

A south-south opportunity emerges in global power shift

ABROAD AT HOME

Thitinan Pongsudhirak



A tectonic power shift in the global arena is an emerging phenomenon that is no longer in doubt. Why, and to what end, this profound power shift in the international system is taking place at this time, however, remains a matter of dispute.

The whole process is likely to take at least another two decades to unfold, and its eventual results may be murky, disorderly, volatile and unstable. Yet one consequence is likely to be a power shift from the northern to the southern hemisphere, from the affluent and established Western countries to a wide variety of developing economies which used to comprise the "third world".

This likelihood provides unprecedented opportunities for up-and-coming economies of the south to cooperate and play a greater role in determining the shape and form of the international system in the years to come. At the Crans Montana Forum in Morocco's seaside town of Dakhla last March and at the Asian-African conference in Jakarta last week, the logic and realm of possibilities for south-south assertion in international affairs were evident.

Next year marks the Crans Montana Forum's three decades in operation. The Swiss NGO has sought to advance the agenda and priorities of developing countries of the south. At Dakhla, the focus was on bringing together and harnessing regional resources of Africa for Africans in a south-south spirit, including the roles of southern countries in other regions.

Africa is a mixed continent of 1.1 billion people, beset by all sorts of challenges — from internal conflicts and civil strife to pandemics and Islamist terrorism. But it is broadly making steady strides in expanding areas of growth and development. Notwithstanding perilous pockets of violent internal conflict and outright warfare, the continent is in a better shape than it has ever been. The IMF even saw fit last year to co-organise an international "Africa Rising" conference, showcasing the continent's vast



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indonesian President Joko Widodo, along with other African and Asian leaders, lead the reenactment of the historic walk from 1955 along Asia Africa Street in conclusion of the Asian African Summit in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. AP

economic potential, relative social development and political liberalisation gains.

The Crans Montana Forum and many other pro-south NGOs, such as Focus on the Global South in Southeast Asia, have been instrumental in highlighting and pressing the agenda of developing countries. At the same time, many governments of the south are also intent on setting the global agenda in their own way.

The Asian-African conference, organised by the Indonesian government and spearheaded by President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, is a prime example of countries in the southern cone coming into their own. With 109 nations sending senior leaders to attend, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Asia-Africa gathering rang of nostalgia, because it marked the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which Indonesia's then-President Sukarno hosted in 1955.

At that time, Bandung represented a sea change for the less-developed

countries of Asia and Africa. It was the first time they came together from two of the world's most populous continents, most of them poor and newly independent from colonial rule. Apart from Sukarno, Bandung featured Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Yugoslavia's Josip Tito and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah — all recognised as leaders of the post-colonial world. In addition, China's Zhou Enlai, Cambodia's Norodom Sihanouk, Burma's U Nu and U Thant and Thailand's then-foreign minister Prince Wan Waithayakorn also joined the Bandung forum.

All of these leaders from "third world" countries wanted to chart their own course of development and progress in the face of the bipolar Cold War between the US-led West and the Soviet-led East. Back then, "east" meant the Soviet Union and its client regimes in Eastern Europe. Taking sides between these two Cold War titans was unavoidable.

Countries that carved out their own paths, such as Burma's inwardly socialist

experiment and India's insularity, suffered from not being able to integrate with the expanding global economy.

For Thailand, Bandung was a second thought on neutrality. In 1954 prior to Bandung, Thailand had already signed on to the US-led Manila Pact, which spawned the anti-communist Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation. Bangkok took sides because it had to, as communism expanded into Indochina just six years after the communist People's Republic of China became triumphant. All things being equal, Thailand would have liked to have taken a neutral path but that choice was not available if it was to thwart the threat of communist expansionism.

The Bandung spirit of independence and third-world camaraderie, in turn, led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. NAM now has 120 members, many of which attended the Asia-Africa conference in Jakarta. The Bandung spirit of non-alignment has been partly reincarnated into south-south cooperation. Without the Cold War,

the Bandung participant countries now have a second chance to see the world as they wish it to be, not lorded over by America and Europe.

Asian voices and African aspirations have never counted this much in the international system. Rising Asia and Africa do not necessarily mean an inexorable decline of the West. And Asia and Africa are still full of the same problems that plagued them in the past — government mismanagement, corruption, human rights violations and so on. But there has never been a better opportunity for developing nations of these two continents, that make up more than two thirds of the world's population, to come together and connect in collaboration with the "first world" to cultivate peace and prosperity and mould the future of things to come in international life.

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COMMENTARY

Nicholas D Kristof



Riots distract from crisis of US inequality

Conservatives have sometimes been too quick to excuse police brutality. And liberals have sometimes been too quick to excuse rioter violence.

It's outrageous when officers use excessive force against young, unarmed African-American men — who are 21 times as likely to be shot dead by police as young white men. It's also outrageous when rioters loot shops or attack officers.

So bravo to Loya Graham, the Baltimore mother captured on video grabbing her teenage son from the streets and frog-marching him home. The boy wilted: It must be humiliating to be a "badass" rioter one moment and then to be savagely scolded in front of your peers.

"That's my only son. I don't want him to be a Freddie Gray," Ms Graham later told CBS News. It was of course Gray's death, after an injury at the hands of the police, that set off the rioting.

On social media, there were plenty of people making excuses for rioters — a common refrain was "nothing else works to get attention." But to their great credit, African-American leaders provided firm moral guidance and emphasised that street violence was unconscionable.

President Obama set the right tone. "When individuals get crowd-baited and start prying open doors to loot, they're not protesting. They're not making a statement. They're stealing," Mr Obama said. "When they burn down a building, they're committing arson. And they're destroying and undermining businesses and opportunities in their own communities."

Or as Carmelo Anthony, the New York Knicks basketball star who grew up in Baltimore and has invested in a youth centre there, put it: "We need to protect our city, not destroy it."

Yet as Mr Obama, Anthony and other leaders also noted, there are crucial underlying inequities that demand attention. The rioting distracts from those inequities, which are the far larger burden on America's cities.

That also represents a failure on our part in the US news media. We focus television cameras on the drama of a burning CVS store but ignore the systemic catastrophe of broken schools, joblessness, fatherless kids, drug abuse, oppressive policing — and, maybe the worst kind of poverty of all, hopelessness.

The injustices suffered by Freddie Gray began early. As a little boy he suffered lead poisoning (as do 535,000 US children ages 1 to 5), which has been linked to lifelong mental impairments and higher crime rates.

In Gray's neighbourhood, one-third of adults lack a high school degree. A majority of those aged 16 to 64 are unemployed.

And Baltimore's African-American residents have often encountered not only crime and insecurity but also law enforcement that is unjust and racist. Michael A Fletcher, an African-American reporter who lived for many years in the city, wrote in *The Washington Post* that when his wife's car was stolen, a Baltimore policeman bluntly explained the department's strategy for recovering vehicles: "If we see a group of young black guys in a car, we pull them over."

Likewise, the Baltimore jail was notorious for corruption and gang rule. A federal investigation found that one gang leader in the jail fathered five children by four female guards.

Wretched conditions are found to some degree in parts of many cities, and Shirley Franklin, the former mayor of Atlanta, told me that when we tolerate them, we tolerate a combustible mix.

"It's not just about the police use of force," she said. "It's about a system that is not addressing young people's needs. They're frankly lashing out, and the police force issue is just a catalyst for their expression of frustration at being left out."

Whites sometimes comment snidely on a "culture of grievance" among blacks. Really? When tycoons like Stephen Schwarzman squawked that elimination of tax loopholes was like Hitler's invasion of Poland, that's a culture of grievance.

If wealthy white parents found their children damaged by lead poisoning, consigned to dismal schools, denied any opportunity to get ahead, more likely to end up in prison than college, harassed and occasionally killed by the police — why, then we'd hear roars of grievance. And they'd be right to roar: Parents of any colour should protest, peacefully but loudly, about such injustices.

We've had months of police incidents touching on a delicate subtext of race, but it's not clear that we're learning lessons.

The real crisis isn't one night of young men in the street rioting. It's something perhaps even more inexcusable — our own complacency at the systematic long-term denial of equal opportunity to people based on their skin colour and ZIP code. ©2015 THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Future work model brings new challenges

EMPLOYMENT

KLAUS F ZIMMERMANN

Many people have long dreamed of being less chained to their workplaces. Their vision is to be free to manage their various tasks throughout the day. They especially want to be able to better blend work and leisure. Others wish to no longer have to do monotonous, highly repetitive tasks.

That world is getting ever closer to becoming a reality. Even so, instead of feeling freed from past shackles, there is great nervousness all around. The questions anxiously raised now are these: Will we run out of work? More specifically, will there be a job for me in the future?

Remarkably, these worries actually unite much of the world, developed and developing.

After all, this is a time when the focus — even in China's manufacturing sector — is on installing massive amounts of industrial robots. Part of the reason is that the size of China's labour force — long the source of existential worries in the Western world about assembly jobs being shipped to China — has peaked.

If anyone needed a wake-up call about how much the world, as we know it, is changing, consider this: China betting its future on robots is certainly about the starkest signal imaginable.

Labour market pressures are also felt elsewhere. In India, soon to be the world's most populous nation, over 10 million new jobs are needed each year — just to find employment for new labour market entrants.

And all around the globe, university graduates — whether in "rich" countries or developing ones — find that their academic degree alone is no longer a guarantee for getting a job.

Meanwhile, robots don't threaten just assembly line jobs in the manufacturing sector. So-called service robots and computerisation are bound to take a toll on a range of occupations — from airline pilots and truck drivers to surgeons and cooks.

Even the military, long a source of steady employment for young men across all skills levels, from frontline ground troops to fighter pilots, is changing. It now relies much more on robots, from unmanned fighter vehicles and aircraft to cyber-defences and bomb-defusing rovers.

At present, there is much techno-hype and much techno-phobia when it comes to robots and automation. And we still need to work out many practicalities on either



Replacing humans, a kimono-clad android robot named Aiko Chihira greets visitors at the reception desk in a department store in downtown Tokyo. The human-shaped robot can interact with customers, use sign language and speak Chinese. REUTERS

side of that divide. For example, there are sweeping visions of a world of autonomous, driverless cars.

If you have ever been stuck in traffic for hours or travelled long distances, that sounds like a great idea. Until you read reports that, freed from the steering wheel and a strict forward orientation inside the car, drivers and passengers may experience motion sickness. Or until you hear about the vexingly complex implications for the insurance industry.

True as well that services like Uber usher in a world of independent operator entrepreneurs. I have seen quite a few graduate students in the US feeling relieved because they can generate income from being Uber drivers on weekends and evenings.

But creating more flexibility, and potentially value, for customers and drivers alike does not yet herald a world of new wealth. Some of the smartest thinkers in the field — and longtime techno-optimists — now worry that the basic promise of creating "more wealth with less labour" does have a negative impact on employment.

The best evidence we have collected so far points to negative employment effect for low-skilled and also some middle-skilled workers. However, Oxford University researchers forecast that, within 20 years, as many as half of all jobs could be affected. This includes quite a few job categories that are widely considered to

require high skill levels. To guide policy-making, we will clearly need to track these developments carefully.

Change is always unnerving. And while the precise shape of the future is uncertain, we know about some key shifts. Lifelong employment by one firm and even formal employment contracts will become rarer than they were over the past three quarters of a century (at least in developed countries).

More "informality" in work arrangements — long considered a phenomenon mostly affecting developing countries — is also taking hold in developed countries. It is, in fact, becoming a great leveler globally.

A future marked by less formal work relationships undoes a core feature that many people in rich countries have taken for granted. This trend also runs counter to what many people in developing economies are very much striving for.

The net effect of this global trend is that, on balance, the risks associated with work are transferred more to individuals.

That is no news whatsoever to many societies and the overwhelming part of the world population, especially in the developing world. There are places that rarely ever had any dependable labour protections or social safety nets to begin with.

As far as the developed world is concerned, some societies are better prepared for the shift to reliance on oneself — to a world of individual risk-taking — than

others. In particular, the social model of the United States has, for good or ill, always put more emphasis on the individual when it comes to absorbing financial and economic risks related to one's existence.

This implies the mental shift required will be harder on Europeans. They are much more accustomed to society as a whole, rather than the individual, absorbing existential risks.

Here then is the key conundrum: To a considerable degree, the "new economy" gives people what they have asked for. There are fewer hierarchies, more flexibility and more goal orientation. The ability to act in a more entrepreneurial fashion is in demand, as is a compensation model based on results, not just on time put in.

But this gain in flexibility comes at a cost. The key issue is to make sure this brave new world of labour will not lead to a wholesale shift of risk taken away from firms (and capital) and loaded on the individual.

The best guess which labour economists can make at this juncture is not that there will be less work. Rather, it is that work will take on different forms from the ones many people in the developed world have been accustomed to for a century or so.

Important innovations are required, such as finding more portable ways of social insurance that are not tied to long-time employment in one firm. At the same time, safeguards need to be in place to protect