
EXPORTING CULTURES OF VIOLENCE OR PEACE? INTERPRETING SOUTH AFRICA'S POST-APARTHEID ROLE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

This article examines a number of assumptions made in the early 1990s regarding the potential influence and power of South Africa and its subsequent (in)ability to sustain a peacemaking role in Africa.¹ Competing interpretations are reviewed in the light of the South African government's post-apartheid policy objectives and experience regarding Africa. It also examines its more recent behaviour as Africa's 'premier peacemaker'. The key argument is that the South African government, under former President Thabo Mbeki, adopted an 'emerging middle power' role, and that its foreign policy strategies were marked by the exercise of 'soft power', understood as the ability to set political agendas in a way that shapes the preferences of others. Co-optive and collaborative strategies rather than coercion characterised Pretoria's Africa agenda, expressed through the continent's multilateral institutions and development plans. The article notes that despite several successful interventions, the South African government's ambitious continental role as peacemaker and post-conflict reconstruction and development agent is constrained by global political agendas and domestic challenges. It identifies a number of factors with the potential to influence the international orientation of a new administration, but concludes that until the ruling party clarifies its ideological orientation, the Mbeki template will remain.

Introduction

As Tilly (1985) famously argued, 'war makes states'. State formation in the southern region of Africa has mostly been a violent process. So has South Africa's historical impact on the region: driven by colonial and apartheid mindsets, it has resulted in subjugation, exploitation and destabilisation. The establishment of impressive infrastructure usefully served the economic interests of European metropolises, its appointed local rulers, and their beneficiaries. Following the end of communism, the region experienced major political change, including a transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy. This transition created expectations of qualitatively different relations: policy documents of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) spoke of the 'fate of democratic South Africa being inextricably bound up with what happens in the rest of the continent', that 'our foreign policy should reflect the interests of the continent of Africa', and 'that if we do not devote our energies to this continent, we too could fall victim to the forces that have brought ruin to its various parts' (Naidu 2004:207).

However, from the mid-1990s, a contested understanding of the relationship between South Africa and the rest of the continent has emerged. In a prescient analysis written in the early 1990s, academic and anti-apartheid activist Rob Davies proposed three possible futures for this relationship: one defined by a narrow 'South Africa first' approach, a second based on a hegemonic integration approach, and a third that predicated a non-hegemonic

regional cooperation and integration approach (Davies 1993). Reflective of the first two scenarios, the critical notion of South Africa serving Western capitalist interests to the detriment of Africa or, alternatively, a country unable to exert power and influence in its

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neighbourhood took hold among analysts. It is these understandings that will be scrutinised in this article. This examination takes place against a brief contextualisation of the region's experience of apartheid South Africa, followed by a reflection of the behavioural change, as a consequence of the transition to democracy. It is necessary to provide some conceptual

clarification before proceeding with the analysis. Foreign policy as used in this text refers to the plans and actions of national governments oriented toward the external world. This definition is deliberately state-centric. Hill reminds us that the foreign policy of a state

is now a complex balance between concerns for the overall welfare of a society, as interpreted by governments ... concerns for general principles of international order and justice; and concerns for selected groups of foreigners designated as friends or as deserving help (2003:43).

Foreign policy formulation therefore takes place against a broad backdrop of international events, processes and actors, all of which interact with one another. The resultant processes tend to shape the limits of the possible. Against this background, we can ask: to what extent did the South African government pursue cooperation in order to advance sustainable development and poverty alleviation? The article will also examine the widely held view of South Africa's foreign policy role as 'hegemonic'. Hegemonic powers exercise unchallenged leadership over other states. A global hegemon represents the core which powers the world, and its role is to provide order for the international system. Regional hegemonies possess power sufficient to dominate subordinate state systems. A middle power occupies a particular position in the global hierarchical order of states, as well as rank and size in the international division of labour, which confers the opportunity to exert moral influence. Emerging powers, on the other hand, are found in the global South and their job is to shoulder responsibility for stability and order in their regional environment.

Finally, the article makes use of Joseph Nye's notion of 'soft power' as a useful metaphor to describe the ANC government's foreign policy strategies. As Nye (2002) argues, military power and economic power are both examples of hard command power that can be used to induce others to change their position. But there is also a third, indirect way to exercise power. Soft, or co-optive, power rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others. It flows from the attractiveness of a country's values, ideology, or culture. As Nye puts it,

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness. This aspect of power – getting others to want what you want – I call soft power. It co-opts people rather than coerces them (2002:552).

Apartheid and the export of violence

To understand the momentous nature of the shift in South Africa from exporting violence under apartheid to peacemaking under democracy, it is useful to recall the era of the 1970s and 1980s. The white minority rulers, in large part correctly, saw peril everywhere. The

struggle against apartheid had indeed grown from internal resistance to continental solidarity, with liberation movements and international pressure, to isolate the regime (Klotz 1995). The South African military, led by the pugnacious P.W. Botha, had a response: a 'total strategy' to counter the perceived 'total onslaught'. Minter (1994:37-55) aptly describes this 'total strategy' as a framework for putting together a mix of reform and repression, both internally and in foreign policy. Its implementation varied, depending on circumstances and policy debates. As the military built up a massive capacity for both overt and covert action in the region, the defence budget spiralled upward. The Department of Military Intelligence soon became the premier intelligence agency. Special commando forces grew rapidly, incorporating black as well as white recruits. While the military action of 1979 seemed related primarily to the conflicts in 'South West Africa' (today's Namibia) and Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), the next year saw the beginning of a 'total onslaught' on Angola and Mozambique. This shift followed Robert Mugabe's landslide victory in the February 1980 elections in Zimbabwe. As Minter (1994) notes, South Africa's protective shield of friendly states, now virtually non-existent, could not be reconstructed. Still, South Africa had the military might to make its neighbours pay dearly for any assistance given to the anti-apartheid cause. The cumulative impact of South Africa's regional destabilisation policies, quite apart from lost and damaged lives and destroyed infrastructure, can be seen in South Africa's economic dominance of the region and the region's deepened dependence upon South Africa (Cawthra 1986). As will be described below, these factors linger, like a ghost, in the post-apartheid era.

Idealists versus pragmatists

When the ANC took power in South Africa in 1994, many people, including scholars and policy makers, expected the new government to apply the principles of mutual benefit, interdependence, and the promotion of human rights – language the ANC itself used – in reshaping relations with Africa (Davies 1993). It was an exciting time for academics, many of whom descended upon the new South Africa to put democratic transition theories and assumptions to the test. The transition was described as a 'miracle' (Friedman 1994), achieved by the 'rainbow nation', a phrase coined by archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu. This optimistic mood was strengthened by the perception (some legend, some real) of South Africa's domestic and regional strengths in the political, economic, cultural and military arenas.² Yet, how was South Africa to meet these expectations? How was South Africa to translate 'mutual benefit' into policy when its economy was larger than the economies of southern Africa put together? If economic readjustments were difficult, then peacemaking was even trickier. How, for example, should South Africa have dealt with

dictators such as Sani Abacha, Mobutu Sese Seko and Robert Mugabe, or the ethnic conflict in Darfur?

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The academic and policy-related debates unfolded along 'outward-looking' versus 'inward-looking' poles, with much in between. In the immediate post-apartheid period, Mandela's global moral standing

inspired many commentators to prescribe an active, interventionist continental role for South Africa. The more optimistic analysts and policy advisers expected – and even recommended – that the country should export its 'magic' of negotiated settlement, government of national unity, reconciliation and orthodox fiscal policies to the turbulent continent.³ While others saw little structural change in the political economy of South and southern Africa, they predicted a bleak neo-apartheid future of continuing exploitation.⁴

Two broad schools of interpretation therefore emerged: pragmatists and idealists. This is close to the suggestion that there were really only two ways to interpret South Africa's role in Africa: one as globalist, or the other as Africanist. Pragmatists and globalists link South Africa's economic interests to Africa 'via the meta-narrative of globalisation' (Vale & Maseko 1998). Idealists expected South Africa to pursue a continental policy informed by the values of human rights and democracy, while pragmatists wanted the country to pursue its national interests in Africa as elsewhere. For the latter, human rights and democracy were to be used as instruments in the exercise of the country's foreign policy – the means to an end. The end itself, of course, was subject to intense debate in the 1990s and finally formulated as a peaceful and prosperous Africa (Le Pere & Van Nieuwkerk 2002). So the pragmatists point to South Africa's role as evidence that it has opted for a pragmatic foreign policy course: in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the 'African Renaissance'; the restructuring of both the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and peacemaking and peacekeeping on the continent.⁵ Vale and Maseko (1998) argue the African Renaissance posits Africa as an expanding and prosperous market alongside Asia, Europe and North America in which South African capital is destined to play a special role through the development of trade, strategic partnerships and the like. In this scheme, setbacks are admitted, but achievements multiply. Thus from the pragmatist perspective, the South African government is operating a successful Africa policy based on the logic of 'middle power' behaviour (playing the role as peacemaker, peacekeeper and development agent).

Leftist idealists thought that because South Africa showed promise in playing a 'middle power' role, Western powers, especially the United States, the United Kingdom and France, would attempt to co-opt it as the policing agent in Africa. Consequently, South Africa is seen by some to be acting as an agent of Western (commercial and strategic) interests in Africa. Other

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idealists argue that even if it wanted, South Africa could not police Africa on behalf of outsiders. In their view South Africa has lost its sense of the heroic, abandoned some of its principles and turned pragmatic in the narrow interests of elites. This means that the country merely followed African group consensus on

matters of abuse. Human rights activists Clough and Freith put it well: in the early post-apartheid years South Africa was seen as a beacon of hope for human rights movements and oppressed groups all around the world. A perception developed that South Africa was going to be a new and different kind of nation, and that gave it a special status in the world. But these expectations and perceptions were cruelly dashed:

Today, barely a decade later, South Africa appears to be abandoning the principles that gave it power and is in danger of becoming just another ordinary, middleweight regional actor (Clough & Freith 2005:11).

So despite its regional dominance, South Africa seems to struggle to balance its domestic, regional, continental and global interests, and the article proceeds to examine this dilemma more closely.

Post-Apartheid: New Roles for South Africa

Planning South Africa's post-apartheid role in Africa started long before the ANC came to power in 1994. The liberation movement's Africa orientation was initially shaped by its strategies of fighting the apartheid regime (Thomas 1996). By the time it entered into

negotiations with it, the ANC had realised it needed to prepare policies that would shape the relationship between a democratic South Africa and its neighbours in southern Africa and the rest of the continent. The ANC's foreign policy discussion document of 1993, produced by its international affairs department, articulated a range of principles to guide the new state's foreign policy behaviour, including 'a belief that our foreign policy should reflect the interests of the continent of Africa' (ANC 1993:3). At the same time, Nelson Mandela declared that 'human rights will be the light that guides our foreign affairs' and that 'South Africa cannot escape its African destiny' (Mandela 1993).

Given the isolation of the apartheid regime from continental political affairs and its destabilising policies in the sub-region, the new South African government was politically committed to the development of a different relationship. The new form of the engagement, however – political, military and economic – followed textbook international relations

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policy. The political relationship was the first to be managed, without teething troubles, as ANC policy called for the new South Africa to normalise its relations with Africa. It joined SADC and the OAU and established full

diplomatic relations with 46 African countries. However, these important gestures masked difficult relationships, some of which emerged quickly: Morocco and the disputed Western Sahara; the dictator Sani Abacha in Nigeria; the kleptocrat Mobutu in the then Zaire; Angola's problems with rebel leader Jonas Savimbi; and instability in Lesotho, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan and elsewhere. South Africa's initial reluctance to play the role of big brother was put to the test very quickly, as is discussed further below.

Economic and trade relations were treated equally optimistically. Davies (1993) wrote that despite the liberation movements' support for future regional integration based on 'the principles of mutual benefit and interdependence' (ANC 1993:11), several competing approaches motivated the plans for post-apartheid regional cooperation and integration. In his view the contest was between a market or trade integration approach versus a development integration approach.⁶ The former, in his view, would result in the regional project merely becoming 'another mechanism for subordinating the region to the current neo-liberal orthodoxy', whereas the latter would 'contribute to strengthening the capacity of all the peoples of the region to cope with the challenges of an increasingly complex global environment' (Davies 1993). The discussion below shows that a little more than a decade later, South Africa has opted for the market integration approach. Most SADC members have had little choice but to go along with the scheme.

Ten years on, satisfactory results? Two schools of thought

A review by the Presidency (PCAS 2003) noted that South Africa has 'successfully diversified and expanded' its trading networks and export markets. It also noted that as part of its trade strategy, South Africa is developing economic relations through bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs). South Africa has supported the restructuring of SADC and has played a leading role in the transformation of the OAU into the African Union. In addition to its successful pursuit of a market integration approach, the presidential review argued that South Africa has, since 2001, sought a sustained engagement with the Group of Eight 'to keep Africa and the concerns of the South' on the agenda. If this is music to the ears of the pragmatists and globalists, the idealists and particularly those on the left of the ideological spectrum were not impressed. This school interprets the marketing of South African successes (such as the above) as a cover-up for more sinister activities. The foremost (but by no means only) proponent of this view, Patrick Bond, recently concluded:

There is no South African model to lift Africa out of its socio-economic doldrums, and no heroic Nkrumahist figure to coordinate other elites into a progressive, good-governance mode of political behaviour. Mbeki's agenda is not that of the majority of Africans or South Africans. If Mbeki and his colleagues are benefiting from the high profile provided by NEPAD and a variety of other global-managerial functions, the real winners are those in Washington and other imperial centres that, increasingly, require a sub-imperial South African front man for the ongoing super-exploitation and militarisation of Africa (Bond 2005: 27-28).

By this analysis, given South Africa's role in Africa as Washington's 'reliable deputy sheriff', NEPAD becomes a sub-imperial threat to Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and elsewhere. For example, Bond argues that in the DRC

Pretoria and Washington back different corporations engaged in extraction and exploitation, but are agreed on the general framework for regional geopolitics, and for enslaving Kinshasa via the multilateral agencies ... [South African and U.S. relations] can be compared to occasionally hostile brothers scrapping over their patches of Africa, but nevertheless siblings in a family enterprise not dissimilar to mafia control of a neighbourhood or city. Decades-long supplies of oil and minerals are the prizes (2005:4-6).

By using this analysis to decode the African Renaissance and NEPAD, it emerges that the overall strategy is to allow multinational corporate interests to lead the process of development, maintain African debt, get African governments to drop national financial and trade restrictions and, critically

that geopolitical manoeuvres should be conducted – with military backup in the nearly inevitable event of failure – in a manner consistent with South Africa's own elite political-economic transition (Bond 2005:6).

This approach leads Bond to conclude that South Africa is not really able to police the global capitalist periphery because of the lack of 'root-cause problem solving'. South Africa consequently does not comprehend, 'much less resolve', the Burundi and DRC terrains of war, or Zimbabwe, because it chose to pursue elite deals that lock in 'low-intensity democracy' and neo-liberal economic regimes. Interventions, Bond says, are characterised by top-down decisions from the Presidency and apparently neglected consultation with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Adopting a soft power approach

Clearly by now, there is little dispute over South Africa's relative power in regional and continental terms. The question is rather how to understand the choices of the South African government in exercising it. Does Pretoria's orientation in the region and elsewhere in Africa display hegemonic behaviour or middle power behaviour and how far does it pursue cooperation in order to advance sustainable development and poverty alleviation? Intriguingly, South Africa has been labelled a middle power (Nel *et al* 2001), a pivotal state (Sidiropoulos & Hughes 2004), a regional hegemon (Adebajo & Landsberg 2005), even a selfish regional hegemon (McGowan & Ahriweng-Obeng 1998), an emerging power (Spence 2004), an emerging middle power (Schoeman 2003), and finally, a sub-imperial power (Bond 2004). All these role definitions have one factor in common: the recognition that South Africa exercises leadership. The real questions are: for what purpose, and with what capacity?

One reading of the evidence shows that South Africa as an emerging middle power follows a pragmatic, reformist foreign policy agenda (Field 2004). This has not always been the case. We can discern two post-apartheid phases in its relationship with the region and the continent. The first was the period of human rights crusade, 1994-1998, when the country exercised a 'morally superior attitude' towards the continent (Alden & Le Pere 2003). It was also the time when South African commercial interests started to expand into the southern African region. The ANC government took a strong stand on human rights abuses in Nigeria under Sani Abacha, and Mandela lectured SADC about the virtues of human rights and good governance, but realised the limits of this approach.

By the time the 1998 crisis in Lesotho broke, the government followed its peacemaking efforts with military intervention.⁷ The politically controversial and poorly executed military intervention in Lesotho became a turning point in South Africa's thinking about the management of its foreign policy. It was also the time when Mbeki was about to succeed Mandela as president, and so, apart from a 'software upgrade' (the crafting of centralised and harmonised decision-making structures), a new, less confrontational approach became apparent: multilateralism. The impetus behind this phase (1999-2007) lies with the decision makers' realisation of the limits of unilateralism, the value of peer pressure, and an understanding of the damage of corporate plundering in the region and beyond. The focus of the ANC government therefore shifted to the strengthening of the tools of multilateral diplomacy such as SADC and the OAU. In operational terms, Mbeki's vision of an African

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renaissance also became clearer and found expression in NEPAD. A broad consensus emerged that the interests of the ruling classes in South Africa would be served through these policy instruments. Indeed, the South African government's broad agenda included the pursuit of stability, democracy, trade liberalisation and economic integration

on the continent. As far as the region was concerned, South Africa was the undisputed political, economic and military leader. The recent restructuring of SADC and reinterpretation of its functions and roles, though incomplete, are described largely as a product of South African soft power (Landsberg 2006).

There are other examples. For the Kimberley Process, the South African government played a key role in the formulation of a global policy to halt the trade in conflict diamonds. In 1995, South Africa signed the Treaty of Pelindaba, which declared Africa a nuclear weapons-free zone. Committing to its role in international disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Shelton 2006:277), South Africa also signed a treaty banning anti-personnel mines and chaired the Oslo negotiations dealing with the final text (Schoeman 2003). Its use of soft power was demonstrated in continental and global summit diplomacy on behalf of the UN, AU, the Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement (Wheeler 2004); global and regional trade negotiation sessions (Cassim & Zarenda 2004); the restructuring of the AU; and hosting the Pan African Parliament and the secretariat of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

Soft Power in Peacemaking and Capacity Building

This article advances the proposition that Pretoria has exercised soft power – understood as the ability to co-opt key interests – in pursuit of its African Renaissance and NEPAD agendas and its peacemaking efforts in Africa. Using bilateral and multilateral approaches and strategies, South Africa pursued peacemaking, governance and post-conflict

reconstruction processes in a range of African countries, including Ethiopia and Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Rwanda, Sao Tome & Principe, and Somalia (SA Yearbook 2005). However, quick success was not a hallmark of peacemaking and post-conflict recovery intervention. In what one author calls South Africa's 'age of unilateralism', it failed on several fronts (Kagwanja 2006:163). Its foreign policy goals of contributing to stability and a return to democracy in Nigeria in the mid-1990s produced negligible results. Other factors contributed to a breakthrough in the crisis, including the unexpected deaths in 1998 of Abacha and the opposition leader, Chief

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Moshood Abiola, events that opened the door for a reconfiguration of political relations and processes of bargaining and negotiation. It also failed in its attempts to persuade the Angolan, Mozambican and Congolese governments to shift their approaches away from military confrontation with rebel movements to that of a negotiated settlement and the adoption of a government of national unity (Alden & Le Pere 2003; Landsberg 2006). As chairperson of the AU Committee of Countries of the Region on Comoros, South Africa pursued several initiatives in bringing peace and stability to the island group (SA Yearbook 2008:258). However these efforts did not bring desired results and an AU-mandated military intervention in the Comoros in 2008 brought an effective end to the peacemaking efforts of the South African government. Its peacemaking intervention in Cote d'Ivoire similarly produced mixed results. As the political crisis deepened in 2002, the chair of the AU requested Mbeki, as mediator, 'to expedite the Ivorian peace process' (Pahad 2005). As Kagwanja notes, the highlight of Mbeki's mediation was the signing in 2005 of the Pretoria Agreement between the Ivorian government and the rebel leaders (2006:176). However, for complex reasons, the peace agreement failed to hold.

The unstable Central African Republic (CAR) requested assistance in 2006, and the South African National Defence Force provided support to repel attacks from northern rebels. In September 2007, South Africa deployed 85 SANDF members to assist with the capacity building of CAR's defence force (South African Yearbook 2008:262). Clearly, peacemaking and recovery in this instance must be seen against the broader context of complex patterns of sub-regional conflict in the Sudan and Great Lakes region.

As for the Zimbabwe crisis, at an extraordinary summit in March 2007, SADC heads of state requested Mbeki 'to continue to facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the government and report back to the troika on progress' (SADC 2007). This South African-driven, SADC-mandated intervention is an example of the limits to South African soft power. Bringing an end to the socio-economic and political crisis inside Zimbabwe remains a daunting challenge, in need of additional exploration, perhaps by the newly-created Centre for Culture and Peace Studies at the University of Botswana.

The joint Botswana/South Africa military intervention – ostensibly under the auspices of the SADC – in Lesotho in 1998 is criticised by many as a failure. Despite the shortcomings of Operation Boles, the facts remain that military action was taken after it became apparent that Lesotho was in the throes of a violent mutiny, and that the intervention succeeded in stabilising the situation. This allowed for a process of political negotiation on a new constitution and voting system to take off (Van Nieuwkerk 2006).

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pretoria's persistence in playing the role of peacemaker also paid off. After a shaky start by Mandela, in 1997, to bring Kabila and

Mobutu together on the basis of a 'government of national unity', from 2000 onward it pursued a comprehensive strategy of peacemaking – drawn-out, costly and at times hovering on stalling, but nevertheless worthwhile (Khadiagala 2006). Despite ongoing violence in the east of the DRC, the Sun City talks and the subsequent Pretoria Agreement laid the foundations for a credible peace and opened the door to post-war reconstruction of Congolese society. South African soldiers made up a large contingent of the United Nations peace mission and Pretoria deployed personnel from seven state departments to assist the Congolese with governance and administration.

In the same Great Lakes region, following the Arusha Accord of 2000, war-torn Burundi became the recipient of Pretoria's exercise of soft power. Under the leadership of senior ANC members Mandela, Mbeki and Jacob Zuma (and at the time of writing, Defence Minister Charles Nqakula), peace processes were kept alive. The relative stability that followed was boosted in no small measure by the presence of SANDF members, who were eventually assisted by other nations in the first AU peace mission. One author describes the inauguration in 2005 of President Pierre Nkurunziza as marking the high point in South Africa's peace diplomacy on the continent (Kagwanja 2006:174).

In the meantime, the South African government is using its elected position on the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for two years (2007-2009) primarily to 'promote the African agenda'. As articulated by Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma (2007), international support (particularly funding) for African conflict resolution and peacekeeping is high on its agenda (although not necessarily on that of the five permanent members). As Pahad (2007) remarked:

Sixty percent of the agenda of the Security Council regards African conflict and post-conflict issues. We will be serving in the Security Council at a time when it is seized by issues which include Western Sahara, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia and Eritrea. We see our membership of the Security Council therefore allowing us to enhance the role that we are already playing in conflict resolution and peacebuilding on the African continent.

Capacity building

Another example of Pretoria's exercise of soft power relates to its promotion and use of training and capacity-building programmes. It used this 'demonstration' technique in the various African countries where it was involved in peacemaking and the strengthening of governance, bringing state resources into play and involving the non-state sector: NGOs pursuing 'dialogue', tertiary institutions providing management training and big businesses exploring commercial opportunities. South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission has become a popular strategic tool in the government's Africa policy. This

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broad approach was not a new or an original foreign policy tool (it is standard political practice in many countries of the North), but in the African setting, its application by a local actor with apparent peer acquiescence, was unique in its scope and breath: clearly a

demonstration of soft power at work. As Foreign Minister Zuma remarked, 'it provides us with a great opportunity to carry the African Renaissance forward and to promote the advantages of peaceful transition' (DFA 2005).

South Africa's approach to the crises in Sudan and the DRC illustrates the application of this foreign policy tool. The AU appointed South Africa to chair a committee on the reconstruction of Sudan. However, the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2004 requires that the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), of south Sudan, constitute a government in the south and nominate members to the central government in Khartoum. Pretoria calculated that a key ingredient of a successful transition would be the ability of the SPLM to take up the task of governing the south. It then invited the senior SPLM leaders to Pretoria to engage with key South African institutions of governance and administration in a series of intensive, on-the-job training programmes.

As for the DRC, the South African government has adopted a post-conflict reconstruction and development approach. Informed by the AU's Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development Programme (PCRD), a dozen South African government departments are engaged in projects to assist the DRC, mainly in the areas of institutional capacity building, security sector reform, and economic development (Department of Foreign Affairs 2007). This capacity-building approach has been expanded to include participants from Malawi, Sao Tome and Rwanda.

Conclusion: A Sustainable, Pragmatic Peacemaking Approach in Africa?

Early optimism and expectations regarding South Africa's role in Africa have not been entirely rewarded or betrayed. Rather, the South African government's view of its continental role as peacemaker and peacebuilder, initially infused with notions of human rights activism, has been tempered by the realities of the African condition. Its experiences in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and elsewhere vividly demonstrate this change. This 'reality check' hardly made the

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ANC leadership reactionary or its foreign policy schizophrenic as some critics claim (Habib & Selinyane 2004). Policy-making adjustments under the Mbeki administration took hold in a manner that allowed the specific policy objectives of peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction to be implemented with modest yet growing

success (Chotia & Jacobs 2002). This has led one scholar to declare South Africa an 'international norms entrepreneur' (Geldenhuys 2006). There is a strong argument that despite this, Mbeki was, and his successors still are, hampered by a relatively weak domestic base upon which to launch South Africa's regional, continental and global initiatives. Even though its economy is much bigger than the combined economies of the entire southern Africa, resources were constrained by poverty and unemployment, the Aids pandemic now affecting one in five adult South Africans, and a fragile racial reconciliation. And indeed, the region understandably continued to maintain a cautious attitude towards the South African 'miracle' transition. McGowan (2006) captured these constraints when he argued that economic growth since the mid-1990s had not been strong enough to lower the unemployment rate (at least 40%), resulting in great (and perhaps growing) inequality (50% of the population lives in poverty). Add to this emerging political and civil service corruption, illustrated by the ruling party's reluctance to commission an investigation into a strategic arms procurement package.⁸

It is unclear how South Africa's 'emerging middle power' role can be played without close involvement of external powers. For many analysts, the deeper issue to be explored relates to the economic base from which the South African government launched its African policies:

was peacemaking undertaken because of a strong economic base, or to strengthen it? This article acknowledges the value of this question; responding to it in detail ought to take the form of a follow-up article, although a few observations are made. African governments – and citizens – should never underestimate the self-serving calculus behind ‘donor assistance’. In many, if not all cases, donor nations’ support for Africa’s various causes – essentially around poverty alleviation and development – is driven by domestic considerations. U.S. contributions to the fight against HIV and AIDS are driven by a conservative domestic agenda; hence the focus on abstinence and other preventive measures. European support for an enhanced African

capacity in the peace and security arena is largely driven by the ‘war on terror’ agenda and the domestic aversion to African immigrants. Free trade agreements between African countries and Europe do not address the North’s unfair trade practices (such as agricultural subsidies) and tend to divide Africa’s regional economic communities instead of uniting them. Given these realities,

Given the global financial crisis, the stability of the South African economy is becoming a key foreign policy objective, with the potential to override the government’s stated commitments to SADC integration or the African Renaissance.

how ought South Africa to balance its international, regional and domestic interests? Cooperation with external partners remains important, considering the country’s dependence on trade with the countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. This relationship has always constrained the idealist tendencies of the South African government, especially in relation to its desire to lead efforts in restructuring the institutions of global governance (Nel *et al* 2001). Given the global financial crisis, the stability of the South African economy is becoming a key foreign policy objective, with the potential to override the government’s stated commitments to SADC integration or the African Renaissance. In such crisis moments, longer-term political and ideological preferences (non-hegemonic, mutually beneficial cooperation) tend to be overruled by immediate, pragmatic concerns (state and regime survival).

Is South Africa’s role as a regional power – that of exercising ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power on the continent and in the global South – therefore sustainable? This depends on four factors. The first was identified in the discussion of the role of external powers. Against the perception that the South African government does the bidding of powerful external players (the U.S., the United Kingdom and the EU) stands the reality of asymmetric economic interdependence. This makes for a complex mix of motives: cooperation thrives in areas of perceived interest convergence and withers in its absence. In the light of the rapidly changing global economy, the exact shape of relations between South Africa and these external players is difficult to anticipate. Second, the strength of the domestic economy is a determinant in government’s allocation of resources to departmental portfolios. If we assume a weakening economic outlook over the medium term, the ambitions of Foreign Affairs will be curtailed.

A third factor complicates the response – the role of personality. Thabo Mbeki’s exacting personality and bureaucratic obsessions impacted largely on the country’s foreign policy posture. Another imponderable is who the new president will be following the 2009 national elections. Closely related is a fourth factor: the evolving nature of the ruling party and of its relations with its Alliance partners, the South African Communist Party and Congress of South African Trade Unions. It is safe to say that the ANC’s transition from liberation movement to political party is a turbulent and unpredictable affair: at stake is ‘the battle for the soul of the ANC’ (Gumede 2005). This transition unfolds most visibly at the party political level, with intellectuals attempting to determine its parameters in terms of the ‘developmental state’ (Erwin 2008).

Although the foreign policy orientation of the post-2009 election government is yet to be determined, a shift to pre-Mbeki domestic policy frameworks, guided by the values of the 'Reconstruction and Development Programme', will strongly impact South Africa's future external relations. In the meantime, its foreign policy and its African orientation continue to be shaped by the interplay between these four factors. The essence of the Mbeki template is a strong peacemaking role coupled with an aggressive neo-liberal development agenda, delivered via the instruments of multilateral pragmatism, the exercise of 'soft' power, and market-led regional integration. Until the political and economic orientation of the incoming regime is resolved, that template will endure.

South Africa's remarkable journey from apartheid to democracy and its people's vigorous attempts to tackle the range of issues in the way of democratic consolidation will forever capture the imagination of Africa and indeed the international community. To make the transition happen, a level of cooperation between sworn enemies had to be achieved which others can only hope for. Understanding the complexities of this achievement is ultimately South Africa's deep and lasting contribution to Africa's quest for peace, security and development.

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Endnotes

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² Readers unfamiliar with South Africa and its relationship with its neighbours may be interested to note that it is characterised by 'asymmetrical interdependence'. See McGowan 2006.

³ Thinkers and writers in this broad school include Thabo Mbeki and his policy advisors (Le Pere 1998) and academics, such as Matlosa (2004), Black and Swatuk (1997), Kornegay and Landsberg (1998), Alden and Le Pere (2003, 2004) and Mills (2002).

⁴ The left is similarly a broad school and includes Bond (2004), Vale and Maseko (1998), Nel, Taylor and Van der Westhuizen (2001), Gumede, (2005) and Makgetlaneng (2001).

⁵ The 'African Renaissance' refers to the idea that African people and nations can overcome the current challenges confronting the continent and achieve cultural, scientific, and economic renewal. This concept has been popularised by President Thabo Mbeki during his rein. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is an economic development programme of the African Union, adopted in 2001. NEPAD aims to provide an overarching vision and policy framework for accelerating economic co-operation and integration among African countries.

⁶ The difference between the market-driven regional integration and 'developmental integration' approaches relates to the role of the state. In the former, the state is expected to provide a stable (and

'enabling') environment for business to flourish. In the latter, markets are not assumed to prioritise sustainable development and poverty alleviation, and these roles are subsequently assigned to the state. For more on this see Mkandawire 2001.

⁷ The crisis in Lesotho relates directly to a contested election outcome in the mountain kingdom in 1998 that led to a coup in the making. Aggrieved extra-parliamentary opposition parties, the military and the monarchy challenged the authority of the elected parliament and undermined its capacity to govern effectively after the 1998 election. Faced with Lesotho's descent into disorder, South Africa and Botswana responded to a call from Prime Minister Mosisili for military assistance. The intervention succeeded in stabilising the country, but was accompanied by loss of life and widespread damage to the capital. For analysis, see Van Nieuwkerk 2006.

⁸ A former ANC MP, Andrew Feinstein, explains in his account of the arms deal that he resigned from the ruling party in 2001 because of the 'ANC leadership's refusal to allow an unfettered, comprehensive investigation into a multi-million-rand arms deal that was tainted by allegations of high-level corruption' (2007: 3).

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