



thruMYeyes

with PROF. BOLAJI AKINYEMI

THE WEEKLY FOREIGN-POLICY BRIEFING

SESSION 117 · THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2022 · FROM THE ARCHIVE · Syncterface Media

FROM THE ARCHIVE

# THIS IS NOT A HOLY WAR

Nobody is choosing sides on virtue. Every country in this episode is acting, precisely and predictably, in its own interest.

SESSION 117 · THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2022

Syncterface Media · [tmeinsights.com](https://tmeinsights.com)

*Session 117 — the week the red wave failed to arrive, and nobody chose sides on virtue.*

FROM THE ARCHIVE

## This Is Not A Holy War

*American voters refuse the script, Russia leaves Kherson, and the Professor keeps returning to one point: every country is acting in its own interest, and expecting moral alignment is a category error.*

A solo broadcast recorded two days after the United States midterms and the day before Russia completed its withdrawal from Kherson. The moderator puts the questions; Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi answers, with viewer comments read out from Zoom and YouTube. **The through-line is his own rebuke to Kyiv, and it applies far beyond it: this is not a holy war. Iran arms Russia over its quarrel with Washington, India buys discounted oil while Europe keeps buying Russian diamonds, and Ukraine votes against a UN racism resolution and then wonders why African capitals are cool.**

*An archive edition, recorded 10 November 2022. Events are described as they stood that week — the midterm count was unfinished and control of Congress still undecided, COP27 was in its opening days, and the G20 summit in Bali had not yet met. Several figures discussed have since left office.*

### 01 · THE RED WAVE THAT DID NOT ARRIVE

The Professor opens by naming the expectation and then explaining why it failed. Midterms normally punish the party holding the White House, often heavily, and with oil prices and inflation both driven up by the war in Ukraine, most analysts had the Democrats losing badly. A few cautionary voices pointed to two things: the abortion issue after *Roe v. Wade*, and the Republican

threat to impeach President Biden if they took Congress — a threat he reads as having made voters cautious rather than emboldened.

The factor he says everyone missed, himself included, is demographic. Generation Z voted, and young immigrant participation rose, and between them they held a Congress that should have flipped. He is not generous about the President's own contribution — the performance was lacklustre, the speaker unenergetic — which makes the point sharper rather than softer: the result was produced by the electorate changing shape, not by the incumbent's campaigning.

*“There is a third factor which I think all of us missed, and that is the changing demography in the United States.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

## Said, and done

Four actors accused of inconsistency — each behaving exactly as the argument predicts

| ACTOR            | THE MORAL CLAIM                            | THE INTEREST BEING SERVED                                 |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Ukraine          | Asks Africa to be steadfast against Russia | ● Voted with Washington against a UN racism resolution    |
| Iran             | Cast as an enemy of Ukraine                | ● Arms Russia over its own quarrel with the United States |
| The EU           | Presses India to stop buying Russian oil   | ● Never banned Russian diamonds — it would close Antwerp  |
| The global North | Asks the global South to cut carbon        | ● Returns to burning coal at the slightest pinch          |

*“You are acting in your national interest. We will act in ours — and there are no counter-arguments against that.”*

SESSION 117 • THIS IS NOT A HOLY WAR

As argued on this broadcast

*Four actors, each accused of inconsistency, each acting exactly as the Professor's argument predicts.*

### 02 • THE LOSER WAS TRUMP, AND HIS OWN NEWSPAPERS SAID SO

On his reading the night's real casualty was the former president, who had expected a Republican margin large enough to carry his own announcement along with it and was cocky enough to trail a major statement for the following week. That calculation now needs rebuilding.

The evidence he offers is not polling but proprietorship. Reading the American press that afternoon, he found The Wall Street Journal and the New York Post — both Murdoch titles, both papers Trump could previously count on — ditching him and inviting Republicans to imagine a life after him. When your own newspapers move first, he suggests, the position is worse than the numbers show.

Asked who might replace him, he points to the governor of Florida, of Cuban descent, returned by roughly twenty points, and notes the reported threat that Trump holds scandalous material in reserve should he run. But he doubts the national appeal. Florida's politics have long been shaped by the Cuban generation whose parents and grandparents were expelled after Castro took power, and they sit so far right, he says, that leaning any further would take them off the edge — which is not a base from which to build a country-wide coalition.

*“Two of Murdoch's newspapers, on which Trump could count, had in fact now ditched him and were calling on Republicans to think of a life after Trump.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

### 03 • HOW A WHITE HOUSE SHRINKS ITS OWN VICE-PRESIDENT

The Professor objects to what was being said about Kamala Harris when a Biden retirement looked likely — that she had been lacklustre and had not shone — and answers it structurally rather than personally. Presidential staff have always worked to diminish the standing of the vice-president, whoever it is. Those old enough to remember the 1960s know what Johnson endured under the Kennedys, and that he was close to being dropped from the ticket had Kennedy lived to run again; they also know what Johnson then did to Humphrey.

His sharpest observation is that the complaint is circular: she was given no opportunity to outshine a president who, by his own blunt assessment, would not have been difficult to outshine. He reaches for an unexpected comparison — the jewellery Meghan could not wear because it would have outshone the Princess of Wales — and then adds the political debt. Biden would not be in the White House without the black vote, and his black supporters and mentors in the House ought, he says, to be reminding him of it.

*“They were not giving her any opportunities to outshine the president.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

#### 04 • THE MONEY, THE LOBBYISTS, AND THE GRIDLOCK THEY PREFER

Asked whether record spending corrupts American politics, he draws a distinction that matters more to his listeners than to Washington. In the global South a candidate spends personal money and, once elected, recoups it from the treasury — so the spending should worry you. In the United States the money is raised, spending limits apply per donor, and the small contributions genuinely aggregate across a country that size. That system he is relaxed about.

What should worry people is the lobbyists — corporate money attached to candidates who then arrive in Congress and block gun control, which is why no reasonable law has followed even the massacres of schoolchildren. That, he says, is the weakest point in the American electoral system.

On the split Congress he refuses the premise that a narrow result is not a win. Gridlock is an American value. He walks through the evidence: a Republican Senate that would not consider any Obama nomination for almost a year, leaving the Supreme Court at eight justices, then confirming a Trump nomination with weeks to go before an election; and the Clinton-era shutdowns, where money existed but Congress had not approved its spending. Americans are used to it — and, he concludes, would rather live with the shenanigans than reform the system that produces them.

*“Gridlock is an American value. They'd rather go through that than reform the system.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

#### 05 • COP27, A REAL VICTORY, AND TWO CHOKERS

He prefaces the climate discussion by saying it is not his specialty and that specialists will see things he does not — then gives it one of the evening's warmest passages. He is proud of the African contribution, and singles out President Buhari's speech as what he has always expected from the leader of the biggest black nation in the world: specific, moderate in language, and to the point in defending the global South.

The substantive victory he identifies is procedural and, in his view, decisive: the global South insisted that compensation for damage done by the North's historic use of hydrocarbons be debated, and won its place on the agenda. That establishes the principle that the South is suffering the consequences of consumption it did not do. He welcomes the specific sums now attached — the African climate risk facility, the British contribution tied to flood-resistant crops and adapted

agriculture, for the rain belt and for drought in Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya — and thinks the timing right, in a year when flooding of an unprecedented kind was visible to everyone.

Then the two chokers. He is not an authority here. And commitments and disbursements are two different things — a warning he puts up front rather than in passing. He closes on the point he liked best from Buhari: the North returns to burning coal at the slightest pinch rather than let its own people suffer, while asking the South to make sacrifices it will not make itself.

*“At the slightest pinch you don't want your people to suffer, so you go back to burning coal — but you expect our people in the global South to make sacrifices which you don't want your own people to make.”*

— President Muhammadu Buhari, cited approvingly by Prof. Akinyemi

#### 06 · KHERSON, AND A LIGHT THAT MIGHT BE AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

The withdrawal from Kherson is presented, he argues, as theatre. Two senior Russian officers appear to be caught on film in casual conversation — I think I'll order our troops to withdraw to the eastern bank — when the decision was in fact taken by Putin at the highest level some three weeks earlier. Anyone monitoring social media had seen it coming; Ukraine had been saying for weeks that the dam in the area was mined and primed, precisely because holding the position was no longer attainable. Nobody announces a retreat that way by accident.

What interests him more is what has begun leaking alongside it: that the Americans and Russians are talking again through back channels, with the US defence secretary openly acknowledging contact with his Russian counterpart. His reading is that Putin may have concluded this is a war he cannot win, that NATO has made the cost of the weapons he once contemplated unacceptable, and that Kyiv may in parallel be hearing that a country reduced to ashes is not a victory worth completing. He is careful about how much light this is: not the end of the tunnel, more the beam from a phone torch.

On Putin skipping the G20 in Bali he is unsentimental. Timing is critical in negotiation, and you do not use such an occasion to argue your case before an audience that has already condemned you. Had the back-channel talks reached the stage of crossing t's, a meeting might have ratified something. They have not. Serious diplomats calibrate.

*“Serious diplomats don't do that. They calibrate the steps they take until they get to where they think they should be.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

#### 07 · THE FRIEND OF MY ENEMY

A viewer asks whether Ukraine should cut relations with Iran over the drones supplied to Russia. The Professor understands the frustration and then refuses the framing entirely. Iran is not anti-Ukraine; Iran is acting on its quarrel with the United States. Ukraine has allies arming it, so Russia will have allies too. This is the nature of vicarious wars.

He then produces the evening's most uncomfortable example, and it cuts against the sympathetic party. Ukraine has complained that African states are not steadfast enough in voting against Russia — yet when a resolution criticising racism came before the UN Human Rights Commission, Ukraine voted with the United States against it. The next Ukrainian ambassador who telephones an African foreign minister will be reminded of that vote.

The same logic closes the programme, on India. Asked whether buying Russian oil damages India's standing, he says no, and turns the question round: the EU has never banned Russian diamonds, because a ban would have destroyed the Antwerp market. Do not expect India to forgo discounted oil while you keep buying stones for profit. India's stated principle, he notes with something close to approval, admits no counter-argument — you act in your national interest, and so will we.

*“This is not a holy war, where Ukraine expects everybody to line up and see the holiness the way Kyiv sees the holiness.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

#### 08 • CONGO, AND THE COUNTRIES THAT STOPPED WAITING

Asked about the DRC bombing rebels, he answers with a history rather than a bulletin. Congo has been an unfortunate child from the beginning — Leopold, then Belgium, then the theft of its legitimate prime minister when Patrice Lumumba was murdered after independence. Neighbours use their own security as grounds to ferment insurrection inside it; Western companies treat its minerals as a playground. It should be among the richest countries in Africa and it will not be left alone. Lumumba was not the only prime minister assassinated: Kabila followed, after Mobutu.

The immediate trigger he identifies is Kenya's new president sending troops to assist the Congolese government, which he thinks energised Congolese forces to take on M23 — the Rwanda-sponsored insurgency he says has been committing what amounts to genocide in the east. Pressed on why mediators only appear once a conflict flares, he rejects the question's premise outright: it has never flared down.

He closes on a pattern worth noticing. Mali and Burkina Faso have told French forces that sixty years have produced no security against the jihadists, and asked them to leave in favour of new allies. The Congolese have turned on the UN in the same spirit — peacekeepers whose mandate does not permit them to confront M23 directly. And there he lands the line the section is built on.

*“You can't maintain peace if the peace does not exist.”*

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

#### THREADS TO PULL

- If Generation Z and young immigrant voters held a Congress the models said would flip, what else are those models mispricing — and does the same blind spot apply to forecasts of African elections?
- He is relaxed about American campaign money because it is raised rather than personal, and alarmed about lobbyists. Is that distinction stable, or is the difference simply who gets to be repaid?
- Ukraine's vote against the UN racism resolution cost it African goodwill it now needs. Should a country at war be expected to vote for its diplomatic interests rather than its patron's?
- Mali, Burkina Faso and the DRC have all told long-standing foreign forces to go. Is that sovereignty asserting itself, or a vacuum being opened for whoever arrives next?
- If commitments and disbursements are different things, what should the global South accept at a COP as evidence of the second — and who would be believed if they certified it?

**Watch Session 117 in full** on the Syncterface Media channel. New episodes every Thursday, 7pm WAT (7pm UK, 2pm ET).

More analysis: [tmeinsights.com](https://tmeinsights.com) · [profbolajiakinyemi.com](https://profbolajiakinyemi.com)

*Quotations are drawn from an auto-generated transcript of a live broadcast and have been lightly cleaned for readability — punctuation and obvious mis-transcriptions only, never sense. The Florida governor discussed in section 2 is described but not clearly named on the recording; he is identified here as Ron DeSantis from context (Florida, a Cuban-descent electorate, a roughly twenty-point margin) and this identification is flagged rather than asserted. The characterisation of M23's conduct as genocide is the Professor's own. The claim that the withdrawal announcement was staged is his reading of the footage, not a documented fact.*