



REPORT

“How Africa can thrive in a turbulent multipolar world”
Institute for Security Studies
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Online
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Context

The ISS (Institute for Security Studies) held - “How Africa can thrive in a turbulent multipolar world” on June 4th, 2025. This seminar explored how Africa’s future could be shaped by global megatrends, from climate change and geopolitical shifts to population dynamics and technology. Speakers assessed Africa’s position across alternative global futures and reflected on how leadership, governance, and strategic planning can enable sustainable transformation.

The seminar was moderated by **Ottilia Anna Maunganidze**, *Head of Special Projects, ISS*.

Panelists

- **Dr Jakkie Cilliers**, *Head, African Futures & Innovation, ISS*.
- **Melanie Robinson**, *Futures Analyst, UK Ministry of Defence*.
- **Dr Hesphina Rukato**, *Africa Director, Crisis Action*.

Current Strategic Context and Key Drivers of Change

The first aspect identified in the seminar was that Africa’s strategic location and natural resource wealth ensure continued external investment and competition for influence. The growth of the working-age population and improved energy connectivity could support industrialisation, trade, and inclusive development. However, ongoing challenges such as migration, instability, and conflict persist across the continent.

The following five aspects were named as the key drivers of change in the continent; (1) Global and Regional Power Competition, (2) Increased Pressure on Governments, (3) Rapid Population Growth, (4) Rising Environmental Stress, (5) Economic Transition and Transformation. Understanding these key drivers facilitates the proactive management and changes that the continent will be required to implement in order to adapt to new circumstances, and maintain a competitive edge.

Global Futures Scenarios and Implications for Africa

The following four scenarios were discussed by panelists as potential best and worst case future scenarios that Africa may face.

1. Growth World

The growth world is one where Neoliberalism dominates, with high inequality, strong corporate influence and weak states. In this scenario, Africa sees uneven development through regional fragmentation of alliances and the dominance of power by the elite. The ‘Growth World’ is one of increased organised crime, weak governance, and limited poverty alleviation.



2. Sustainable World

The Sustainable World is the most desirable but hardest to achieve, requiring strong leadership and global cooperation. In this world, Africa benefits from improved governance, deeper AfCFTA integration, and stronger democratic institutions. AU becomes more credible and average annual African GDP growth could reach **7.7%**.

3. Divided World

The Divided World is a multipolar, unstable world with increasing tensions between global powers. Africa becomes a geopolitical pawn; AfCFTA exists in name only. There is a rise in secession movements, instability, and poor governance, economic growth slows to **3.3%**.

4. World at War

In the World at War scenario, global conflicts escalate (e.g. Ukraine, Taiwan), creating widespread insecurity. Africa's voice is marginalised, the AU remains weak. In the World at War, there is some sub-regional trade integration, but overall political fragmentation and democratic backsliding persist. Average African growth projected at **4.5%** by 2043.

Shifting Global Influence on Africa

Data collected on the sum of influence on all African countries between 1960 and 2019, compared influence by **Russia, China, Indian, USA** and **Former Colonial Powers** (France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, UK) on the continent. This research shed light on the shifting trends of Global interest on the continent.

The findings highlighted the following:

- **Former Colonial Powers** - Dominant but steadily declining influence.
- **China** - Dramatic rise post-2001 WTO entry; now a major external actor.
- **USA** - Stable but not significantly expanding presence.
- **India & Russia** - Limited but gradually increasing roles since 1990s.

Alternative African Scenarios

- Africa becomes a hub of innovation and global services.
- Potential for Africa to lead in reshaping multilateralism.
- Alternatively, Africa may face strong global headwinds without coordinated leadership or reform.