

AFRICA IN A DISRUPTIVE GLOBAL ORDER

This moment of turbulence in global affairs provides an opportunity to reposition Africa in a global order that is in flux. Africa has almost always been at the receiving end of global vicissitudes. As such, the ramifications of global order and disorder have been significant, with some of these underscoring the contradictions that have always underlined politics, governance, economics, and inter-group relations in Africa. The Unipolar world that was largely dominated by the United States for several decades has now become “multi-polar”, with Russia and China becoming major global actors challenging American hegemony and middle and meddling powers, formerly US allies pursuing an independent posture countering Western democracy or the ‘rules-based’ international order while undermining Africa’s regional institutions.

Consequently, it is not only Africa’s international relations that need fixing. Africa’s internal affairs also need significant attention. The normative energy that was harnessed at the turn of the 21st Century for continental renewal has largely fizzled out. The repositioning of Africa must go hand in hand with deep introspection and a prospect of internal renewal. This repositioning requires a timely and simultaneous negotiation of Africa’s future amid the current global (dis)order and uncertainty.

THE AFRICAN PUBLIC SQUARE (APS)

The African leadership Centre has established *the African Public Square (APS)* as a platform to harness Africa’s intellectual power and inter-generational agency to enable a rethinking of the continent’s response to its marginalisation on the global stage and the norm reversal that is creeping into the management of the continent’s security and development challenges.

The APS aims to:

- Speak back to established agendas in the global landscape that place Africa at a disadvantage.
- Offer new solutions and proposals for re-energising Africa’s normative and response framework, with possibilities for Africa’s renewal.
- Expand the constituency of actors that speak for Africa when the spaces for engaging state and continental action are closed.

The APS offers a three-part intervention to raise Africa’s position in the world:

- **A convening platform**: to convene new and established voices constituting an intergenerational community of African public intellectuals catalysing the repositioning of Africa in the global order.
- **An annual high-level (continental) forum** – an African/global public debate bringing together prominent African intellectuals along with a variety of interlocutors to frame and propose an alternative framework of engagement on issues of the day shaping Africa’s trajectory.
- **An inter-generational community of African public intellectuals** in co-leadership of special interventions that propose new ideas and forms of collaboration for responding to Africa’s challenges, and reshaping global engagement to raise Africa’s position in the world.

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN PUBLIC SQUARE

The ALC will officially launch the APS in Nairobi, Kenya, on 27 June 2024. In its first high-level forum, the APS will convene, along with key partners, an initial intergenerational group of African public intellectuals to open a public debate on a critical question: Can Africa escape the twin tragedy of deinstitutionalisation through “militiafication” and externally imposed templates? How can African societies recreate peaceful states that serve the collective and not the few? We will focus on **Sudan and South Sudan**.

Why Sudan and South Sudan?

Combined, Sudan and South Sudan represent two of the most intractable problems at the core of recalcitrant armed conflict and state crisis /instability in Africa and illustrate the twin tragedy plaguing the continent. Sudan is an African state in perpetual crisis while South Sudan represents the rehearsal of state formation – a new African state. In Sudan, the military’s dominant control over the country’s security and economy from independence in 1956 has been interrupted since 2015. An erstwhile peripheral actor, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began to assert influence given increased control over natural and other resources. The growing contestation between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF led to a full outbreak of war in April 2023 calling into question Sudan’s long existing social, political, and economic order. The influence of the powerful states in the Gulf and Middle East has been a prominent feature of this conflict elucidating a strong predictor of external disruptions facing Africa. Regardless of the outcome of the war, the future of Sudan now appears unfathomable.

In South Sudan, which became a new state in 2011 following a referendum, the generic liberal democratic peace model has failed to deliver sustainable peace. With elections of central characters in the conflict a central feature of state building rather than the pursuit of a binding mutuality among the people, and between them and their leaders, peace and state building remains elusive. A focus on elections in and of itself is not faulty. But the opportunity to create a stable new state was missed from the start by going first into elections that secured the pre-eminence of war leaders rather than a shared vision of the future among the people. In a new South Sudan, the international community opted for elections momentarily perverting the trajectory of a new African state before convening the people around the architecture and texture of their new country such as constitution, revenue generation and allocation, and foreign relations. With exclusive focus on competing elite as the locus of elections and not on a shared future, the *peace building dilemma* remains a reality despite inordinate investment.

Collectively, Sudanese, and South Sudanese states are at the mercy of competing elite – whether military or civilian – and of powerful external actors. Is it too late for the Sudanese and South Sudanese states to chart a different course? What should a future path consist of? Can the Sudanese parties act outside the influence of powerful external actors? Can plebiscites be a more effective alternative for pursuing a stable future in South Sudan? By voting first on the terms on which the people will live together, before voting for the people that will lead them towards the desired future, can we shift attention away from the self-interest or predatory intent of contending elite?

FRAMING THE APS LAUNCH

The launch event will adopt ALC’s “open debate” format. An inter-generational group of African public intellectuals will embark on an open debate on the situations in these African countries. We will intentionally depart from dominant and usual frames which reinforce elite solutions that are externally influenced. Rather we will focus on approaches and solutions that give agency and voice to diverse African participants across the political, social, economic, and cultural landscape that are people- and issue-centred as well as future-oriented.