Between December 1963 and February 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier He Long visited 10 African countries to: reinforce Beijing's opposition to imperialism; reiterate China's willingness to provide independent states with economic and technical aid; garner anti-Taiwan support; and restore China's rights in the UN (Kachiga 2013: 32; Yu 1988: 852). Visiting Ghana in 1964, Zhou further emphasised China's 'contributive role to Africa's development' (Yu 1988: 852); in return for China's support, new autonomous states began officially recognising Beijing (Johnston 2015: 385). And amidst the Cold War politics of the time, as China found '[its] niche in advocating for developing nations [to] which it proudly claimed to belong' (Kachiga 2013: 35), it presented itself as an alternative ally to the United States and USSR for newly independent African countries (Kachiga 2013: 35). However, the Sino-Indian War of 1962, although brief, brought into question the validity of non-alignment as a practice in foreign affairs; the NAM was called into

question, as two of its prominent members were at loggerheads, testing the group's cohesion (Adebajo 2024). Some African members, while officially non-aligned, strongly sympathised with India or China, for primarily ideological reasons. Those with more socialist leanings, such as Guinea and Mali, were more sympathetic towards China. In contrast, those wary of Chinese expansionism and aligning more with the USSR, such as Egypt, Ethiopia and Nigeria, were more supportive of India.

## Economic cooperation

Resonating with one of the Ten Bandung Principles – 'promotion of mutual interests and cooperation' – China has, primarily through the Forum On China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), established significant economic and development cooperation with the African region, becoming a key economic partner over the past two decades. Like the NAM and G77, various FOCAC documents emphasise the promotion of economic and social development of developing countries (especially African economies), South–South cooperation and solidarity, respect for sovereignty, a multilateral world order, and opposition to hegemonic tendencies, especially by Western countries.

Since the 2015 FOCAC Summit, China has shifted its resource-focused strategy towards Africa to prioritise investments that boost the region's industrialisation. Although resource exportation remains the bedrock of economic ties, Beijing is adopting an 'intensive development' approach towards the region (Deng 2017). This complements many African states' desire to hasten development and improve their economic growth in line with development aspirations expressed in the AU's Agenda 2063. In accordance with Agenda 2063's aspiration of building an integrated continent connected by 'world-class infrastructure', the Chinese have focused on providing development finance to African states for building trade, energy and connectivity infrastructure (in partnership with Chinese companies), contributing significantly to Africa's structural economic transformation. No other country has been able to match or exceed China's contribution to developing African infrastructure. Between 2000 and 2020, China reportedly built and upgraded over 10 000 km of

railways, nearly 100 000 km of highways, about 1 000 bridges, close to 100 ports and more than 80 large-scale power facilities (Xinhua News 2022).

Beyond cooperation on infrastructure development, China–Africa trade has grown from strength to strength. China's trade relations with Africa became more prominent after the establishment of FOCAC in 2000. Since then, multi-million-dollar trade deals between China and African countries have become a standard practice. Under the impetus of FOCAC, in the 2000s China established eleven Trade Promotion Centers in the region, and Chinese businesses were (and continue to be) encouraged to pursue trade and investment with African states (Alden 2007: 14). Additionally, drawing on its development model, China has pioneered the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across Africa, which are anticipated to serve as centres of investment and economic exchange between China and African economies.

In 2009, China surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner. However, in the context of Beijing's international trade profile, Africa remains a comparatively small trade partner for China (Alden et al. 2008: 10). Relative factor endowments of labour, capital and resources shape China–Africa trade patterns and, individually, each African country's trade arrangements with China (Shin and Eisenman 2012: 116). From a continental perspective – that is, looking at the China–Africa trade relationship with all 54 African states grouped together – the trade relationship is generally balanced (Shin and Eisenman 2012: 116). Yet, stark differences become apparent when the trade data is disaggregated. Based on comparative advantage, the trade balances between China and many African states convey an asymmetrical trade relationship that favours China (Lumumba-Kasango 2011). To address this, at the eighth FOCAC, held in Senegal in 2021, China prioritised improving trade relations by implementing measures to strengthen agricultural trade with the region, and it increased the scope of products from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that would receive zero-tariff treatment (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] 2021). The Chinese also committed US$10 billion towards deepening China–Africa trade and economic cooperation (FOCAC 2021). Building on this momentum to improve African trade with China, at the ninth FOCAC, held in Beijing in

2024, China announced that it would further open its market to 33 LDCs in Africa, which will receive zero-tariff treatment for 100 per cent of their tariff lines (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024). The further opening of the Chinese market to African products is intended to 'turn China's big market into Africa's big opportunity' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024a).

## *Respect for African sovereignty*

Framing itself as an anti-imperialist ally and emphasising South–South cooperation, China has – in adherence with NAM principles – sought to engage with Africa on the principles of solidarity, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Thus far, China's non-interference approach has 'allowed Beijing to seek solidarity with African (and other developing) countries while at the same time distancing itself from what it usually considers "hegemonic" policies of the Western powers' (Gazibo and Lema 2023).

By adopting a non-interference approach to its political and economic dealings with the region, China positions itself as often the preferred development partner for many African countries, especially those with more authoritarian-leaning regimes, which are frequently criticised by Western governments for poor governance and human rights violations. Aside from having to prescribe to the One-China principle and avoiding criticism of sensitive Chinese domestic issues, Chinese lending to the region is mostly non-conditional. This has helped African countries reduce their dependence on conditional foreign (primarily Western) investments and aid, which are often tied to political and economic reforms that undermine African sovereignty, forcing African economies to prioritise donor demands for democratic reforms and economic liberalisation over their own national interests. Many African officials and leaders praise China's (mostly) non-conditional lending and non-interference approach, preferring it over the usually superior, imposing and lecturing disposition that the West has traditionally taken towards African countries (Alden 2019).

However, some research indicates that it may be challenging for the Chinese to adhere strictly to their principle of non-interference (Gazibo and Lema 2022: 2). For example, during the build-up to the 2006 Zambian presidential election, the then Chinese ambassador, Li Baodong, threatened to sever ties with Zambia if the country elected the late Michael Sata, who was highly critical of China and touted anti-China sentiments during his campaign (Reed 2006). And, during the 2018 Sierra Leone presidential election, the opposition party – Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) – reported that China provided 'material and financial assistance' to the ruling All People's Congress (APC), which has long-standing ties with Beijing (SLPP Today 2018). Additionally, the SLPP criticised China for its 'overt political interference' in Sierra Leone's domestic politics (SLPP Today 2018). Such incidents cast doubt on whether China can genuinely respect African sovereignty and uphold NAM principles of non-intervention and non-interference. Under the tacit assumption of reciprocity, if China deviates drastically from its non-interference approach toward Africa, it could jeopardise its strategic all-weather partnership with the region. This would have notable geopolitical consequences, greatly reducing China's influence relative to the United States and its allies in leading and shaping the development of a multipolar world order.

## *Support for greater African representation in multilateral organisations*

In advocating for reforms in the governance structures of international organisations, the Chinese have consistently maintained that these reforms should focus on increasing the representation of developing countries. In this regard, China (along with other Global South heavyweights, especially India) has been a strong supporter of increasing the representation of African nations in international organisations. This supports the G77's goal of advocating for reform of multilateral institutions such as the UN, Bretton Woods organisations and the WTO, which were originally designed to benefit the American–Euro world order after the Cold War and are arguably not fit for purpose in the twenty-first-century international system (Group of 77 and China 2024).

China has promoted African representation in international forums

by lobbying member states to support African candidates and causes. The Chinese have also voted in favour of African candidates for leadership roles in organisations, such as the UN and its agencies, and they have also advocated for expanding the UN Security Council (UNSC) to include permanent seats for African countries (Klomegah 2024). At the UNSC Open Debate on Peace and Security in Africa in 2019, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, stated that the UNSC 'should listen more to African voices, respect their opinions and let them play their roles' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Expanding the UNSC's permanent seats to include more African representation would strengthen the African voice in global decision-making, especially on peace and security issues. The US also supported the notion that Africa should have two permanent seats on the UNSC. However, this gesture is considered somewhat half-hearted, as it did not support these seats having veto power. It seemed the US made a paltry attempt to improve ties with Africa and its Pacific Island countries to counter China's growing regional influence (Nichols 2024).

Additionally, China has supported the AU's efforts to strengthen its role in regional and global affairs, and has actively engaged with the AU and its member states on various issues, including peace and security, economic development and human rights. China has also supported the AU's efforts to obtain Group of Twenty (G20) membership. At the G20 Summit held in Indonesia in November 2022, China's President, Xi Jinping, explicitly stated that 'China supports the African Union in joining the G20'. Under India's chairmanship, the AU officially became a member of the G20 in 2023 (China Daily 2022). Within the rules-based multilateral trading system promoted by the WTO, China has, on several occasions, advocated for African countries' interests, particularly in negotiations on agriculture, textiles and intellectual property rights. Also benefiting Africa, China has used its growing influence to push for policies that benefit developing countries, such as special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions (She 2023).

Although China's efforts to promote African representation and interests in international organisations are acknowledged and praised by African leaders, some international affairs commentators and critics opine that it is motivated by self-interest and conditional on African

countries supporting China's own interests – indicating a type of quid pro quo relationship between the two sides in international settings (Konings 2007: 360).

## Africa: China's partner in shaping the development of a multipolar world order

As China has steadily risen to become a major power, it has advocated for a multipolar world system in which the sovereignty of each country is respected. Simultaneously, it has consistently voiced its disapproval of hegemonic behaviour and international institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) that seek to maintain the US-led hegemonic international order. China's revisionist vision of an international system resonates with many Global South countries, especially African nations, which have been marginalised by the neoliberal American–Euro-led international system and have not received significant economic development dividends from it.

China's efforts to push for a multipolar world order and reform global governance settings to reflect said order rest partly 'on its ability to enlist Global South support for its [international] initiatives' (Nantulya 2023). In this regard, Africa en bloc is a crucial ally, because 'Africa is the largest bloc in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly with 28 per cent of the votes compared to Asia's 27 per cent, the Americas' 17 per cent, and Western Europe's 15 per cent. Africa also holds over a quarter of the votes in all UN governing bodies, and it is the largest bloc in other agencies, such as the WTO, the Group of 77, and the Non-Aligned Movement. This makes African votes critically important to Chinese efforts to redesign global institutions' (Nantulya 2023).

The Chinese have especially relied on African support in addressing human rights issues at the UN (Nantulya 2023). In 2020, all African UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) members (except for one – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which abstained) voted in favour of another Chinese resolution, 'Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights', which included elements of Xi Jinping's Thought on Human Rights (Nantulya 2023; Roberts 2023; Introvigne 2022).[2] During the 2019/2020 and 2021/2022 UN debate cycles, no

African country supported a series of draft communiques critical of Chinese policies in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong (Nantulya 2023). In October 2022, only Somalia among African countries voted in favour of a resolution to hold a UNHRC debate on China's alleged human rights violations in Xinjiang; however, the proposal did not pass, as most of the African group voted against it (Nantulya 2023). Additionally, the Chinese and African groups have supported each other in securing leadership roles within the UN and increasing each other's representation in various UN organs and programmes (Nantulya 2023). China-Africa cooperation has also been fruitful in other multilateral settings, specifically the WTO. For example, in 2019, the 43-member Africa Group joined China in adopting a resolution that opposed US veto power over appointments to the WTO's Appellate Body, the world's highest trade court; this increased the number of WTO members opposing the US veto to 114 out of 163 members (Nantulya 2020: 502).

Chinese officials on African tours and at FOCAC events often emphasise the importance of Chinese and Africans supporting each other in global governance. Amongst the four-point agenda of then Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang's five-nation African tour in January 2023 was 'mutual support in the global governance system' (Nantulya 2023). Before this, at the seventh FOCAC in 2018, China and its African partners agreed to 'work together to promote the reform of the global governance system' (Nantulya 2020: 502). Africa's common position on international reform is outlined in the AU's 2005 Ezulwini Consensus, and although it adopts a much narrower position than China's view, both China and the AU, nonetheless, seem to believe that the current global system is 'weighted against them' (Nantulya 2020: 502). This shared grievance, according to Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, makes Africa a 'natural ally of China' (Nantulya 2020: 502).

Several official documents between China and its African counterparts reiterate both sides' mutual support in multilateral forums and on international issues. The China–Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 document (published in 2021 by China's Ministry of Commerce) expresses both sides' shared support for 'economic globalization and an

equitable, open and inclusive multilateral trading system, firmly opposing unilateralism and protectionism and safeguarding the common interests of developing countries' (FOCAC 2021). The *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals* document published by the PRC's State Council Information Office in 2021 noted, 'China and Africa are important partners in advancing the reform of the global governance system and reshaping the international order', and that 'China and Africa firmly support an increase in the representation and say of developing countries in the international governance system, especially African countries' (PRC State Council Information Office 2021). FOCAC-related documents also express similar sentiments. For example, the Dakar Action Plan (from the eighth FOCAC, held in 2021) reaffirmed that China and African countries (that have diplomatic relations with Beijing) will 'continue to support each other in international affairs and major international elections', and that both sides will 'continue to step up coordination and collaboration at the United Nations and other multilateral institutions' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Building on this, the Beijing Action Plan (from the ninth FOCAC, held in 2024) expressed stronger rhetoric on South–South cooperation, especially Chinese support for African countries 'in increasing their influence and role in global governance' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). The document also expressed that more inclusive multilateral frameworks are needed to address the world's problems and that the Chinese believe 'that Africans are qualified to serve as heads of international organisations and institutions, and supports their work' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Furthermore, both sides expressed the need 'for necessary reform and strengthening of the UN including the Security Council, redressing the historical injustices done to Africa, and increasing the representation of developing countries, African countries in particular, in the UN and its Security Council' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Concerning the reformation of the international financial system, both sides called for 'reforming the international financial system and improving development financing for countries in the Global South to realise common prosperity and better meet the development needs of African countries' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). To do so, the Chinese and African

sides expressed intentions to 'take an active part in and promote reform of the multilateral financial institutions, including quota, special drawing rights, and voting rights reform of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). Both sides also expressed the need to increase the representation and voice of developing countries in these organisations, to enable the international monetary and financial systems 'to better reflect the changes in the international economic landscape in a more just way' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). To achieve this, both China and African states committed to enhancing 'cooperation to ensure a comprehensive reform of the Global Financing Governance system that responds to the specific needs of developing countries' (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b).

## Leveraging the NAM and G77 to build an Afro-Sino coalition to advance the development of a multipolar world order

In this era of geopolitical competition unfolding alongside multiple polycrises, coalition-building among developing countries to advance common positions on global governance and trade regimes – and to shape international governance structures to be more inclusive – is becoming more critical. Coalition politics is a strategic tool for rising powers (such as China) that seek to (in line with their geopolitical and geoeconomic interests) gain favour with other countries, especially developing states, to bolster their rivalry with other rising powers or incumbent global hegemons (specifically the US) (Taksashi 2021). In the context of global power transitions, coalition-building and, by association, coalition politics, are organic symptoms of power transitions and are leveraged by both hegemonic and revisionist powers to accrue support in tussles for geopolitical supremacy. For revisionist powers such as China, which seeks to establish a new world order, China-supportive coalitions will be key in achieving this – particularly in reshaping international governance structures to reflect a multipolar world (Schweller and Pu 2011: 44–46). Within international institutions, Taksashi (2021) posits that coalition politics can be understood through three scopes: (1) an inter-coalition scope that speaks to the fate of the (neo-) liberal international order, (2)

an intra-coalition scope with interest in the cohesion of specific clusters of countries, and (3) a state-centric scope that focuses on foreign policy dynamics. It is within category one that this section ruminates (below) on building an Afro-Sino coalition, underpinned by the Ten Bandung Principles within the NAM and G77, to advance China's and Africa's shared goal of actualising a fair and just multipolar world order that is more inclusive of the Global South.

Building on their shared ideological and normative visions of a multipolar world order, where fair and just multilateral cooperation is central to addressing global challenges, the Africa Group in the NAM and G77 should develop a coordinated plurilateral approach to engaging with China within these organisations' frameworks (as well as other multilateral settings) to advance African developmental and political interests. To effectively leverage China within the NAM and G77, African members of these organisations must coordinate efforts to develop a shared strategy or policy for navigating dealings with China within NAM and G77 parameters. This would make engagements with the Chinese within these two organisations leaner and more focused and serve as a bi-regional coalition-building mechanism on various multilateral and geopolitical issues where the two sides share common views or stances – effectively creating an Africa–China caucus within the NAM and G77.

As the Chair of the NAM from 2024 to 2027, Uganda is positioned to pursue its own and collective African interests in these organisations. Through facilitating high-level dialogues and discussions, the Ugandans can rally Africa en bloc in the NAM and G77 to strategically engage with China in influencing and shaping the development of a multipolar world order. Of course, achieving this would require significant collective diplomatic efforts and a considerable amount of political will from all African members. However, given the power imbalances between China and African countries, such efforts are necessary if African countries are to avoid being mere pawns in China's geostrategic calculations, and to ensure that, at the very least, cooperation is mutually beneficial within the parameters of the NAM and G77. This would strengthen African agency vis-à-vis China and could potentially generate a snowball effect, encouraging African countries to unite strategically in other international

organisations to better navigate interactions with major and emerging powers, especially amid competing geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures from various actors.

In efforts to assert active non-alignment while still pursuing cooperation with China within the NAM and G77 amid increasing scrutiny from the US, the Africa Group in both organisations must be proactive and assume much of the responsibility in leveraging the NAM and G77 to serve as an Afro-Sino bi-regional coalition-building mechanism (while remaining sensitive to Euro–American geopolitical interests regarding a perceived revisionist China [and Russia]). To maintain relations with all viable development partners from the East and West, African countries must strategically leverage cooperation with China within the NAM and G77 to promote a multipolar world order. Engagements with the Chinese in these organisations must not be perceived as a praxis for geopolitical collusion against the US. Doing so would undoubtedly endanger NAM and G77 African members' diplomatic relations with Washington and its allies, jeopardising development partnerships and financing. And it would also bring the integrity of the NAM (in its entirety) as a non-aligned entity into disrepute.

On the sidelines of the NAM and G77 events and summits – through co-hosting parallel events, closed and open meetings, and workshops – Chinese and African officials and policymakers can deliberate and strategise on how to further their shared agenda of advocating for a multipolar world order, underpinned by a reformed multilateral international system that is more inclusive and representative of the Global South, especially Africa. From the African side, much thought needs to be given to how to build a coalition with China amidst a tense geopolitical climate where a rising China – despite its 'peaceful rise' rhetoric – increasingly finds itself butting heads with the United States (and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] allies), with whom many African countries have political and diplomatic ties. To uphold active neutrality amid US–China tensions, the NAM and G77 African groups must delineate common cooperation interests with the Chinese within NAM and G77 parameters. Importantly, in cooperating with the Chinese to realise a multipolar world, the African side must firmly maintain non-

threatening and non-aggressive approaches in line with international law. This will help preserve the integrity of African members' non-aligned stance, balance cooperation with China, and maintain sound relations with the US and allied countries.

## Recommendations

African NAM and G77 members must collectively produce a prudent guiding document on engaging with China to further African developmental, political, economic and geostrategic interests. As the current chair, Uganda can lead the coordination of the Africa blocs in the NAM and G77 to deliberate on developing a common African engagement strategy within each organisation. The production of a comprehensive and pragmatic guiding document must be informed by robust consultation among African members and consultations between the African and Chinese sides. To this end, African working groups can be established to determine key areas of cooperation with the Chinese within the NAM and G77, under six themes: Economic Development and Trade; Peace and Security; Climate and Environmental Challenges; Medical and Public Health; Next-Generation Technology and Development; and Global Governance Reformation. To ensure that each thematic working group is not just a talking club, African countries must commit significant resources to coordinating the groups in developing a common African agenda and planning for the furthering of shared interests with the Chinese in the NAM and G77 (and potentially other multilateral organisations).

Cooperation agendas under each thematic area noted above must be lean. Instead of curating long wish lists for cooperation, the Africans (in consultation with the Chinese) should identify a maximum of five cooperation items for each theme. And, importantly, at the very least, from the African side, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be established to measure the effectiveness of cooperation with the Chinese within the NAM and G77. African members can gather every three years – the same timeline as the triannual FOCAC – to deliberate on the cooperation agendas under each thematic area. Based on information

from monitoring and evaluation reports, the cooperation agendas can be revised and updated in line with African and Chinese interests.

A common African agenda or plan outlining engagement with China within the NAM and G77 must be a product of careful deliberations, acknowledging shared or common development and geostrategic interests with the Chinese, and – in the interests of preserving relations with the US and allied countries – stipulate the African sides' limits of cooperation with Beijing, if any. This would assert African agency (at least on paper) and provide a practical and pragmatic guiding policy document for collective African action vis-à-vis China within the NAM and G77. However, producing such a document is easier said than done. Since the Africa groups in the NAM and G77 are not homogenous, as each sovereign member has varying developmental levels, socio-economic priorities, geopolitical interests, and divergent peace and security agendas, trying to develop a common African strategy regarding China within the parameters of the NAM and G77 is a challenging task that would need extensive negotiation and compromise on the part of African members.

Just as the Chinese carefully scrutinise international documents and communiques to reflect their stance on sensitive domestic issues, the African side must, in the interest of international optics and allaying US and allied countries' geopolitical concerns, employ African international relations and geopolitical experts to draft or inform an African NAM and G77 strategy regarding China. To maintain and strengthen good relations with the US, EU and UK, which are key trade and investment partners for Africa, careful consideration must be given to the language and wording employed, to avoid risking any perception that African NAM and G77 members are strongly allying with China; this would, without a doubt, bring the NAM and its ethos of non-alignment into disrepute.

## Conclusion

Based on their shared ideological and normative visions of a multipolar world order, in which fair and just multilateral cooperation is central to addressing global challenges, Africa and China can forge a formidable coalition to challenge the dominance of an international system that has

historically marginalised the Global South. Through the NAM and G77, and in line with the Ten Bandung Principles, the Africa grouping within these organisations can develop a coordinated plurilateral approach to engaging with China and promoting their shared goal of establishing a multipolar world order by reforming global governance institutions, while also working together to address urgent international economic, political, security, environmental and health challenges. What will be interesting to observe is how the process of initiating and coordinating an Afro–Sino coalition within the frameworks of the NAM and G77 unfolds. It is likely to further clarify how China perceives African countries – whether as pawns or partners. More importantly, the main challenge will be whether African countries can genuinely unite to meet the challenge, overcome their differences and position the continent as a significant force in relation to China (and other middle and major powers of the Global South).

Although the NAM and G77 can serve as platforms of convergence for the Africans and Chinese to convene and deliberate on strategic manoeuvres for advancing a more equitable and inclusive multipolar world that is more responsive to the needs of developing countries, African countries must engage tactfully with the Chinese. Considering the unstable geopolitical climate and the key relationships with American–Euro partners who are sceptical of China's rise and somewhat resistant to a multipolar world order that diminishes their power and influence, African countries must become skilled at diplomatic gymnastics. They need to take an active role in shaping engagements with China within the NAM and G77, in order to influence the future of international governance and avoid becoming mere pawns that can be easily coalesced to advance China's strategic interests. Simultaneously, embodying a spirit of active non-alignment, African countries must strategically maintain and sustain cooperation with American and European partners outside the NAM and G77 to avoid alienating important development and trade partners.

Importantly, in tag-teaming with China within the NAM and G77 to advance a multipolar order, African agency must be robust enough to counterbalance China's outsized power vis-à-vis individual African countries. In this regard, drawing on the adage that a united Africa is a strong Africa, African countries in the NAM and G77 must actively

deliberate and strategise on how to approach and engage with the Chinese within NAM and G77 frameworks. In this regard, a common African guiding strategy document would help African states collectivise and speak with one voice when dealing with China in NAM and G77 settings. It will assist African stakeholders in the NAM and G77 to organise themselves, engage strategically with China, and ensure that in promoting their common vision of a multipolar world and reforms in major international governance and financial organisations, Africa is fully represented in all decision-making bodies of these organisations, rather than simply being used by the Chinese as a stepping stone to enhance their influence and positions in international institutions.

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## Endnotes

1 Active non-alignment or active neutrality is a foreign policy strategy that aims to balance relations with often competing geopolitical blocs or countries, while maintaining independence and avoiding formal alliances. Unlike traditional neutrality, which often implies taking a stance of passivity, active non-alignment involves taking a proactive approach to global affairs, seeking to influence and shape global decision-making and events, and promote national interests without being beholden to any actor. Adhering to active non-alignment (in its truest sense) allows countries: to maintain autonomy in decision-making, avoiding pressure or influence from competing powers; balance relationships with major powers and avoid excessive dependence on any one actor or geopolitical bloc; and proactively engage in international forums unencumbered by pressures from competing powers to 'choose a side' and actively shape global discourses in line with national interests. Countries adopting this approach often prioritise multilateral cooperation and seek to leverage international institutions to advance their geopolitical interests. For a comprehensive description and understanding of active non-alignment see: Fortin, C., Heine, J. and Ominami, C. (eds). 2022. Latin American foreign policies in the new world order: The active non-alignment option. London: Anthem Press, p. 310.

2 Xi Jinping Thought, officially known as 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', is the dogmatic ideology currently shaping the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Based on 14 guiding principles derived from Xi's views and writings on political and economic thought, Xi Jinping Thought is viewed as a framework for guiding China's development and enhancing its position in international affairs. By combining Marxist ideas with traditional Chinese Confucian values, Xi Jinping Thought emphasises the importance of duty, social harmony and development over individual human rights.