Africa and recalibration of global order

When US Secretary of State Marco Rubio addressed the Munich Security Conference on February 14. He began his speech five centuries ago, with the arrival of Europeans in the Americas.

From that starting point, he traced America's civilisational journey through expansion, world wars, post-1945 institutions, and what he described as the weakening effects of deindustrialisation.

It was a speech about sovereignty, identity, and national capacity. Listening carefully, one hears something larger than American politics.

We are witnessing not the end of globalisation but the end of its frictionless phase. The era in which integration was assumed to be inevitable, supply chains purely economic, and sovereignty secondary to efficiency is giving way to a more strategic and guarded form of global interdependence.

When such recalibration occurs among major powers, Africa must reflect as well. If the Western story begins 500 years ago with expansion and consolidation, Africa's story over the same period begins with encounter and divergence.

When Europe met Africa in the 15th century, the continent was home to established political and intellectual systems. The Mali Empire and Songhai Empire sustained scholarship and commerce linked to Timbuktu. The Kingdom of Kongo maintained structured diplomacy. The Kingdom of Buganda developed an administrative order. Great Zimbabwe stood as a centre of organised urban life.

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Globalisation

After the encounter, the trajectories diverged. Western societies expanded outward, industrialised, and accumulated institutional leverage. African societies were progressively integrated into global systems in ways that redirected their economic evolution toward primary commodity export.

That divergence still shapes today's realities. In Munich, Rubio spoke of America's frustration with post-war institutions and economic hollowing. Many African States could articulate parallel frustrations, albeit from a different historical position.

Yet, this moment should not become a competition of grievances.

Africa has never been a revenge civilisation. After apartheid in South Africa, there was no racial purge. After anti-colonial transitions in Kenya and elsewhere, there was no continent-wide retaliation.

Africa's instinct at moments of disruption has been renewal.

If the global order is recalibrating, Africa's response must be rejuvenation. This means strengthening value addition so minerals and agricultural products do not leave the continent in raw form.

It means deepening continental value chains through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) rather than competing as fragmented exporters. It means investing in technical skills and institutional discipline, so industrial ambition is matched by capacity.

It also means revisiting civilisational memory through museums, archives, and scholarships that restore historical confidence without romanticism.

A continent that understands its continuity negotiates differently from one that sees itself only through interruption.

As major powers speak increasingly of strategic competition in the Global South, Africa must ensure it does not once again become the terrain upon which external rivalries unfold.

Five centuries after the encounter, the next chapter should not be another phase of competition over African space.

It should be a phase of African rejuvenation; calm, strategic, and self-authored.

History is not ending. It is recalibrating. Africa must recalibrate with it.

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