POLITICS OF ECONOMIC RETALIATION AND GLOBAL BUSINESS DISRUPTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE U.S.–CHINA TARIFF WAR FOR AFRICA

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Abstract

Research Problem:
The literature on the U.S.-China tariff war primarily discusses its implications in terms of trade imbalances, geopolitical rivalry, and institutional fragmentation. Africa is also treated as a mere recipient of commodity shocks or trade diversion. Such a conceptual framework does not allow us to understand how the economic retaliatory measures between the U.S. and China are redefining the role of Africa in the global value chain and how such a redefinition is creating dependency or strategic repositioning.
Methods/Theory:
The research is based on a qualitative political economy framework with a refined understanding of Economic Globalization Theory. The research uses triangulated data from the World Bank, UNCTAD, WTO, Afreximbank, and tariff monitoring data sources. The research introduces the concept of retaliatory globalization to understand the political recalculation of interdependence rather than its reversal in the context of strategic rivalry.
Results:
The research found that the U.S.-China tariff war is affecting the economies of the African continent through a series of structured transmission channels. Though the continent is facing increased fiscal and industrial vulnerability in the context of the U.S.-China trade war, it is also becoming strategically more important in the supply chain of mineral resources in the context of the environmental and technological shifts in the global economy. However, the supply chain diversification effect was not significant in the context of institutional constraints.
Conclusion:
In conclusion, the study concludes that globalization is not dying but

rather being rebalanced in a world of great-power rivalry. Africa's place in the world is neither solely marginalized nor inherently privileged, but rather institutionally embedded and strategically negotiable. The findings depend on the institutions, the domestic political economy, and the regional coordinating mechanisms such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Key Contribution to Knowledge:

The study makes an important contribution to international political economy studies by conceptualizing economic retaliation and global business disruption within a single conceptual framework. It develops the concept of retaliatory globalization to account for the differentiated third-region impact of great-power rivalry, overcoming traditional approaches to dependency and diffusion.

Recommendation:

African policymakers should focus on strengthening their institutions, upgrading their industries, and effectively utilizing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to leverage their exposure. Strategic coordination in key sectors, such as minerals and manufacturing, remains vital to transform their vulnerability into structural repositioning in a rebalanced global economy.

Introduction

The escalation of the tariff war between the United States and China since 2018 has emerged as one of the most significant disruptions to the global trade governance landscape, with implications that go far beyond the two main actors in the conflict. What started out as tariff measures justified in terms of trade imbalance, intellectual property rights, and industrial policy issues has now developed into a more general pattern of economic retaliation, strategic rivalry, and de-risking of supply chains. In the process, the conflict has increased global trade policy uncertainty, fueled the rise of trade restrictions, and reinforced the trend towards fragmentation in the global economy (World Bank, 2026). Indeed, recent global assessments point out that the rise in trade barriers and the associated trade policy uncertainty continues to be a drag on investment decisions and growth prospects, especially in the global economy and in regions that have been more integrated into global value chains but lack the ability to absorb shocks (World Bank, 2026).

The current state of knowledge and debates about the tariff war between the United States and China can be understood through three main analytical approaches, which dominate the current state of knowledge and debates about the conflict. First, the political economy perspective views the tariff war through the lens of the role of tariffs in trade relations, where the escalation of the conflict can be understood in terms of distributive conflict, constituency pressures, and strategic negotiation in trade relations between the two countries. Second, the economic statecraft perspective views the conflict in the context of the global geopolitical rivalry between the two countries, where the conflict is centered on the rivalry for technological, industrial, and strategic dominance in the global economy, where tariffs and trade restrictions serve merely as instruments of power in the conflict. Third, the institutionalist perspective views the conflict in the context of the role of the multilateral trade system in the conflict, where the tariff war is an outcome of the loss of legitimacy of the multilateral trade system, especially in the context of the dysfunctional

nature of the WTO's dispute settlement system, where states now increasingly rely on unilateral measures to settle disputes, especially in the context of the conflict between the two main actors in the global economy (Hopewell, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

A parallel line of research has explored the economic spillovers from the trade conflict, including tariff pass-through, disruptions in intermediate goods trade, and the structural reshaping of supply chains as firms adapt their sourcing, investment, and production strategies in response to volatility and geopolitics. These studies demonstrate that tariff levels and retaliation remain significantly above pre-2018 levels, illustrating the evolution of the trade war from a temporary shock to a more permanent feature of the trade landscape (Bown, 2025). This has contributed to trade diversion, new investment channels, and increased competition in third markets as suppliers seek alternative markets for excess exports and firms seek new production locations (Bown, 2025).While the discussion regarding the trade war's causes and systemic effects has become quite mature, Africa's place within this literature has remained limited and unspecified. When Africa does feature, it is typically either a passive recipient of external shocks such as fluctuations in commodity prices or demand, or as a potential beneficiary of more complex and diversified supply chains. The discussion, however, has remained somewhat broad and not closely linked with clear mechanisms. Africa is treated as a single, monolithic unit.

Further, there has been a tendency for many of these studies to treat trade war politics as a singular set of events (tariffs, retaliation, export restrictions, coercion) and business disruption as another set of events (supply chain restructuring, plant relocation, investment reallocation). Yet these two phenomena are closely linked. The tactics used by retaliation shape business strategies, and business restructuring can create new challenges and opportunities for Africa.It is within this context, that this study illustrates its contribution, in the midst of an analytical landscape that is shaped by prevailing thought. It breaks with conventional approaches along three distinct lines.

Firstly, it integrates economic retaliation and business disruption under a single analytical umbrella. Rather than treating tariffs as autonomous policy instruments, economic retaliation is conceived of as a cumulative process that transforms supply chains, investment flows, industry rivalry, and commodity price shifts. By so doing, it connects the study of international political economy with global business analysis, conceiving of coercive state strategies and business responses as two sides of the same coin that jointly impact African outcomes (Brown, 2025; World Bank, 2026).

Secondly, it shifts attention away from broad continental generalizations and toward the mechanisms of sectors and value chains. It demonstrates how various mechanisms, including commodity price volatility, export reallocation, import competition, shifts in foreign direct investment, and strategic control of inputs, operate in extractive industries, agro-processing, and manufacturing sectors in unique ways. Such a results-driven approach is consistent with Africa-focused trade analysis that emphasizes how structural change and an uneven global environment interact with Africa's ongoing drive for economic growth and deepening intra-African trade linkages (Afreximbank, 2025).

Third, and most importantly, the paper transforms Africa's position from being a mere recipient of global forces to one of conditional strategic leverage. Recognizing the reality of global asymmetries, the paper asserts that "moments of retaliation by powerful economies provide occasions for bargaining, where Africa's share of global production

networks becomes contingent rather than predetermined." It is important to note that outcomes are not predetermined as mere vulnerability or automatic advantage, but are instead made contingent upon domestic institutional capacity, infrastructure readiness, policy coherence, as well as the quality of regional integration efforts in the region, as embodied by the AfCFTA (African Union, n.d.; Afreximbank, 2025). The AfCFTA's focus on enhancing Africa's voice and policy space in global trade negotiations underscores its value as a strategic tool for resilience and repositioning in an increasingly fragmented global economy.

This study, however, doe not simply describe spillovers. It changes how they are thought about. By locating Africa in the broader process of reorganization of global trade governance and production networks as a result of retaliatory trade politics, the paper advances the debate beyond what previous literature has done. It also counters overly simplistic, deterministic accounts of Africa's position as being either outside the main process or as being full of opportunity but lacking institutional foundations. To put it simply, the tariff war between the U.S. and China is not simply an issue between two countries with spillovers. It's an issue of realignment in global economic governance, including Africa's position. The key issue that the paper tries to resolve is whether this process of realignment will be one of deepening dependency or of opening up opportunities for repositioning.

Research Problem

The major problem addressed in the present study is the absence of a mechanism-based understanding of the processes through which the economic retaliatory measures between the United States and China are affecting the changing role of Africa in the global production networks and trade governance structures. The U.S.-China trade conflict in the context of the U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods is a well-researched area in the context of trade imbalances, geopolitical rivalry, and institutional fragmentation. However, in the majority of the research on the subject, the role of Africa is treated as a residual variable either in the context of its receptiveness to the price volatility of commodities or in the context of its speculative resilience in the context of supply chain shifts.

The three gaps in the literature define the problem more precisely. First and foremost, the literature on the subject is characterized by a dichotomy between the political dimensions of the trade conflict (the processes of tariff escalation, economic coercion, retaliatory measures) and the reality of the business conflict (the processes of supply chain shifts, export shifts, FDI shifts, market saturation). Secondly, the literature's focus is largely macroeconomic, as well as continent-based, which makes it difficult to assess the micro-foundations of the intersectoral transmission of the effects of the tariff war. It's therefore difficult to argue whether the tariff war's effects in Africa are those of enhanced vulnerability or conditional leverage. Thirdly, the emerging literature's suggestion of positive outcomes for Africa resulting from the diversification of global value chains is based on weak foundations, including institutional, infrastructural, as well as regional integration, especially under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). As such, any positive outcomes are largely speculative.

The research problem, therefore, revolves around understanding the implications of economic retaliation between global powers for differentiated restructuring effects in Africa, as well as conditions for vulnerability or leveraging. The relevance of the proposed research stems from two main issues. Firstly, it advances the field of international political economy by linking economic statecraft with

global business adjustment. Secondly, it has practical implications for African policy debates.

The key question that this study seeks to explore is not just whether Africa is feeling the effects of this U.S. China tariff war, but also how this retaliatory trade action affects Africa's place in the world economy, whether it does so in a way that strengthens dependency or opens up possibilities for negotiated autonomy.

Research Objectives

The research seeks to critically investigate the implications of the economic push-and-pull between the United States and China on the changing role of Africa in the global trade and production networks. More precisely, the research seeks to:

i. Investigate the implications of the U.S.-China trade conflict on the economies of Africa in terms of the volatility of commodity prices, supply chain disruptions, shifts in export markets, and the diversion of FDI.

ii. Evaluate the implications of the trade conflict on the major sectors of the economies of Africa in terms of the extractive industries, manufacturing industries, and the agro-processing industries.

iii. Investigate whether the trade disruptions in the global trade networks could be an opportunity for Africa, especially in terms of the options of regional trade integration such as the AfCFTA.

iv. Develop a comprehensive framework that integrates the dimensions of economic retaliation and global trade disruption.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach that is descriptive-analytical in nature, as informed by international political economy. This approach is most suitable for this study because it does not intend to quantify attitudes or behavior but to analyze how structural economic processes, tools, and transmission channels develop from the U.S.-China tariff war, which affects African economies. Since this is a macro-structural problem, it does not require a population survey to inform this study. Instead, it uses secondary data to analyze economic retaliation, trade diversion, shifts in supply chains, and investment shifts.

Sources

1. To ensure a robust study that uses a triangulated approach to data analysis, this study uses a variety of secondary sources, including:
2. Trade data from the World Bank, WTO, and Peterson Institute for International Economics
3. Reports from UNCTAD, Afreximbank, African Development Bank, and African Union
4. National trade data from selected African economies
5. Policy briefs and trade monitoring reports
6. Peer-reviewed articles on economic statecraft, trade wars, and GVCs

These sources provide quantitative and qualitative evidence. The quantitative evidence includes indicators of tariffs, trade volumes, commodity prices, and FDI. The sources provide qualitative evidence as well.

Approach

The framework for analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies involves an outcome-oriented and mechanism-based approach. The steps in this framework are as follows:

1. Identifying the retaliatory actions of the US and China.
2. Identifying the channels through which the ripple effects occur.
3. Identifying the sector-specific impacts of US-China retaliation.

The outcome-oriented and mechanism-based approach will allow for a better analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies. This framework will enable a better analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies.

Validity

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies, this study will use a technique of data triangulation. This involves using different sources of evidence and comparing the analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies. The sources of evidence for this analysis are as follows:

1. Institutional sources.
2. Trade monitoring reports.
3. Peer-reviewed academic sources.
4. Policy sources.

The use of different sources of evidence will ensure the validity of the analysis of the ripple effects of US-China retaliation in African economies. The use of established sources of international datasets will ensure transparency.

Justification of Methodology

A population-based sampling method is not appropriate for this study because the research problem concerns macro-level trade governance, retaliatory policy instruments, and structural economic transformation. These phenomena operate at the systemic and institutional level rather than at the individual or household level.

Therefore, a qualitative, document-based, mechanism-centred methodology is best suited to addressing the research objectives and explaining Africa's repositioning within global economic restructuring.

Conceptual Clarification

This research also seeks to clarify four important concepts: Economic Retaliation, Global Business Disruption, Trade Dependency, and Strategic Repositioning.

Economic Retaliation: Economic retaliation is the planned application of trade and financial measures, such as tariffs, export controls, sanctions, and regulatory measures, by states in reaction to perceived economic damage or strategic rivalry. Although traditional trade theory views tariffs as instruments of protection and negotiation, the study views economic retaliation as an instrument of economic statecraft that transcends traditional commercial adjustments. Economic retaliation is not just a reaction; it is a strategic instrument that seeks to influence the behavior of rival states, even while it alters global production incentives.

As such, the study views economic retaliation as a structural shock generator. The importance of retaliation is not just in the reduction of trade between the retaliating states but also in the level of uncertainty it creates in the global economy. For instance, the tariff war between the US and China is viewed not just as a trade war but also as an instrument of retaliation with third-region effects.

Global Business Disruption: Global business disruption refers to changes in corporate decision-making, supply chains, investment patterns, and market strategies in reaction to geopolitical and policy-related volatility. Unlike the traditional trade impact analysis

that focuses on price and quantity effects, business disruption takes into account strategic corporate changes in location, diversification, China+1 strategies, and changes in inventory and supply.

The current study contributes to the argument that economic retaliation and global business disruption are conceptually inseparable. Economic retaliation affects corporate strategies and corporate changes either exacerbate or ease the economic spillovers of retaliation. Understanding the extent of Africa's vulnerability to the tariff war requires an analysis of both state and corporate actions through a single lens.

Trade Dependency: Trade dependency refers to a structural feature of an economy in which export earnings, fiscal security, and industrial inputs are heavily concentrated in a handful of external markets and primary products. Trade dependency in the African economies is characterized by a narrow export base and a high import dependence for manufactured products.

In this study, dependency goes beyond the notion of a fixed and permanent subordination. It is rather a fluid and contingent concept that can be rebalanced at any time when the world production hierarchies are turned upside down. The tariff war generates moments when dependency can be strengthened through volatile commodities and tougher imports. At other moments, dependency can be something that can be negotiated through trade diversion and value chain relocations.

Strategic Repositioning: The concept of strategic repositioning refers to the ways in which states and regions can use the disruptions caused by the systemic changes in the world economy. It involves strategic actions taken at the state and regional levels in order for the disruptions caused by the changes in the world economy to be an opportunity for strategic changes.

In this study, strategic repositioning in the context of the tariff war and its impact on Africa and other regions is viewed as a conditional rather than an absolute process. It hinges upon the capacity of the institutions and infrastructures in the regions as well as the regulation and regional integration in Africa through AfCFTA. The impact of the tariff war between the US and China in Africa is viewed as an open strategic field.

Conceptual Contribution of the Study

The contribution of this study in the realm of economic theory lies in its attempt to combine economic retaliation and disruption in world business in a single framework. This study contributes to the world economy as a relational approach to the impact of the great-power trade conflicts on the third regions. Africa in this study is not viewed as a mere periphery and a mere beneficiary of the world economy. It is rather viewed as a region that is structurally embedded in the world economy.

In this respect, this study shifts the discussion of the impact of the tariff war and other disruptions in the world economy from mere economic impact to economic structural changes. It puts Africa in the center of the economic changes in the world economy rather than at its margin.

Theoretical Framework

This study is related to Economic Globalization Theory in a non-mechanical and non-orthodox sense. Here, the idea of globalization is not treated as a straightforward line of market integration and efficiency creation. Instead, the basic assumptions of the idea are challenged in the context of retaliatory trade politics and strategic economic pressures.The traditional economic globalization theory considers globalization as an increase in cross-border trade, investment, financial integration, and interconnected production (Stiglitz, 2003; Waters, 1995).

Accordingly, the opening of markets, trade liberalization, and the free movement of capital are expected to increase efficiency and productivity through the principles of comparative advantage and globalization (Stiglitz, 2003). The liberal approach focuses on the positive-sum character of globalization and the spread of development (Amin, 1987). In contrast, the radical approach focuses on inequality, dependency, and structural imbalances in the context of globalization (Amin, 1987; Sorensen, 2006).

Practically,both the liberal and radical approaches to globalization are based on the assumption that globalization is fueled by market forces and integration processes. Even the radical approaches focus on inequality and dependency in a broad sense, without considering the possibility of globalization being used strategically. The conflict between the United States and China over tariffs is a litmus test for the assumption.The rise of tariffs, export controls, and strategic decoupling indicates that globalization is not merely an economic phenomenon but also a politically managed and reversible process. This means that interdependence can be weaponized, supply chains can be securitized, and trade can be used as an instrument of economic coercion. From such an understanding, it is not merely that globalization is growing in depth; it is also being strategically reconfigured.

This study, therefore, extends Economic Globalization Theory by introducing the concept of retaliatory globalization, wherein globalization is characterized by the weaponization of interdependence for geopolitical purposes, with firms adapting to the new conditions by reconfiguring supply chains to mitigate the effects of the same.The study differs from Economic Globalization Theory in that, unlike the traditional theory, retaliatory globalization takes into account the following factors:

1. Politicization of interdependence
2. Securitization of supply chains
3. Strategic trade instruments
4. Ripple effects of bilateral retaliation in third countries

By incorporating these factors, this study transcends the liberal optimism and structural dependency pessimism associated with globalization.

Theoretical Contribution: From Passive Dependency to Conditional Leverage

Typically, globalization processes place African economies in a position of a structurally sidelined actor in the world economy: primarily exporters of raw materials and importers of manufactured products. In this view, Africa's place in the world appears to be predetermined by long-standing processes of dependency. This study contests this monochromatic view by acknowledging the fact that, Africa's economies start from a disadvantaged position, this study argues that a trade pushback opens up opportunities for bargaining leverage. This is so because, when trade chains break down and trade blocs realign, the value of alternative markets, strategic minerals, and production centers can fluctuate.

However, Africa is not just a victim of a fragmented world: it is structurally embedded in a system, but strategically negotiable in a constantly evolving hierarchy of global production. Three things that this study does to globalization theory:

1. This study rethinks globalization as a phenomenon that is politically reversible and weaponizable, not a necessary or inevitable process.
2. This study brings together economic statecraft and corporate restructuring in a new approach to globalization studies.

3. This study uses a mechanism approach to third-region effects to capture how great power counter-retaliation affects peripheral economies in differentiated ways.

Why Economic Globalization Theory Still Matters

In spite of its limitations, Economic Globalization Theory remains relevant because the US-China tariff war occurs in a tightly interwoven world. The African economies remain part of this world. The theory provides the structural foundation upon which the politics of retaliation are waged.

The purpose of this study remains the same. The US-China tariff war and its impact on African economies are part of a new world of strategic contestation disguised as interdependence. The study therefore not only engages Economic Globalization Theory but adjusts it in accordance with the new reality of strategic contestation disguised as interdependence.

Where this study sits in the theoretical conversation

The study occupies an intermediate position in the debate about Economic Globalization Theory. It disagrees with:

1. The liberal assumption that economic integration necessarily leads to shared prosperity.
2. The deterministic assumption that peripheral economies are inevitably locked in a predetermined subordination.

It proposes a conditional structural assumption: the impact of the US-China tariff war on Africa is mediated by institutional capacity and regional frameworks such as AfCFTA. The theory is not taken literally. It is adapted as a flexible framework in accordance with the new reality of economic retaliation and fragmentation.

Major Discussions: Retaliatory Globalization in Practice: Africa in the Recalibration of Trade Power

The trade war between the US and China did not merely slow down trade; it also reorganized the world map. What is striking about Africa is that, while it did feel the sting of this trade war, something that was expected given its position in world value chains the channels through which this effect was felt were structured.Consider, for instance, commodity price volatility as a first clue to this phenomenon. With trade tariffs escalating from 2018 to 2020, uncertainty in world demand for these products started to affect commodity price stability globally. While for oil-exporting countries such as Nigeria and Angola, as well as for mineral-exporting countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, this would mean shaky fiscal futures, this was not a run-of-the-mill commodity price volatility driven either by overproduction or by new substitutes that were gaining ground. This was a war-induced uncertainty.

Moreover, to focus only on this would be to narrow our scope to a particular phenomenon without capturing the larger picture. While Africa's commodity-exporting economies were quivering, Africa's mineral economies, specifically those related to cobalt, lithium, and rare earth minerals, were gaining much higher strategic importance as a result of reconfiguring global supply chains to de-risk manufacturing and technology-related inputs. So, Africa was destabilized and re-valued on the world map.Other research would typically focus on this destabilization while overlooking this re-valuing of peripheral regions as strategic hubs. This study demonstrates that retaliation reorders hierarchy; it does not deepen marginality. Thus, when viewed from this particular lens, the trade war does not indicate that globalization is ending or that globalization is proceeding apace. It indicates a form of recalibration that is happening, a

form of interdependence that is weaponized, a form of globalization that does not retreat but reconfigures itself in a new way: globalization restructures itself.

Trade Diversion and Industrial Pressure: Dependency Reinforced or Reconfigured?

Commodity volatility points to macro-level issues of exposure, whereas trade diversion points to micro-level issues of industry-level stress. After the tariffs rose, Chinese manufactured exports began looking for alternative markets as access to the US market was reduced. The African economies benefited from this as their consumer markets and relatively open import policies absorbed part of this. The consequence was that the local manufacturing sectors had an even tougher time competing.In both Nigeria and Kenya, local manufacturing was squeezed out by cheaper imports. This looks similar to dependency theory. The peripheral economies are soaking up surplus production capacity of the core economies. However, this is not as straightforward as it initially looks.

Although the local manufacturing sector was squeezed out by cheaper imports, this was a consequence of the global realigning. The multinational corporations had no choice but to start looking for alternative sources. The new trend of multinational corporations was the "China+1" strategy. Africa benefited little from this. This contradicts the liberal assumption that a reshuffling of markets will always lead to new opportunities for developing economies.But why did Africa not benefit? The problem is not just a question of a global bias. It is a question of local readiness. Can the local logistics be relied upon? Is the energy supply reliable? Are the regulations in place? Dependency isn't just a question of a structural relationship. It's a question of a relationship mediated through institutions.

These conclusions contradict two main narratives. The liberal assumption that a diversification of supply chains will lead to an uplift of developing economies. The hard determinist assumption that peripheral positions are fixed. We are left with a conditional structural dependency. Trade retaliatory policies open doors only in those places that are institutionally ready. Therefore, dependency is not fixed.

AfCFTA and Institutional Mediation: Can Regional Integration Convert Disruption into Leverage?

If this shifts how exposure is viewed globally, then it's how it's mediated that's key. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which has been fully up and running since 2021, is an effort to stitch a continental economic space together in a world order that's stubbornly fragmented. Its role in the tariff war context is not symbolic; it's about scale. By reducing intra-African tariffs and unifying trade rules, AfCFTA hopes to reduce external dependency and deepen internal trade (African Union Commission, 2023). In theory, this should give Africa a stronger bargaining position in a world of great power rivalry.

However, as with any large-scale continental reform, lofty institutional goals must navigate domestic political realities. There's still a lot to be done in implementation. Rules of Origin negotiations for trade exceeding 90% of tariff lines have been slow to conclude (Hartzenberg, 2023). There's a structural problem with infrastructure, as well as issues with harmonizing customs. This does not mean integration is a failure; it's just defining how quickly it is happening. AfCFTA demonstrates that it's ultimately institutions that set the stage, but it is domestic incentives that dictate how quickly or thoroughly rules are followed. Retaliatory globalization makes regional coordination more valuable, but it's still subject to domestic political realities.

From this view, Africa's ability to reposition itself is not hard-wired to a rivalry with anyone globally; it's something that's developed. Therefore, regional integration is a necessary component, but it's not enough on its own to guarantee strategic repositioning.

Multi-Level Contestation and the Limits of Structural Determinism

The larger point, in other words, is that the African experience in the conflict between the US and China over tariffs is not merely one of victimization, nor is it merely one of triumph. The relevant question is not, in fact, whether globalization is falling apart, because it is not. Nor is the relevant question whether Africa is gaining or losing out in the process, because it is both, but in an asymmetrical way. The answer that the research findings offer is that, yes, it is, but not in an even way;

1. It makes Africa more important in the supply chains of minerals.
2. It makes Africa more competitive in the sphere of manufacturing.
3. It favors societies and institutions that are ready.
4. It disciplines fragmentation.

The implication is that the African experience is no longer merely one of being outside the process of the reshuffling of global trade power, but of being inside it, in an unequal way, to be sure, but in a way nonetheless that is quite different from the earlier research that portrayed the African experience primarily in terms of being a vulnerable periphery, and also quite different from the more recent research that portrayed the African experience primarily in terms of being the next sure beneficiary of the supply-chain effects of the conflict between the US and China.

The implication is that we now have a structurally embedded but strategically negotiable Africa, whose outcome depends on the extent to which its institutions can be aligned in the politically contested global economy.

Concluding Remarks

This study aims to interrogate the dominant views on globalization, particularly with respect to the dynamics of great-power rivalry. Instead of the U.S.-China tariff war representing the process of deglobalization, the research findings suggest that the process of globalization is strategically recalibrating. Instead of the absence of interdependence, the research findings suggest that interdependence has become politicized, and integration and fragmentation are no longer mutually exclusive concepts. In fact, the research findings suggest that the process of retaliatory globalization has created a situation where integration and fragmentation coexist.

The study findings support the fact that Africa remains structurally exposed to the dynamics of global production networks. Economies that are heavily reliant on the production and export of commodities experienced fiscal volatility, while manufacturing industries faced heightened competitive pressures. In this respect, the research findings support the structural views on the nature of the global economic order.

However, the research findings diverge from the earlier literature on the nature of the global economic order. First, the research findings suggest that retaliatory trade politics actually increased the strategic importance of Africa to the global supply chain for critical minerals, which are at the forefront of the environmental revolution. In fact, the research findings also suggest that Africa was not structurally exposed; rather, Africa was structurally recalibrated. Second, the research findings diverge from the liberal views on the nature of the global economic order, as the research findings suggest that supply chain

diversification does not automatically equate to the development of the third region. In fact, the research findings equally suggest that while global corporations pursued the China-plus strategy, Africa was not able to capture the benefits of the diversification process.

The main theoretical contribution of this research is the reframing of the third region effects of great-power rivalry. Instead of the third region experiencing the spillover effects of great-power rivalry, the research findings suggest that retaliation actually recalibrates global hierarchies differently. Dependency, therefore, is not inevitable, but the process of repositioning is not automatic.This critical finding speaks directly to the heart of our concern: what happens to Africa's position in the international division of labor when major economies retaliate economically, and at what point does this shift in position propel Africa towards greater dependency or towards wiser and more strategic action? The answer here is clearly nuanced. Commodity-based economies become more vulnerable, manufacturing-based economies face greater competitive pressure, minerals become more strategically important, and regional integration becomes more valuable and costly at the same time. Africa is neither simply collateral damage in this process, nor automatically a winner. Rather, Africa is a core player in a re-balanced world economy and one capable of strategic negotiation.

In other words,what this means for the African case of regional integration is equally clear. The African Free Trade Area, AfCFTA, is neither simply symbolic nor simply cosmetic. Rather, it functions as a mediating institution. However, its transformative capacity depends on the depth of implementation and the strength of the national political economies in which it finds itself. The dreams of supranational institutions are very much alive. The question here, however, remains what this might look like in practice.

In the end, the US-China tariff tussle may have very little to do with the end of globalization and everything to do with the beginning of a new era of globalization. Africa may feel the effects of this nonetheless. The question remains whether this might be transformed into a position of strength through stronger institutions and a stronger industry. The answer to this question remains to be seen. That, however, remains Africa's challenge and opportunity in this new era of retaliatory globalization.

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