

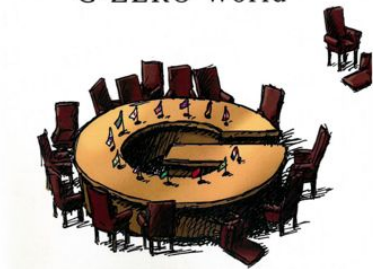
## Africa in the G-Zero world, a microcosm of the macrocosm

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It is becoming harder to argue against the assertion that we are on the cusp of, or already some way into, a new geopolitical dispensation. Ian Bremmer and David F. Gordon call this a *G-Zero World*.<sup>1</sup> In such a world, states like China and America may have an immense amount of power, but never enough to dictate their wills; and a considerable number of mid-size, pivot states have the capacity to frustrate the collective actions of the broader global community, regional bodies and blocs. The aspirations for a Wilsonian world of laws and norms, which has only ever looked like rampant hypocrisy, will increasingly be pushed aside by the realities of a Bismarkian world of interests and power.

### EVERY NATION FOR ITSELF

Winners and Losers in a  
G-ZERO World



<sup>1</sup> See Bremmer, Ian *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, Penguin Books, London, 2012.

Despite the internationalist rhetoric, states are more nakedly self-interested, and will make temporary alliances with whoever can assuage their immediate concerns or satisfy their needs. In essence a Realists dream, or nightmare, depends on how powerful they conceive their state to be. The State, rather than being an anachronistic construction, will return to being the centre of our thinking, theorisation and action.

Africa already represents a microcosm of this G-Zero macrocosm, a “canary” of our global future. African states take what they can; give only what they must; frustrate great powers machinations; and are jealous of each to the extent of limiting collective action to only the most basic or pressing of matters. The African Union, for example, is only just able to attenuate Somali jihadist group al Shabaab. Its broader aims are little more than press releases, which parallel the international discourse of those with money. Africa is at this point in part because when ideological power blocs stopped fighting each other, the West no longer felt compelled to micromanage Africa, and Russia was no longer able.

The cash that once flowed to fund rapacious and brutal regimes came to an end in the 1990s, requiring rulers and their clients to find new sources of money, along with new avenues for their brutality and dominance. Critical to all of this was the need to find new “boogie-men”, the necessary enemy with which to legitimise their regimes. The Second Congolese War (1998-2003) is the starkest example of this to date. Unchecked by the West, the rest of the world, or even by other African states, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and Zimbabwe lead their kleptocratic campaigns across Congo.

On the reverse side, free of the great power game, and free of the ideological struggle of the Cold War, many African states have moved towards greater economic and political liberalisation, acquired greater internal stability, and begun to define themselves more robustly as sovereign and authentic states.



With the demise of the Soviets, the ideological legitimacy of centralised government and command economies suffered badly. A less constrained marketplace in goods, services and ideas, emerged across the continent, grasped by countries such as Ethiopia, Botswana and Kenya to name but a few. Most importantly, with the end of the Soviet Union, the Afrikaner ruling class in South Africa felt safe enough to dismantle from within the Apartheid system. We should not mistake these developments for the victory of democratic movements, Western in style and allegiance, over all forms of autocratic rule. Instead, they represent the beginning of different African states establishing, and making tangible, their own solutions to the problems that they face.

While it may appear easy to divide the forces of “chaos” and “progress” into different camps, on the ground there is no such simplicity. Uganda and Rwanda happily lead the rape of Congo’s Eastern

Provinces, while at home transforming and liberalising themselves dramatically. Rwanda has a civil society of some note, and is as democratic as any Tutsi regime dare to be.<sup>2</sup> Uganda is turning the tide on HIV/AIDS through educating their citizens and actively breaking down the taboos of sex. On the other hand, South Africa has lost much of its moral capital through the corruption of the ANC and particularly the inept, tin eared rule of Thabo Mbeki.<sup>3</sup> Ethiopia’s recovery from the tyranny of the Durg of Mengistu Hale Miram did not make the government of Meles Zenawi immune to criticism about its human rights record.

The transformative nature of self-interest can very often manifest itself as social progress at home and ruthlessness abroad, something which those of a liberal inclination are always ready to denounce as hypocrisy. That criticism misses the point. Statecraft requires ruthlessness, and responsible governments are prepared to accept criticism if it serves the interests of their society, state and regime. It was ever thus.

In this up-front world of self-interests, attempts at paternalism in Africa have floundered on reality and been stymied by local interests and scepticism. Britain has invested much in building up Africa through aid and interventions such as Serra Leone, aiming to create stable and friendly democracies in Africa only to be told to “butt out”, as demonstrated by South Africa’s protection of Zimbabwe’s decaying regime. The new Cameroon administration has gone some way towards rationalising

<sup>2</sup> Crisafulli, Patricia & Redmond, Andrea. *Rwanda, Inc.: How a Devastated Nation Became an Economic Model for the Developing World*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Feinstein, Andrew. *After the Party: Corruption, the ANC and South Africa’s Uncertain Future*, Verso, London, 2009

British behaviour in Africa, but is constrained by the power of the aid industry and influential campaigners.

France, on the other hand, has demonstrated some willingness to robust action, but only when it correlates with its own interests (rather than for the internationalist narrative) and when it fits comfortably with the needs of local élites'. The Mali, Libya and Cote d'Ivoire interventions demonstrate this profoundly. What France acquires is greater kudos as a pivot state, both with its former colonies and with the rest of the world's powers. There is a risk however, that France may over leverage itself in this regard: France cannot fight every war, and not every war it has to fight will be as morally tidy or marketable. That must become clear at home and abroad, for France to continue being successful.



China, on the other hand, has sought to buy its way into Africa's heart. Money might buy China access, but not love. When China's spending has worked against local sensibilities, as in Zambia, it has resulted in violence. And China lacks the projectionist capacities needed to defend its interests. For all its recent spending, and even contributing to a peace-keeping mission in Mali, China is unlikely to acquire these capacities any time soon, nor the reputation for using them.

The United States of America, despite shepherding Liberia back towards stability, is not offering anything African states want to buy. The soft power, wrapped up in the images of Barak Obama (for Africa's middle classes) and 50 Cent (for its urban youth), does not give the American dream the pull in Africa that it had in Eastern Europe. For so many, the "Land of the Free" is anything but, and the hypocrisy of America's actions and words undermines its kudos. What America will need to offer are tangible services, access to markets and meaningful investment. But to do so America must acquire the skills, the culture and the temperament to recognise the advantages latent in Africa.

In the G-Zero world, Africa has the potential to master its own destiny, and pivot states, no matter their size and perceived influence, will have to appreciate that their interests must "dove tail" with the self-interests of African States. Western democratic states, and more importantly their publics, will have to come to terms with the fact that progressives and democrats are not always the same thing, and that our post-enlightenment narrative about 'conservative', 'moderate', 'radical' and 'liberal' is clumsy and should not be allowed to straightjacket the relationship building process. If they do not, states will find their rivals (for that is what we will all be) reaping the rewards. Africans have the resources and knowhow to frustrate any imperialist and colonial ambitions of outsiders, and have acquired an immunity to universalist dogma. Africans are already in, and mastering the G-Zero world, while the rest of us are struggling to come to terms with its existence.

*Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of  
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**Images accessed 28/07/2013 –**

Every Nation for Itself cover:

[http://www.worldpolicy.org/sites/default/files/node\\_image/G-Zero.jpg](http://www.worldpolicy.org/sites/default/files/node_image/G-Zero.jpg)

Second Congolese War:

[http://fc08.deviantart.net/fs71/i/2010/340/f/a/the\\_second\\_congo\\_war\\_by\\_darkn3ssinzer0-d34dnw8.jpg](http://fc08.deviantart.net/fs71/i/2010/340/f/a/the_second_congo_war_by_darkn3ssinzer0-d34dnw8.jpg)

French forces in Mali:

[http://www.dnd.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ap\\_french\\_soldiers\\_chad\\_mali\\_ll\\_130114\\_wg.jpg](http://www.dnd.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ap_french_soldiers_chad_mali_ll_130114_wg.jpg)