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# **Geopolitical fragmentation in the world and its consequences on developing countries: a game of chess on a fractured board**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the impact of geopolitical fragmentation on developing countries amid rising tensions between major powers like the USA, Russia, and China. It examines how these dynamics compel developing nations to make difficult decisions regarding economic survival, sovereignty, and growth. The analysis focuses on the economic, political, security, and environmental consequences of this fragmentation, using examples such as sanctions and trade wars. The study also assesses the role of the USA and its allies in shaping global governance, highlighting the challenges brought by the increasing influence of emerging powers like China and India. It argues for the need to reform institutions such as the IMF to better reflect the complexities of this fractured global landscape. At the same time, the paper emphasizes the potential of regional institutions to address these challenges and foster cooperative development. Ultimately, the paper underscores the importance of navigating these shifts to ensure sustainable development in a divided geopolitical environment.

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Fragmentation, Developing Countries, Major Powers, Global Governance, Emerging Economies

## **Introduction**

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is increasingly characterized by division and competition, reminiscent of a fractured chessboard where global powers vie for influence and control. As articulated by Kissinger (1994), "The future of the world order will be determined by the interactions of major powers." On one side, the United States and its allies strive to maintain their dominance, while on the other, Russia rallies its bloc in opposition. Amidst this dynamic, China emerges as an ambiguous player, strategically maneuvering between these two camps to secure its interests.

The roots of this geopolitical struggle can be traced back to the Cold War, a period when developing countries were often pressured to choose between capitalism, championed by the USA and its allies, and communism, led by the USSR. Gaddis (2005) emphasizes that the Cold War was "not merely a struggle between two superpowers but a global conflict that engaged nearly every nation." This competition had profound consequences for developing nations, frequently treating them as pawns in a larger ideological battle. Many countries aligned with one bloc or another in pursuit of economic aid, military support, or political legitimacy, often at the cost of their sovereignty and independent development.

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Today, developing countries find themselves caught in a similar struggle, facing new dilemmas in deciding whether to align with the stability and prosperity promised by the USA or to counterbalance western dominance by siding with Russia. Stiglitz (2002) asserts that globalization has often prioritized the interests of major powers over those of developing nations, exacerbating their vulnerabilities in the process. The complexities extend beyond mere political affiliations; they involve considerations of economic survival, sovereignty, and long-term growth.

As these nations navigate turbulent waters, they must weigh the benefits and risks of aligning with major powers, often finding themselves in precarious positions influenced by competing agendas. Key questions arise: How can developing nations protect their interests while navigating the geopolitical rivalry between the USA and Russia? What role does China play in either facilitating or complicating these nations' quests for independence and development? Moreover, how can developing economies leverage their positions to maximize benefits while minimizing potential losses in this competitive landscape?

This paper will explore these questions by examining the roles of major global powers and the implications of their competition on developing nations. Scholars such as Rodrik (2018), Piketty (2014), and Moyo (2009) contribute to our understanding of these challenges, while Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), Sachs (2005), and Sen (1999) provide insights into the dynamics of economic growth and political decisions that shape development pathways.

### **Consequences of geopolitical fragmentation on developing countries**

The fragmentation of global geopolitics presents significant consequences for developing countries, manifesting in economic, political, security, and environmental dimensions.

#### *Economic consequences*

Developing countries often find themselves in precarious economic situations due to the increasing frequency of trade wars and sanctions instigated by major powers. For instance, sanctions against Venezuela have severely limited its ability to borrow internationally, as the USA has imposed restrictions on transactions involving its state-owned oil company, PDVSA. These sanctions not only cripple the country's economy but also hinder its capacity to access vital financial markets (Torres, 2021). Additionally, countries like Iran face similar challenges, with US sanctions preventing them from trading oil effectively, leading to substantial losses in revenue and economic instability (Bahrami, 2019).

Moreover, countries heavily reliant on exports to the USA may experience downturns when trade barriers are erected. For example, Ethiopia faced substantial economic challenges due to the withdrawal of its eligibility for the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which allowed duty-free access to the US market for certain exports. This decision was based on human rights concerns and highlights how geopolitical considerations can severely impact developing nations' economies (Eklund, 2022).

### *Political consequences*

Geopolitical fragmentation complicates the political landscape for developing countries, often leading to issues of sovereignty and external interference. Nations may struggle to maintain independent foreign policies as they are pressured to align with the strategic interests of either the USA or Russia. For instance, many African nations have found themselves navigating the complexities of relations with both China and the USA, leading to internal divisions. The case of South Sudan, where the USA has considerable influence, demonstrates how a country can feel pressured to align with a major power while simultaneously contending with internal political strife and external expectations (Smith, 2023).

Furthermore, developing nations that choose to remain neutral may find themselves marginalized. The situation in Myanmar illustrates this well, as the military junta's refusal to align with either bloc has led to economic isolation and humanitarian crises. As a result, external funding and political support have dwindled, leaving the nation struggling to address its developmental challenges (Chen, 2021).

### *Security consequences*

The implications of arms races and military alliances are particularly pronounced for developing countries caught in the crossfire of major power competition. Regional instability often escalates as countries align themselves with competing blocs, leading to increased militarization. For example, nations in Africa and the Middle East have experienced heightened tensions and conflicts partly due to the influence of external powers seeking to extend their strategic reach. The ongoing conflict in Libya, exacerbated by foreign interventions and support from various powers, illustrates how such dynamics can destabilize entire regions (Crocker, 2020).

The proliferation of arms and military support can further entrench conflicts, making it more challenging for these countries to achieve lasting peace. The USA's military aid to Egypt, despite concerns over human rights violations, reflects a strategic partnership that prioritizes stability over reform, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and unrest (Khalil, 2019).

### *Environmental challenges*

Fragmented cooperation among global powers also hinders collective efforts to address pressing environmental issues. Developing countries, often at the forefront of climate change impacts, require international support for sustainable development initiatives. However, geopolitical tensions can impede collaborative efforts, as nations prioritize strategic interests over environmental considerations. The failure of the COP26 climate negotiations to secure binding commitments from major powers exemplifies this challenge, leaving many developing nations without the support they need to combat climate change effectively (Jones, 2021).

In summary, the consequences of geopolitical fragmentation are profound for developing countries, shaping their economic stability, political autonomy, security landscape, and environmental resilience. The complexities of navigating this fragmented landscape

necessitate careful consideration of how these nations align themselves in a world defined by competition among major powers.

### **The position of the USA and its Allies**

The USA and its allies significantly influence global geopolitics, particularly concerning developing countries. This section discusses the strategic interests of the USA, its economic and military support mechanisms, and the broader implications of its dominance in international institutions like the IMF.

#### *Strategic interests in developing countries*

The USA's strategic interests in developing nations encompass various dimensions, including promoting democratic governance, ensuring stability in volatile regions, and securing access to essential resources. The United States has sought to counter China's growing influence, particularly in Africa and Latin America, through initiatives that enhance economic ties and political alliances. For instance, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) exemplifies U.S. efforts to foster trade relationships with African nations while simultaneously promoting stability and democratic governance (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

#### *Economic aid and military support*

The USA employs economic aid and military support as pivotal instruments to exert its influence in developing countries. Financial assistance is often directed towards humanitarian efforts, infrastructure development, and fostering political reforms. For example, USAID provides substantial funding to countries facing crises, such as Yemen, where the U.S. has committed millions to alleviate humanitarian needs amidst a prolonged conflict (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2023).

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the situation is particularly dire. The eastern region has faced significant instability due to armed groups and external influences, notably from Rwanda. UN experts have highlighted Rwanda's involvement in the DRC's eastern conflicts, pointing to how geopolitical fragmentation allows Rwanda to benefit from external support while the DRC struggles with a long-standing ban on arms purchases (International Crisis Group, 2023). This imbalance hampers the DRC's ability to respond effectively to threats, perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability.

Military support serves to bolster the defense capabilities of allied nations. The U.S. provides military assistance to countries like Egypt and Jordan to maintain regional stability and counter threats, particularly in the Middle East (Lutz, 2020). However, this dependence on U.S. support can restrict the autonomy of developing nations in foreign policy decisions, as seen in Egypt's adherence to U.S. directives due to reliance on military aid (Khalil, 2019).

### *The role of the IMF and U.S. dominance*

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) plays a crucial role in the global economy, particularly concerning developing countries. The USA holds significant voting power within the IMF, which allows it to influence critical decisions, including the allocation of resources during crises. This power was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when the IMF sought to allocate Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to bolster liquidity in global markets. However, the extension of SDRs faced delays largely due to opposition from the U.S. under the Trump administration, which emphasized a narrow view of financial assistance despite the pressing needs of developing countries for liquidity and economic stability (Hoh, 2021).

Moreover, the U.S. decision to withhold support for expanding SDRs during times of crisis illustrates how the interests of a single nation can impede collective action needed by the international community. Developing countries, reliant on external financial assistance, found themselves at a disadvantage as the U.S. leveraged its influence to block initiatives that could have provided much-needed relief (Thwaites, 2021).

### *Advantages and disadvantages of alignment*

Aligning with the USA offers developing countries access to significant financial and military resources, which can be advantageous for national development and security. However, this alignment comes with risks. Countries that align too closely with the USA may experience geopolitical tensions with other powers, such as Russia or China, potentially leading to economic isolation or sanctions. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine serves as a pertinent example, where nations that chose to support western positions faced retaliatory measures from Russia, demonstrating the delicate balance developing countries must navigate in their foreign policies (Lutsevych, 2020).

In summary, the position of the USA and its allies in developing countries is characterized by strategic interests, economic aid and military support, and significant influence over international financial institutions like the IMF. This dominance shapes the choices available to developing nations, compelling them to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of alignment in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

## **Geopolitical fragmentation and its effects on global governance**

Geopolitical fragmentation significantly impacts global governance, influencing international cooperation, multilateral institutions, and the ability to address global challenges effectively. A crucial aspect of this fragmentation is the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and how the growing economic influence of countries like China reshapes its governance structure.

### *Impact on international cooperation*

The increasing rifts between major powers have led to a decline in effective international cooperation. The USA and China, as primary actors in the geopolitical landscape, often find themselves at odds over trade, technology, and military influence, complicating diplomatic

negotiations. For instance, the ongoing trade war has not only affected bilateral relations but has also led to uncertainty in global markets, impacting developing countries that rely on stable trade relationships (Ferdinand, 2020).

### *Challenges for multilateral institutions*

Multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and the IMF, face significant challenges due to geopolitical fragmentation. The USA's withdrawal from various international agreements under the Trump administration weakened these institutions' effectiveness (Mason, 2021). Additionally, the IMF's decision-making process has been criticized for not adequately reflecting the growing economic power of countries like China, which has emerged as a major player in global finance.

As of 2021, China is the second-largest economy in the world, yet its voting power in the IMF does not align with its economic standing. The IMF's quota system, which determines the voting rights of member countries, has remained largely unchanged for years, causing friction between established powers and emerging economies (Vasudevan, 2022). Recent attempts to reform the IMF's quota system have faced resistance from traditional powers, particularly the USA, which holds significant sway over the institution. This stagnation in reform undermines the legitimacy of the IMF and its ability to address the needs of a changing global economy effectively (Igan, 2021).

### *Addressing Global Challenges*

Geopolitical fragmentation severely hampers efforts to address global challenges. Issues like climate change, public health crises, and terrorism require coordinated international responses; however, the current geopolitical landscape often leads to fragmented approaches that fail to produce meaningful results. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, highlighted the necessity of global cooperation in vaccine distribution, yet political tensions hampered collaborative efforts (Gonzalez, 2021).

Moreover, the failure of major powers to commit to binding climate agreements has hindered progress on global climate action, leaving developing countries to face the brunt of climate impacts without sufficient support or resources (Biermann, 2022).

In nutshell, geopolitical fragmentation poses significant challenges for global governance, particularly regarding the role of institutions like the IMF. The failure to adjust the IMF's quota system in light of emerging economies undermines its effectiveness and reflects broader tensions in global governance. As countries grapple with pressing global challenges, the need for innovative approaches to enhance collaboration and inclusivity among nations has never been more urgent.

Emerging economies, particularly China and India, have been playing an increasingly important role in reshaping global geopolitics. Their economic growth, diplomatic influence, and strategic interests are challenging the traditional dominance of western powers, leading to new dynamics in global governance, trade, and security.

## **Economic influence of emerging powers**

China's rapid economic growth has shifted the balance of power in global finance and trade. As the world's second-largest economy, China's influence on global markets is profound, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa. It has become the leading trading partner for many developing countries, offering them infrastructure investments through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Schmidt, 2021). While this provides opportunities for economic development, it also creates dependency on Chinese capital and markets, which can put pressure on developing countries' economic sovereignty (Albert, 2020).

India, another rising power, is also expanding its geopolitical influence through trade agreements and diplomatic partnerships, particularly in South Asia and Africa. Indians' "Look East" and "Act East" policies are designed to deepen engagement with Southeast Asian countries, promoting economic ties and security partnerships (Dahiya, 2021).

### *Shaping global governance*

The rise of emerging economies has implications for global governance, particularly in institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions have historically been dominated by western powers, with the USA holding significant influence. However, the growing economic power of China and India has led to calls for reform in these institutions to better reflect the realities of the global economy.

China's increased financial contributions to international institutions like the IMF have given it greater influence over decision-making. However, despite its large economy, China's voting power in the IMF remains disproportionately low compared to its economic size. This misalignment has led to tensions, with emerging economies calling for more equitable representation in global financial governance (Igan, 2021).

The BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has also emerged as a platform for emerging economies to advocate for reforms in global governance. Through BRICS, these countries have pushed for a more multipolar world order that challenges western dominance. They have advocated for increased representation in institutions like the UN Security Council and greater financial autonomy through the establishment of the New Development Bank (BRICS Bank) (Lissovlik, 2020).

### *Strategic and security concerns*

The growing economic influence of China and India has also reshaped global security dynamics. China's expanding military presence in the South China Sea and its strategic investments in ports and military facilities across Asia and Africa (commonly referred to as its "string of pearls" strategy) have raised concerns among western powers and neighboring countries. This has led to increasing military cooperation among countries like the USA, Japan, and India, as they seek to counterbalance China's growing influence (Campbell, 2021).

India, for its part, has been actively increasing its defense partnerships with countries in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Its involvement in the quadrilateral security



dialogue (Quad), along with the USA, Japan, and Australia, reflects its strategic interest in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific (Grossman, 2020).

### *Impact on developing countries*

While emerging economies like China and India offer opportunities for trade, investment, and development, they also pose challenges for other developing nations. Countries that align closely with China, for instance, may find themselves entangled in geopolitical rivalries, as seen in the case of Sri Lanka and its Hambantota Port project. Similarly, the influx of Chinese capital has led to concerns about debt sustainability in countries like Zambia and Sri Lanka, where heavy borrowing for infrastructure projects has led to mounting financial obligations.

Moreover, the competition between China and the USA for influence in Africa has created both opportunities and risks for African nations. While African countries benefit from increased investment and infrastructure development, they must carefully navigate the competing interests of these major powers to avoid being drawn into geopolitical conflicts.

The rise of emerging economies, particularly China and India, is reshaping the global geopolitical landscape. Their growing influence in global governance, trade, and security is challenging the traditional dominance of western powers and creating new dynamics that developing countries must navigate. As these emerging powers continue to expand their reach, they will play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping the future of global geopolitics.

### **The role of the international monetary fund in a geopolitically fragmented world**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) continues to play a vital role in global financial stability, but its effectiveness is increasingly challenged by geopolitical fragmentation and the growing influence of emerging economies. Historically, the IMF has been shaped by the economic and political power of its largest shareholders, particularly the USA and European countries. However, as countries like China, India, and other emerging economies grow in global influence, there are increasing calls for reforms to IMF governance and financial resources.

### *Quota system and voting power imbalance*

One of the central issues within the IMF is its quota system, which determines both the financial contributions of member countries and their voting power. Currently, the USA remains the largest single shareholder, giving it significant influence over IMF decisions. However, the IMF's governance structure does not fully reflect the rising economic power of countries like China and India, whose quotas and voting power are disproportionately low relative to their contributions to the global economy (Weiss, 2022).

For example, China's voting share is significantly smaller than that of the USA, despite its rapidly expanding global economic footprint. This imbalance has created tensions between developed and emerging economies, with countries like China pushing for a more equitable redistribution of quotas that better represents their economic weight (Strand, 2021). The reluctance of major western powers, particularly the USA, to allow reforms has hindered

progress, further entrenching the perception that the IMF remains dominated by traditional powers.

#### *Impact of US influence and the SDRs controversy*

The USA has often used its position within the IMF to further its strategic geopolitical interests. A notable example occurred during the Trump administration when the USA blocked a significant allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) that would have provided much-needed liquidity to developing countries facing economic challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when many developing nations were struggling with mounting debt and economic downturns, this move was seen as prioritizing domestic and geopolitical concerns over global economic recovery (Gallagher, 2021).

This incident illustrates how US influence within the IMF can have far-reaching consequences for the global financial system, especially for developing countries that depend on IMF assistance. The blockage of SDR allocations underlined the growing disconnect between the economic needs of the developing world and the strategic interests of the USA, fueling calls for governance reform within the IMF (Bretton Woods Project, 2021).

#### *Conditionality and the changing global landscape*

While the IMF has long been criticized for the conditionality attached to its loans, this issue has taken on new dimensions in a geopolitically fragmented world. Emerging economies, particularly China, have become alternative sources of financing for developing countries, offering loans with fewer political and economic conditions. China's influence, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offers developing countries an alternative to IMF programs, which often come with stringent fiscal and policy conditions (Dreher et al., 2018)

As a result, the IMF faces increased competition in terms of its ability to influence the policies of borrowing countries. Countries like Zambia and Sri Lanka, heavily indebted to Chinese lenders, are increasingly caught between traditional western financial institutions and Chinese-led development initiatives. This dynamic has weakened the leverage of the IMF in some regions, forcing the institution to reconsider its role and policies in a more multipolar world (Bräutigam, 2020).

#### *Looking forward: the need for reform*

In a world increasingly shaped by multipolar power structures, the IMF's relevance will depend on its ability to adapt to new geopolitical realities. This includes addressing the growing demands for quota reform, as well as rethinking its approach to conditionality in an environment where alternative sources of funding are available. Moreover, the IMF must find ways to engage more effectively with emerging powers like China and India, whose economic influence will continue to shape the global financial system in the coming decades.

Reforming the IMF's governance structure to give greater voice to emerging economies would not only reflect the current global economic landscape but also ensure that the

institution remains effective in promoting global financial stability. As geopolitical fragmentation deepens, the IMF's ability to bridge the interests of traditional and emerging powers will be crucial in maintaining its central role in the international financial architecture.

The fragmented global geopolitical environment presents developing nations with difficult choices, forcing them to navigate between alignment with major powers or neutrality. These decisions shape their economic growth, political autonomy, and long-term stability. Various authors have explored these dilemmas, offering diverse perspectives on the challenges faced by developing nations.

#### *Aligning with major powers*

Several scholars and analysts have discussed the economic and political implications of aligning with major global powers, particularly in the context of the USA, China, and Russia.

Hirschman (1945) argued that economic dependency on major powers creates vulnerabilities for developing nations. He highlighted how economic aid and military support from countries like the USA can strengthen local economies but also introduce political and policy constraints.

Mearsheimer (2014), from a realist perspective, emphasized that nations aligning with a major power like the USA or China must prepare for shifts in their domestic political landscape. He noted that developing countries risk becoming pawns in the broader strategic objectives of these powers, limiting their sovereignty.

Nye (2011) underscored the role of soft power in alignment decisions, explaining that countries tend to align with powers that offer not only economic incentives but also cultural and ideological appeal. This concept of soft power, where alignment with major powers is less coercive but still impactful, has been evident in Africa's engagement with both China and the USA.

#### *The neutrality option: myth or reality?*

Neutrality has been a challenging but appealing route for several developing countries.

Nkrumah (1965), in his reflections on African independence movements, advocated for a neutral stance to prevent African nations from becoming entangled in Cold War dynamics. However, he warned that neutrality without sufficient regional cooperation could lead to marginalization on the global stage.

Cohen (2019) discusses the difficulties of neutrality in his analysis of India's foreign policy, showing how New Delhi's attempt to balance relations with both Washington and Beijing has exposed it to external pressures, particularly regarding trade agreements and security alliances. Cohen warns that neutrality often comes at the cost of underdevelopment, as nations risk missing out on both investment and technological advancement.

Acharya (2020) posits that regionalism can help neutral countries avoid isolation. He contends that strengthening regional organizations, such as ASEAN in Southeast Asia or the African

Union, allows nations to navigate great power competition without being forced to choose sides. He argues that a collective, regional approach is vital for achieving long-term development and political independence.

### *Case studies*

A number of authors have provided in-depth case studies demonstrating the difficulties faced by developing countries in navigating this dilemma:

Kilcullen (2010) explored the challenges faced by African nations in maintaining neutrality, particularly in regions where international interventions play out through proxy conflicts, such as in Sudan and Somalia. He notes that these countries struggle to avoid alignment with major powers while securing their own security and economic stability.

Birdsall (2009) analyzed the role of international financial institutions like the IMF in creating dependency through aid programs. She points out that countries relying on IMF funding often have little room to resist pressure from major powers like the USA, forcing them into alignment even if neutrality would be in their best interests.

### *The role of China and changing quotas in the IMF*

The rise of China has added another layer of complexity. China's growing economic and geopolitical influence has reshaped global power dynamics, and this is reflected in the debate over the restructuring of IMF quotas.

Eichengreen (2011) argues that the IMF's failure to adequately reflect China's increasing economic clout has undermined the institution's legitimacy in the eyes of developing countries. He notes that China's outsized economic role should be better represented in global governance structures, including a greater share of voting rights at the IMF.

Subramanian (2011) supports this view, advocating for a reassessment of global power structures to include growing economies like China and India. He warns that the continued marginalization of these economies in institutions like the IMF could lead to the creation of parallel financial structures, further fragmenting global governance.

It's obvious that the geopolitical fragmentation of the world places developing countries at the center of a strategic dilemma. Authors such as Hirschman (1945), Mearsheimer (2014), and Nkrumah (1965) have all highlighted how aligning with major powers offers immediate economic and security benefits but often comes at the cost of sovereignty. Meanwhile, neutrality, as explored by Acharya (2020) and Cohen (2021), presents its own set of risks, leaving countries vulnerable to external pressures. As global institutions like the IMF face calls for reform, particularly in accommodating the rise of China, developing nations must navigate this complex landscape by strengthening regional ties and advocating for greater representation in global governance.

## **Regional institutions and their role in mitigating geopolitical fragmentation**

As geopolitical fragmentation deepens, regional institutions have increasingly become crucial in supporting developing countries. These institutions provide a platform for collective decision-making and a means of mitigating the adverse effects of geopolitical competition between major powers. Their role encompasses several key areas such as economic resilience, political stability, security cooperation, and environmental sustainability.

### *Economic cooperation and resilience*

One of the primary advantages of regional institutions is their capacity to foster economic resilience in the face of global fragmentation. As Acharya (2017) argues, regionalism enables smaller economies to unite and protect themselves from the economic consequences of trade wars and sanctions imposed by powerful nations. For example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which became operational in 2021, offers African countries the opportunity to reduce dependency on external markets. By fostering intra-African trade, the AfCFTA strengthens economic ties between African nations, shielding them from the economic pressures of major powers' trade policies.

Lopes (2019) further highlights that AfCFTA represents a pivotal moment in African economic development, as it encourages industrialization and economic diversification, reducing the reliance on volatile commodity markets. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, ASEAN has worked to deepen regional economic integration, promoting shared growth and reducing dependence on external powers such as China and the USA (Cooper, 2010).

### *Political autonomy and sovereignty*

Regional institutions also play a vital role in maintaining political autonomy for developing nations. As Buzan and Wæver (2003) note, regional security complexes allow countries to handle internal and regional conflicts without excessive interference from global powers. For example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has successfully mediated peace processes in Somalia and South Sudan, allowing these countries to pursue political stability with less influence from external powers.

Moreover, Healy (2020) points out that organizations like IGAD enable regional collaboration on complex issues such as governance and conflict resolution. By doing so, they help developing countries assert their sovereignty, resisting the pressure to align with global power blocs.

### *Security cooperation*

In terms of security, regional organizations often provide collective defense mechanisms and strategies to counterbalance external pressures. NATO's Partnership for Peace has served as a model for organizations such as ECOWAS, which has intervened in regional conflicts like the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. This kind of regional military collaboration helps protect developing nations from being drawn into the geopolitical contests of larger powers, while promoting regional stability (Chambers, 2018).

Lake (2016) highlights that regional security organizations have the added benefit of being culturally and politically closer to the nations they assist, making their interventions more contextually appropriate and less likely to result in long-term external dependency.

#### *Environmental sustainability*

The fragmentation of global geopolitical cooperation has also negatively impacted efforts to combat climate change, and this is an area where regional institutions have stepped in. SADC (Southern African Development Community), for instance, has led various initiatives on water management and climate change adaptation, particularly in countries like Mozambique and Malawi, where climate-related issues are exacerbating poverty (Nhamo, 2019). This collective approach helps these countries access resources and expertise that would otherwise be unavailable due to the competitive priorities of global powers.

ASEAN has similarly taken steps to promote regional environmental cooperation, particularly on issues like deforestation and pollution, where the lack of global action has left developing countries vulnerable. Regional frameworks provide a platform for these countries to jointly address environmental degradation while pushing back against the lack of global climate leadership (Maritime Southeast Asia Forum, 2020).

#### *Case Study: the African union's role in conflict resolution*

The African Union (AU) is often cited as a critical example of a regional institution actively mitigating the geopolitical consequences of fragmentation. Its role in mediating conflicts across the continent, particularly in regions affected by external influence such as the Sahel, highlights the power of regional diplomacy. Francis (2017) notes that the AU's peace and security architecture has been instrumental in stabilizing countries like Sudan and Mali, where foreign intervention from global powers often exacerbates conflicts. By taking charge of conflict resolution, the AU reduces the dependence of African countries on foreign powers, empowering them to pursue more independent foreign policies.

Regional institutions provide developing countries with an essential mechanism for managing the challenges of geopolitical fragmentation. Whether through economic cooperation, political autonomy, security collaboration, or environmental sustainability, these institutions enable countries to act collectively in the face of external pressures. Though, those institutions support to fully use their influence. However, some external powers exert influence on them especially by funding them.

Authors like Acharya (2020) and Cooper (2010) underscore the importance of regionalism as a means of maintaining sovereignty and ensuring resilience, especially as global powers continue to compete for influence in the developing world. These institutions offer a promising pathway for developing nations to safeguard their interests while navigating a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

## Conclusion

Geopolitical fragmentation poses complex challenges for developing countries, deeply affecting their economic, political, security, and environmental stability. As these nations navigate a world where global cooperation is increasingly fractured, the consequences manifest through limited access to financial markets, political pressures to align with major powers, intensified regional conflicts, and weakened global climate action. The restructuring of institutions like the IMF and the UN remains critical in ensuring fairer representation and consideration of the needs of developing nations, especially as they contend with outdated systems that fail to account for the economic rise of countries like China.

The role of regional institutions, however, provides a beacon of hope in mitigating some of these challenges. Organizations such as the African Union, ASEAN, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) demonstrate the potential for regional cooperation in fostering economic resilience, preserving political autonomy, ensuring collective security, and addressing environmental challenges. These institutions empower developing nations to form alliances that transcend the competition between global powers, enabling them to act more independently and focus on long-term development goals.

Moving forward, the global order must recognize the importance of accommodating the evolving dynamics within developing countries. This requires reforms in global governance, greater emphasis on regional collaboration, and a conscious effort to promote equitable economic and political systems that reflect the growing influence of emerging economies.

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