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with PROF. BOLAJI AKINYEMI

THE WEEKLY FOREIGN-POLICY BRIEFING

SESSION 145 · THURSDAY 22 JUNE 2023 · FROM THE ARCHIVE · Syncterface Media

FROM THE ARCHIVE · FOREIGN POLICY

BUILT, NOT BEGGED FOR

From a submersible's wreck to a snub in Moscow —
who has actually earned a hearing this week, and who is still asking.

Session 145 · Thursday 22 June 2023

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

Built, Not Begged For

From a submersible's wreck to a snub in Moscow to a quietly compounding African bank — this week's session keeps testing the same idea: standing is earned, not asked for.

An episode that opens with grief for five lives lost chasing the ocean floor, and closes with an African bank quietly building the machinery for African-to-African trade, keeps returning to one argument: the world extends real respect to those who have built real leverage — economic, military, or moral — and treats the rest as supplicants. **Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi applies the test to a rebuffed peace mission in Moscow, to India's swagger in Washington, and to Nigeria's long habit of asking for consideration it hasn't yet built the standing to receive.**

An archive edition, recorded 22 June 2023 — the day OceanGate confirmed the Titan's crew had been lost. Events and figures are described as they stood that week.

01 · THE WRECK, AND WHAT WE OWE THE RISK-TAKERS

The session opens with the Titan submersible, whose debris field was confirmed the day this aired. Prof. Akinyemi frames the loss inside a longer human pattern: exploration has always carried a body count, from Everest to the Titanic itself, and grief doesn't cancel the impulse that sent five people down.

He's less forgiving of the commercial arrangement around the dive — a paying expedition where, on his account, passengers signed waivers acknowledging the risk of death on the first page, more than once. He argues the tragedy will likely produce an international protocol, probably brokered under

the UN, setting binding safety standards for future deep-sea and space ventures — though he's also candid that people generally resent having their risk-taking regulated after the fact.

“The human spirit is an adventurous one, and it is through adventure that we've made discoveries as a species.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

02 • MOSCOW'S REBUFF, AND THE PRICE OF TAKING A SIDE

The sharpest exchange concerns the African peace mission to Kyiv and Moscow, led in part by South Africa's Ramaphosa. On Prof. Akinyemi's account, the delegation was disrespected on both legs — forced to shelter from strikes in Kyiv, then reportedly interrupted mid-presentation by President Putin in Moscow, a breach of protocol he says he has never known one head of state to commit against another.

His diagnosis is blunt: a mediator has to be neutral, and South Africa — tied to Russia through BRICS and prior positioning — wasn't. He names the Pope, Switzerland, and China as the kind of actors who could credibly have carried the same proposal. He's equally unimpressed that the AU wasn't invited to Russia's own Africa summit, a snub he reads as more evidence of where Moscow actually places African goodwill.

“If you are going to be a mediator, one of the characteristics is that you must be neutral. South Africa is not neutral — it's on the side of Russia.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

03 • WHAT INDIA HAS THAT NIGERIA DOESN'T

Turning to Washington's reception of Narendra Modi, Prof. Akinyemi reads India's state visit as a model worth studying rather than resenting. India built its economy and its military-industrial base first, he argues, then defined non-alignment on its own terms — economic alignment with the West, political non-alignment at the UN — rather than treating the two as a package deal, which he says is the mistake Nigeria has made since 1960.

The payoff, on his account, is that Washington and Beijing now calibrate their tone toward Delhi because they can't afford not to. He wants Nigeria's political class to draw the lesson: assertiveness follows capability, not the other way around.

“India has got to a state where Russia cannot ignore it, China cannot ignore it, and the United States cannot ignore it and cannot be rude to it.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

HOW A MIDDLE POWER EARNS RESPECT

THE PROFESSOR'S MODEL, APPLIED TO INDIA



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How a middle power earns respect, per the Professor's argument.

04 · A PRESS CONFERENCE WITH NO HARD QUESTIONS

Prof. Akinyemi is sharper on the double standard he sees in how India's domestic troubles are covered relative to Nigeria's. Modi, on his telling, controlled the terms of his rare joint press conference with President Biden — limiting the questions and ruling out press freedom and religious freedom entirely — while an active, armed ethnic standoff in Manipur drew comparatively little international scrutiny.

This is very much his own comparative claim rather than settled fact, and it's worth reading it that way: he's arguing that Nigeria would face a harsher global reckoning for equivalent unrest, not offering an independently verified scale comparison between the two conflicts.

“The kind of insurrection you have in India — if you had it in Nigeria, the whole world and the heavens would hear about it.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, on his own comparative reading

05 · WASHINGTON'S MIXED MESSAGE TO BEIJING

On Biden's delayed intelligence report on COVID-19's origins, Prof. Akinyemi's complaint is about diplomatic sequencing rather than the science: sending the Secretary of State to smooth relations with Beijing while the President separately calls Xi a dictator, in his view, tells China the outreach isn't serious. He reads the report itself as unlikely to change much either way, since by his account it stops short of alleging deliberate release.

06 · A PIPELINE THAT FINALLY AVOIDS THE TRAP

The Nigeria–Morocco gas pipeline gets a rare unqualified compliment for its routing: along the West African coast through Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal and Mauritania, rather than across the Sahara, which he calls a corridor for kidnappers and terrorists.

The caveat lands immediately after: any arrangement running through France's former colonies earns his open distrust, citing the Eco currency project as precedent — a planned common ECOWAS currency he says France redirected so its Francophone members adopted an Eco still tied to the French treasury.

“Don't trust the Greeks even when they bring gifts — any arrangement that involves French-speaking African countries, I will not hold my breath.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

07 · THIRTY QUIET YEARS, AND A POINTED COMPARISON

Afrexim Bank's 30th-anniversary summit in Accra gets the episode's warmest coverage: assets grown from roughly \$10 billion to somewhere near \$30–50 billion (Prof. Akinyemi flags his own uncertainty on the exact figure), and a clearing-house mechanism letting countries like Mali and Ghana trade in local currencies without sourcing dollars — a small, concrete step toward the long-deferred idea of an African common currency.

He closes on a sharper note: the African Union admitted Israel as an observer while, on his account, rejecting observer bids from Caribbean nations invited to Afrexim's own anniversary — a contrast he treats as a genuine grievance rather than a settled institutional fact, and one the producer may want to flag before wide circulation.

“What was the racial affinity between Africa and Israel that isn't multiplied a hundred times over between Africa and the Caribbean?”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

THREADS TO PULL

- Should African leaders who have visibly taken a side still be trusted to broker peace between the two parties they've sided with?
- If leverage — not solidarity — determines who gets heard, what should dependent nations build first: the economy, the military, or the independent foreign policy?
- Is delaying an intelligence report genuine caution, or a diplomatic instrument in its own right?
- Does avoiding a currency scheme tied to a former colonial power actually insulate a country, or just defer the same dependency?
- If Afrexim Bank's local-currency clearing mechanism scales continentally, what happens to the dollar's grip on African trade?

Watch Session 145 in full on the Syncterface Media channel. New episodes every Thursday, 7pm WAT (7pm UK, 2pm ET).

More analysis: tmeinsights.com · profbolajiakinyemi.com

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