

Xi Jinping, China, Africa, and Global Realignment

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This presentation is on “Xi Jinping, China, Africa, and Global Realignment”. It deals with the changing power relations and how various countries and regions react to those changes.

Roughly two years ago, the international version of Central China Television, CCTV, changed its name and brand to that of China Global Television Network, CGTN. The objective was to defend and promote Chinese policies globally probably in competition with other giant global television networks in advancing the interests of their home countries. The BBC, for instance, makes effort, mostly in subtle ways, to promote British policies worldwide and sound credible. CGTN was seemingly to do the same for China. It initially established two global broadcast centers, the main one in Beijing and the second one in Nairobi to cover the entire Africa. Then it added Washington as the third center. Thus CGTN drives Xi Jinping’s development global agenda from the triangular perspective of Beijing, Nairobi, and Washington. This is part of China’s global power projection.

The global power realignment taking place was initially subtle but now it is very open for all to see. In its Nairobi broadcast station, 5th Floor at K-Rep building, there often are four screens showing the global media competitors of CGTN, CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera as if to monitor what the others were doing in real time. At one time, the CNN screen was missing and on enquiring whether CNN no longer mattered as a competitor, there was just a smile. CGTN had seemingly conquered CNN and was working on BBC and Al Jazeera in subtle ways. That was an indication of emerging power.

In the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China President Xi Jinping made it clear that China is asserting itself at the global stage, through “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, and it has no apology for doing so. In the process, it is helping to realign the world in terms of power projection. While insisting that it is second to the United States in economic might, China does not see itself that way when it comes to geopolitics and where other Chinese interests are. These interests are socio-cultural, economic, foreign policy related, political, and military and all are elements of power projection.

Beijing has a touristic attraction called “Forbidden City” which also symbolizes China as a once “Forbidden Country” both internally and externally. As forbidden country, it tended to be confrontational, closed minded, and sought to export “revolution”. Since attempts to export “revolution” rubbed other countries the wrong way, over excited “youth” on both sides reportedly threw stones at each other’s embassies. Once China abandoned “revolutionary” exports and started escaping isolationism, it also became successful in systematically penetrating the rest of the world. It then became the most dynamic of the countries in the *Mythical East*, meaning those in Asia that do not crave to be European. As a result, Xi’s One Belt One Road Initiative and the global Common Destiny strategy attracts, rather than repels, the other states. This attraction systematically turns Beijing into a geopolitical “core” thereby making other powers seem like reluctant peripheries. Emmanuel Macron of France seems to have acknowledged that reality.

As a result of the emerging reality, several countries are busy jostling for geopolitical positions. African countries, too, would like to locate their individual niche in a world that is realigning itself. Some countries appear to be losing “it”, others thrust themselves at the forefront of that jostling. In that jostling, the *Conceptual West*, appears to be losing “it” and the *Mythical East* are picking up the geopolitical pieces. The *Conceptual West* comprises all countries that behave like Western Europe in thought and deed even if they are geographically located in the East like Australia, New Zealand, and to some extent Japan. African countries observe the ability of the collective *Mythical East*, with China in the lead, to ignore and surpass the West. China, once geopolitically a “forbidden country”, appears free to be everywhere.

China's success in going everywhere, compared to the conceptual West, is based on three confidence building factors in global political economy that it handles well. First, its prices for completing a particular task as agreed are generally more reasonable than anything the *Conceptual West* can come up with. Second, China seemingly goes out of its way to deliver, or be seen to deliver, on time. It does not give strange excuses for failure to deliver on what was agreed. Third, it tries to show respect to the host country rather international rudeness. The *Conceptual West*, to avoid fulfilling commitments engages in repeated insults and awkward demands that become excuses for not delivering. The three factors help to make China free from the condition of being "forbidden"

In getting out of that psychological frame of being forbidden, China finds willing collaborators, besides its Asian neighborhood, in African countries that want to advance perceived interests. For Africans, China ceased being "forbidden country" in the 1980s when it engaged in stadia diplomacy by constructing look alike stadia in various African capital cities. For some reason, stadia diplomacy did not attract as much attention from the *Conceptual West* as the current global thrust in highway and railways buildings symbolized by the One Road One Belt Initiative. It seems that China, no longer a "forbidden country", sets out to set global policy by being there when it is needed, and African countries see it. This reality makes Xi's One Road One Belt Initiative and Common Destiny strategy just the appropriate tools for "The New Era of China's Development and New Opportunities of Sino-Africa Cooperation."

In that New Era, Africa should be a key player in the realignment, not just a recipient of the global realignments. African countries are increasingly unwilling to accept insulting demands from obnoxious and condescending people in Euro capitals. In the process, they are receptive to relating with powers other than the Euros. In that regard, China is a welcome alternative because both sides have mutual interests to protect. The New Era of China's development, therefore, is also New Era for Africa with fresh opportunities for Africa-China cooperation.

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