

Africa and the World: Navigating Shifting Geopolitics is one of the first books to analyse the global geopolitical landscape from an African perspective, with a view to the opportunities and challenges facing the African continent. Authors in this edited volume argue for the need to re-imagine Africa's role in the world. As a cradle of humanity, a historical fountain of profound scientific knowledge, an object of colonial conquest and, today, a collective of countries seeking to pool their sovereignties in order to improve the human condition, Africa has a unique opportunity to advance its own interests.

Authors reflect on all these issues; they outline how developments in the global political economy impact on the continent and, inversely, how Africa can develop a strategic perspective that takes into account the dynamics playing out in a fraught global terrain.

Central to this evaluation is the notion of 'island Africa': a vast island – with resources that extend into the oceans around it – that is a strategic centre by virtue of its geographic location, its endowments and its long-term potential. Authors assert that the positioning of 'island Africa' presents unique political, security and geo-economic benefits. Yet they also acknowledge that, as has happened historically, these very advantages can serve as a basis for new forms of domination and exploitation. In addition, this volume takes into account the socio-psychological factors that influence how nations of the world receive and interpret the present, and assess prospects for the future.

The authors go beyond analysis of what is, to venture concrete proposals on what can be, with Africa exercising its agency. This requires the strengthening of continental integration and cohesion in pursuit of ideals that the African Union has enshrined in Agenda 2063. In this way, Africa would be able to engage – in a systemic and disciplined manner – with external powers to assert the continent's own interests which, in their framing, are also the interests of humanity.

A continent united in both purpose and action can be an active agent in shaping the evolving global order. This volume makes a strong case for precisely such a perspective and contributes to what should be an ongoing effort to analyse geopolitics with Africa as a critical frame of reference.

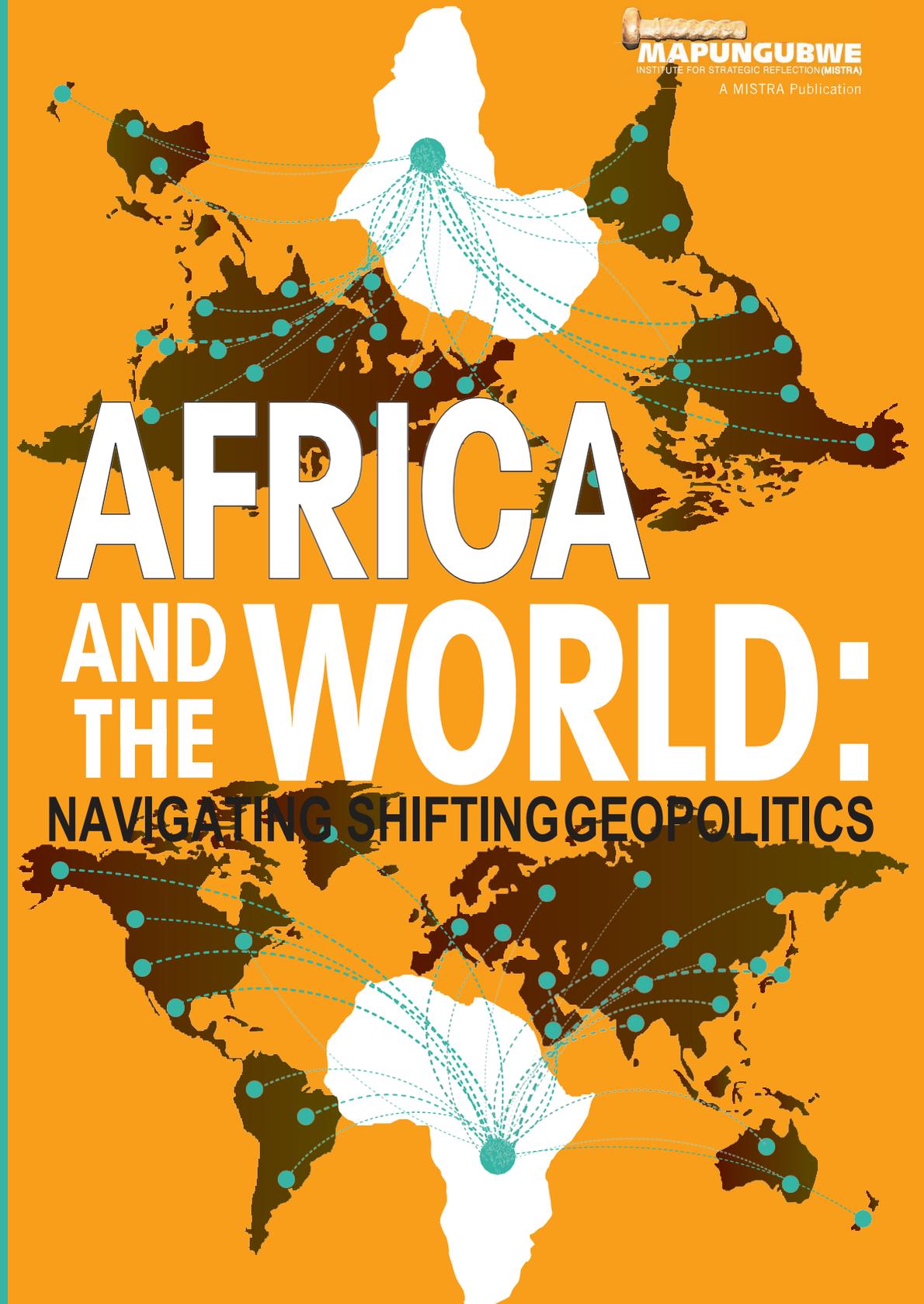
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AFRICA AND THE WORLD: NAVIGATING SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS


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Preface

This volume analyses the shifting global landscape from the point of view of challenges and opportunities facing the African continent. It explores how Africa's future prospects intersect with, and are impacted by, agendas external to the continent. Geographically, Africa is situated at the very crossroads of geopolitical dynamics.

This raises a number of questions, chiefly: what does the broader west-to-east shift in the global political economy's centre of gravity mean for Africa? What are the contours of this evolving terrain? What does the changing balance of forces mean for the future of the continent?

Relevant to these dynamics are matters to do with economic interests, global military strategies, demographics, migration and environmental challenges – all impacting on humanity in a variety of ways.

Over the centuries, geopolitics has played out in many guises. From changing habitats against the backdrop of ancient migrations, to the wars of nation formation and conquest, the rise and fall of empires, the Cold War as well as the struggles for independence and self-determination, these human experiences have etched themselves into the memories of nations across generations. As such, beyond issues of the political economy, psychological factors do influence how nations of the world receive and interpret signals of the present and assess prospects for the future.

Geological Africa is contiguous to the Afro-Eurasian landmass, extending from the western Euro-Atlantic to the east Asia-Pacific. It encompasses the Indian Ocean Rim that links it to the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Africa is configured in a manner suggestive of a mega-island located in the south between east and west. This carries geo-strategic implications for the continent's relations with the rest of the world.

It is these questions and issues that this volume sets out to explore, with Africa as the central frame of reference. The authors in this study seek to contribute to discourse on geopolitics from a perspective that is currently lacking: that is, locating 'Island Africa' as a strategic centre in terms of its geographic location, its endowments and its long-term potential. As a cradle of humanity, a historical fountain of profound scientific

knowledge, an object of colonial conquest and, today, a collective of countries seeking to pool their sovereignties in order to improve the human condition, Africa has a unique opportunity to advance its own interests in a fraught global terrain.

The authors reflect on all these issues, outlining how developments in the global political economy impact on the continent and, inversely, how Africa can develop a strategic perspective that takes into account the dynamics playing out on the global terrain.

The authors assert that the African continent's central geographic positioning in relation to all other continents and its endowments present unique political, security and geo-economic benefits. Yet, they also acknowledge that, as has happened in history, these very advantages can serve as a basis for perverse manifestations of new forms of domination and exploitation. In a world characterised by the resurgence of chauvinistic nationalism, mercantilistic protectionism, right-wing religiosity and the rise of a ubiquitous security-industrial complex among the global powers, Africa indeed has to be vigilant.

As such, the authors go beyond analysis of what is, to venture concrete proposals on what can be, with Africa exercising its social agency. This requires the strengthening of continental integration and cohesion in pursuit of ideals that the African Union has enshrined in Agenda 2063. In this way, Africa would be able to engage, in a more systemic and disciplined manner, with external powers, based on its own interests, which, in their framing, are also the interests of humanity.

A continent united in both purpose and action can be an active agent in shaping the evolving global order. This volume makes a strong case for precisely such a perspective and contributes to what should be an ongoing effort to analyse geopolitics with Africa as a critical frame of reference.

The Mapungubwe Institute (MISTRA) wishes to express its appreciation to all the authors and other intellectuals - both from the African continent and further afield in the global south - who helped shape this volume. Our thanks also go to the funders who have ensured that MISTRA is able consistently to bring into the public discourse ideas that transcend the vagaries of the moment to explore vistas beyond the horizon.

-Prof Sibusiso Vil-Nkomo
Board Chairperson