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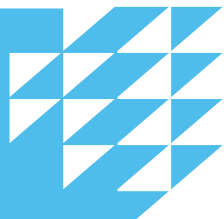
**SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY:  
NATIONAL INTEREST VERSUS  
NATIONAL IDENTITY**

**INAUGURAL LECTURE**

BY

Edelgard Mahant

21 March 2012



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**BY  
EDELGARD MAHANT  
WITH SARA COSTA**

University of Botswana

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## **Preface to the Professorial Inaugural Lecture Series**

Professorial inaugural lectures are part of our engagement strategy and outreach service as they afford the University through its professors an opportunity to share the knowledge and experience cultivated over time with the general public. They also serve as an inspiration to our younger colleagues who are still working their way up the academic ladder.

It is my conviction that the inaugural lectures series will continue to cater for our multiple needs and purposes as an institution and a nation. They act as a resource for students, lecturers and other practitioners. They also provide critical information for planning the institutional operations and the shape and scope that the academic discourse must take across the institution.

The University of Botswana is proud that its Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) has taken over the initiative started in 1985 by the then National Institute for Research and continues to organise the lectures with untiring zeal. The purpose of this general introduction, therefore, is to attempt to invigorate this vibrant initiative and help to spur it to greater heights in an academic setting that is changing in line with the changing demands of the present day Botswana society which is making various demands on the University of Botswana. The professorial inaugural lecture series is therefore a unique response to the cry of our society whose members desire to be effective stakeholders and partners with the University of Botswana going forward.

**Professor Isaac Ncube Mazonde**  
**Director, Office of Research and Development**

## **Abstract**

When Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa, he announced that human rights would become the light which would guide South Africa's foreign policy but, when he tried to implement such a policy, the newly democratic country found itself isolated among African states. When Mandela sought to impose sanctions on Nigeria after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine other opposition leaders, no other African government would support him.

Thabo Mbeki, who replaced Mandela in 1999, proudly proclaimed, "I am an African". He sought to work with other African governments, no matter how unsavoury their democratic credentials. His government tried to mediate the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and maintained good relations with Zimbabwe as that country slid into chaos. Most recently, the South African government has helped to prevent Sudan's President Omar El-Bashir from being brought before the International Criminal Court.

What caused such a rapid change in the foreign policy of a newly democratic country? Using the theoretical framework of constructivism, I argue that it was the desire of the Mbeki regime to make South Africa a leader among African states rather than the pursuit of strategic or economic interests that led to the change in policy. This is a good example of identity politics and the search for prestige!

## **Key words**

*South Africa/foreign*

*policy/democratic/constructivism/Mandela/Mbeki/African*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the inconsistencies that have characterized South African foreign policy since the end of apartheid in 1994 and tries to explain these inconsistencies in terms of some of the theories of international relations.

South Africa's constitution is one of the world's most progressive in terms of human rights. Yet the country continues to perplex the Western world and its democratic neighbour Botswana by a foreign policy that all but ignores human rights and supports members of the international community whose human rights record is, at a minimum, questionable. On the occasion of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 80th birthday celebrations, South Africa delayed the processing of the Dalai Lama's visa, ultimately forcing the exiled spiritual leader of the Tibetan people to cancel his trip to attend the ceremony (BBC, 2011). At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (2011) in Perth, Australia, South Africa opposed the publication of the Eminent Persons' Group Report, which would have made the Commonwealth more effective at preventing human rights abuses amongst its members. Moreover, as a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) from 2007-2008, South Africa voted against imposing sanctions on both Myanmar's military junta after its violent response to peaceful demonstrations, and on Iran, which has repeatedly violated nuclear safeguards (Gruzd 2009). South Africa also blocked a substantive debate on Zimbabwe, and is leading efforts to have the International Criminal Court suspend the prosecution of Omar Al-Bashir, the president of Sudan. It maintains close ties with a number of states whose human rights record is questionable and where democracy is

remarkable for its absence: Cuba, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco. How can we explain this apparently blatant disregard for the basic principles which supposedly guide the country's foreign policy?

South Africa has come a long way in a short time. After the abolition of apartheid, which constituted one of the most egregious institutionalized systems of human rights abuse since the Holocaust, Nelson Mandela, proclaimed that "human rights will be the light that guides [South African] foreign policy" (Mandela, 1993). His successors, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, have adopted an ambitious foreign policy agenda with a decidedly pan-Africanist approach, and they sometimes seem to have all but forgotten Mandela's idealism and initial commitment to human rights, in favour of an apparently more realist approach with an emphasis on the promotion of economic interests and a rhetoric of anti-western imperialism.

Some authors have described South Africa's foreign policy as incoherent and ambiguous (Bischoff 2003) while others have characterized it as an "eclectic synthesis of neo-realist and neo-liberal principles" (Williams, 2000) or have written of "an identity crisis in its external role" (Ventner 2001). So what are the motivating factors that inform South African foreign policy? Are these inconsistencies a reflection of an ambiguous conception of national interest, of a search for a new African national identity, or do they reflect the adoption of a realist, pragmatic, less liberal approach to foreign affairs, as the memory of apartheid fades? This paper attempts to answer to these questions by identifying the theoretical underpinnings of South Africa's post-Mandela foreign policy. To that end, we examine South African policy towards Zimbabwe, South African decisions and actions during

its first term on the United Nations Security Council and South African policy on Sudan.

### **Foreign Policy in the Post-Apartheid Era**

With the end of apartheid and the coming of democracy, South Africa put an end to its status as the pariah of the world and re-entered the international system as an emblematic successful case of democratic transition. Its new-found status as the “darling of the international community” (Moloto 2010) conferred significant political legitimacy and diplomatic clout, advantages which could have helped the country to pursue an ambitious foreign policy agenda. Indeed, South Africa experienced a metamorphosis, from an isolated, militaristic pariah state to a champion of multilateralism and global engagement.

South Africa had the opportunity to redefine its foreign policy, all the while defining itself as a nation. Like its constitution, South African foreign policy seemed at first to be based on high moral values and a sense of identity that stemmed both from its historical legacy and the vision of its charismatic leader, Nelson Mandela. In fact, the same foreign policy principles first established by the ANC in its “Foreign Policy Perspective in a Democratic South Africa” in 1996 continue today, more than a decade later, virtually unchanged as the latest Strategic Plan 2009-2012 issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs (since renamed Department of International Relations and Cooperation or DIRCO) demonstrates. These two documents advocate commitment to the promotion of human rights and democracy, to justice and international law, to international peace and to internationally agreed upon mechanisms for the resolution of



conflicts, a commitment to Africa in world affairs and economic development through regional and international cooperation.

Mandela's leadership was characterized by his idealism, his life experience in prison and his central role in the national liberation movement. A truly charismatic leader, Mandela set out to implement an ambitious foreign policy based on the beliefs that: a) issues of human rights are central to international relations (...) b) just and lasting solutions to the problems of humankind can only come through the promotion of democracy worldwide; c) (...) justice and respect for international law should guide the relations between nations; d) peace is the goal for which all nations should strive and where this breaks down, internationally agreed and nonviolent mechanisms, including effective arms control regimes, must be employed; e) the concerns and interests of the continent of Africa should be reflected in [its] foreign policy; f) economic development depends on growing regional and international economic cooperation in an interdependent world (Mandela 1993).

In the 1990s South Africa took a number of initiatives that reflected its commitment to an ethical foreign policy and greatly contributed to its international reputation. South Africa destroyed its nuclear arsenal, becoming the first denuclearized state and initiated an international campaign to promote non-proliferation and disarmament. It played a prominent role in the 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and became a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regime. The following year, South Africa signed the Pelindaba Treaty on a nuclear free weapons zone in Africa. It also took part in the Ottawa Process (1997) against land mines and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) (Brysk,

2009: 173). In 2000 South Africa played a leading role in the fight against the illegal trade in diamonds in the context of the Kimberly Process (Flemes, 2009). All of these initiatives reinforced the ethical nature of South African foreign policy as well as the vision of its leader.

In 1996, following the Abacha regime's execution of opposition leader, Ken Saro Wiwa, Mandela denounced Nigeria's blatant disregard of democratic principles and human rights and called for the imposition of sanctions and the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. While Mandela's stand for human rights was widely applauded in the North and the West, other leaders refrained from such an approach in order to preserve their national interests. As Adelman (2004:264) explains,

*while Britain, France, the USA, Germany and others verbally applauded his actions, not one of these countries followed South Africa's example. British oil multinationals continued business as usual; the USA kept up a vigorous dialogue with Abacha while US corporations expanded business contacts; France sought to exploit the tension between London and Abudja to its own advantage. South Africa held the moral high ground, but in isolation.*

The failure of his policy on Nigeria was the biggest challenge to South African foreign policy under Mandela, and one that would have a profound effect for future foreign policy decisions. South Africa was heavily criticized in Africa, accused of betrayal for turning against another African country and of being the lackey of the West. The

Nigerian incident was a harsh wakeup call as to the pitfalls of an ethical foreign policy in an international order often still ruled by Realpolitik. It contributed to the realization that a foreign policy based on idealism and ethics can be hard to sustain.

When Thabo Mbeki replaced Mandela as President in 1999, he wanted to show that he was truly African, not an advocate of Northern and Western values (Landsberg, 2000). While in exile, Mbeki adopted Black Consciousness as his “foundation ideology”; in his own words, “the beginning of our rebirth as a continent must be our own rediscovery of our soul....” (Gevisser, 2009: 221) In 1996, Mbeki in a speech to South Africa’s constituent assembly repeated the refrain, “I am an African,” many times. Mbeki’s declaration of his Africaness included “the dignity of the individual”, a “law-governed society”, government by the people and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means ([www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/zuma20.18786.html](http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/zuma20.18786.html), Accessed 8/11/2010; Vale, 2010). Whereas the apartheid government had seen South Africa as a kind of European outpost, Mbeki set out to show that his country was “in Africa, with Africa and a part of Africa”, to improve Africa’s image in the rest of the world) and South Africa’s image in Africa (Landsberg, 2010).

Mbeki took a personal interest in foreign policy, even before he became President, and when he did concentrated “foreign policy in the presidency” (Qobo, 2010; Vale, 2010). He adopted an aggressive policy of putting Africa first. At the regional level, the South African government continued to mobilize political, financial and military resources to stabilize the African continent, generally pushing for negotiated solutions and inclusive governments, consistent with its own democratic transition. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa

has participated in numerous peacekeeping missions and assumed important mediator and facilitator roles in places such as Burundi, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Comoros, Ivory Coast, Sudan Liberia, Lesotho and Zimbabwe (Landsberg, 2010; Gevisser, 2007, p.682; Habib and Selinyane, 2006, 148).

Mbeki assumed an important leadership role in the reconstruction of Africa's institutional architecture, becoming the main defender of the ideal of an African Renaissance, and the architect of the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and its Peer Review Program. NEPAD's main tenet is that African renewal is possible through a commitment to institutional accountability and democratic governance coupled with a neo-liberal emphasis on economic growth (Alden & LePere, 2004). Through NEPAD South Africa became an interlocutor between the African continent and the West, promoting democracy and good governance within Africa while securing western support and investment. South Africa has been instrumental in setting up the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an instrument for mutual learning and socialization which about half of African states have accepted (Landsberg and Monyae, 2010). The APRM, like NEPAD, promotes democracy and good governance, peace and security and development. South Africa contributed to Africa's institutional integration when it participated in creating the African Union (AU), the successor of the Organization of African Union (OAU). South Africa was the first state to chair the AU in 2002. SA has also defended a policy that promotes Regional Economic Communities (REC) as the implementing agents of the AU. South Africa is one of the main contributors to the African Renaissance Fund, which since 2000 has formalized technical and

financial assistance to Africa (Sidiropoulos 2008). Mbeki's government also sought the revitalization of the South African Development Community (SADC), of which South Africa is the wealthiest and most developed member.

Yet Mbeki was sensitive to criticisms suggesting that South Africa was acting as a regional hegemon. Sidiropoulos (2008) adds that "South African officials stressed that they are partners in the continent, not a regional power or a hegemon". This determination to express African solidarity and be a partner to other African countries is visible in South Africa's quiet diplomacy toward Zimbabwe (on which see below).

Beyond Africa, Mbeki has sought to bring the African agenda to the forefront, particularly in the G20, UN, IMF, WB, and the WTO. As the chair of the UNSC in March 2007, South Africa pushed for a new relationship between the UN and the African Union with the goal of better coordinating efforts of conflict resolution on the African continent. South Africa has also advocated the reform of global institutions to provide better representation for the South. In the UN it has positioned itself as the voice of the African continent, pushing for a permanent seat in the UNSC. South Africa has used its political clout to promote unconditional debt relief of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). It sought to extend its leadership role vis-à-vis the developing world through an active engagement in the battle against poverty, underdevelopment, unfair trade and political and socio-economic marginalization (Flemes, 2009; Ventner, 2001).

Mbeki's African identity and Africa first policy led to greater South-South solidarity, an emphasis on the fight against poverty, which in turn has seen South Africa support national liberation struggles as well

as a number of so-called rogue states. It has openly professed its support for the Palestinian struggle, and maintained close ties with undemocratic countries such as Cuba, Libya and Iran. More recently, South Africa has developed strong ties with China; hence the delay in granting the Dalai Lama a visa, as mentioned above.

These characteristics stem directly from a conception of South African national identity as a result of its socio-historical legacy, as the following 2003 speech by Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, then Minister of foreign affairs, illustrates:

*...our collective experiences as South Africans have placed us in a unique position to understand the challenges facing humanity... Firstly, ours is a reality of two nations, one developed and wealthy, the other marginalized and poor... Hence we have committed our foreign policy to the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment and for the transformation of the continent and the global environment' (quoted in Nieuwkerk, 2004).*

So under the leadership of Mbeki there was a shift away from the emphasis on human rights and a greater focus on South-South solidarity, the promotion of multilateralism and anti-Western imperialism. Mbeki often expressed his opposition to Western and Northern imperialism, which has revolved around five key themes: a) the political and economic power imbalance between the North and the South; b) the need to transform the UN and other international bodies to address global inequities; c) opposition to the domineering,

hypocritical and self-serving approach of Western countries that chide and bully developing states; d) South-South cooperation and solidarity; and finally e) multilateralism and respect for international law in the conduct of international affairs (Nathan, 2008: 5-7). In 2007, Mbeki raised many of these issues at the UN General Assembly:

Because the nations of the world are defined by the dominant and the dominated, the dominant have also become the decision makers in the important global forums, including at this seat of global governance [i.e. the UN]. Accordingly, the skewed distribution of power in the world (*political, economic, military, technological and social*) replicates itself in multilateral institutions, much to the disadvantage of the majority of the poor people of the world. Indeed, even as we agree on the important programmes that should bring a better life to billions of the poor, the rich and the powerful have consistently sought to ensure that whatever happens, the existing power relations are not altered and therefore the status quo remains (Mbeki, 2007).

In short, the Mbeki government's foreign policy had schizophrenic aspects, democracy and accountability on one hand, African and Third World solidarity on the other.

In terms of the dichotomy between realism and liberalism, or the more recent theoretical frameworks of neo-liberalism and constructivism, a first intuitive approach would suspect that South Africa's revolutionary idealism has given way to realism and the pursuit of material national interests. Inconsistencies in South African foreign policy would thus reflect pervasive tensions between self-interest and universal

idealism, African solidarity and partnership with a liberal and democratic North and competing perceptions of national identity and national interest. A second look, however, reveals a different, though not necessarily mutually exclusive image, one of a country whose leaders have consciously pursued an African identity in an Africa now happily free from apartheid, yet still haunted by many other forms of violence, repression and human rights abuse.

*Mbeki possessed and acted on a world-view that joined realism to a politics of Third Worldism and racial redress... If human rights came second in Mbeki's foreign policy this was probably due as much to the former president's 'idealistic' notions of racial and South-South solidarity as it was to calculations of South Africa's interests....(Glaser, 2010)*

We now take a closer look at three of the major issues that dominated South African foreign policy under Mbeki: Zimbabwe and its descent into authoritarianism and economic decline, the decisions and actions South Africa took during its first term on the United Nations Security Council (2007-2008) and the policy toward Sudan, which, if we consider the number of people affected, has suffered from human rights abuses even more severe than those seen in Zimbabwe.

### **Zimbabwe**

Mbeki's policy toward Zimbabwe is the most puzzling of all of Mbeki's foreign policies. It is not, as Adelman, quoting Manzini (2004:253) would have us believe that there were bonds dating back to apartheid days. While in exile, the African National Congress (ANC) maintained



close relations with Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU, and when Mugabe won the internationally supervised 1980 elections, the ANC leaders perceived this loss as one for them as well as Nkomo (Gevisser, 2007:431). Mbeki was given the task of establishing good relations with the leadership of South Africa's newly liberated neighbour, a task in which he had only limited success; it took five years after Zimbabwean independence before the ANC was allowed to open an office in Harare (Gevisser, 2009, 301; Gevisser, 2007, 437; Vale, 2010). Mbeki frequently mentioned that in 1990 Mugabe postponed land reform in Zimbabwe, so as not to upset the beginnings of the end-of-apartheid negotiations in South Africa but, that is only one example of assistance from Mugabe and one that was also in Zimbabwe's interest (Gevisser, 2009:302). Mugabe's autocratic and ruthless tendencies became evident long before he started to evict white farmers. In the 1980s, he had 20000 Ndebele supporters of Nkomo, slaughtered in the notorious Matabeleland massacres (Gevisser, 2009:301).

A renewed crisis in Zimbabwe occurred shortly after Mbeki took office. By 2000 the Zimbabwean economy was in a freefall as a result of macroeconomic mismanagement and a corrupt clientelistic ruling elite (Ventner 2001). Zimbabwe's new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was gaining popularity and a defeat of ZANU-PF seemed imminent. Mugabe turned to illegal and increasingly violent means to maintain his leadership, engaging in political repression and racial politics. He announced a land reform program that would reallocate land owned by white farmers to black peasants (Adelmann, 2004). While the western media have focused largely on this expulsion and the consequent food shortages, Zimbabwe suffered from many other problems: rigged elections,

imprisonment and other abuse of the government's opponents, the decline of a once outstanding infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, a decline in public health and hyperinflation (Gevisser, 2009: 297-304).

Mbeki's South Africa responded to the Zimbabwean crisis by implementing what has been termed 'Quiet Diplomacy' or 'Constructive Engagement' (Gevisser, 2009, pp.298-299). As Howarth suggests, 'Mbeki's strategy... toward Zimbabwe may be reconstituting state identity' (2008: 295) but it has also created 'cognitive dissonance'. In May 2000, Mbeki embraced Mugabe at a trade show, an action which led to a rebuke from Nelson Mandela (Gervisser, 2009:272). Later that year, Mbeki met Mugabe at a summit near Victoria Falls, where he thought he had persuaded the latter to modify his policies. Mbeki promised to try and persuade the UK to provide more funds for land reform (Gevisser, 2009:303). In 2002, South African observers rubber-stamped an obviously rigged Zimbabwean election (Prys, 2009). When Mugabe did not change his policies, Mbeki refused to turn or even to threaten to turn off the electricity on which Zimbabwe depends to this day, a tactic that South Africa's had successfully used against former Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith (Gevisser, 2009: 299). The South African government remained committed to its strategy of quiet diplomacy by calling on the international community to drop the 'smart sanctions' against Zimbabwe. Some have also suggested that South Africa has agreed to remain silent on the Zimbabwean matter in return for its vote in various international organizations with regional voting blocs. It is alleged that this was the case with the reformulation of the OAU into

the AU and later as South Africa sought votes to get a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council (Brysk, 2009, 178).

In 2000, the Mbeki government announced an economic rescue package for Zimbabwe amounting to approximately R1 billion (McKinley, 2004). This could have been a pre-emptive move to avert the continuing decline of the Zimbabwean economy, in which South Africa had a vested interest. However, upon closer examination it becomes evident that the real beneficiaries of Mbeki's rescue package were South African government parastatals and government-controlled financial institutions (Lipton, 2009). As McKinley explains:

*By early 2000 one of the targets, the Zimbabwean Electricity Parastatals Association (ZESA), was estimated to owe its South African counterpart (ESKOM) in the region of R300 million. Similarly, the government-owned National Oil Company of Zimbabwe, the country's sole oil procurement agency, was estimated to owe over R250 million to its suppliers, with one of the key suppliers at that stage being the South African oil/coal parastatal, SASOL. Part of the 'rescue package' also included more than twenty joint investment projects in Zimbabwe, in the areas of infrastructure, tourism and natural gas exploration involving South Africa's state-owned corporations such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the Industrial Development Corporation (McKinley, 2004: 359).*

Thus Mbeki's rescue package was intimately tied to the South African domestic goal of black economic empowerment and represented an initiative to secure the interests of the South African economic elite.

The package thus had two main goals; a) fostering the South African economic elite's goals of increasing indebtedness and as a consequence ownership of sectors of the Zimbabwean economy; b) preventing the rise to power of the opposition party, which at the time was relatively unknown and possibly averse to South Africa's interests (McKinley, 2004).

In 2008, the economic situation descended down another spiral. Zimbabwe's currency became worthless, and shortage of water led to an outbreak of cholera and famine (Gevisser, 2009:304). This collapse had economic costs for South Africa, in terms of reduced consumer spending on South African goods and services and a loss in international confidence in the stability of the region. There was also a security challenge stemming from the large influx of refugees. It is estimated that as early as 2003, that is before the Zimbabwean economic crisis reached its nadir, 25,000 to 30,000 refugees crossed into South Africa every month, and that by 2007 the total had reached 2M (Adelmann, 2004; Prys. 2009; Hamil and Hoffman, 2009).

There is by now a substantial body of evidence to show that Mbeki's government was protecting Mugabe's from international criticism and sanctions: the endorsement of the 2002 election, its support of Zimbabwe during the 2002 Commonwealth meeting, the less than neutral role the South Africans played in 2007 when a SADC delegation was supposed to help negotiate a deal with the opposition MDC (Geldenhuys 2006; Lipton, 2009; [www.mg.za/print/Format/single/2010-11-29-report-cats-doubt-on-mebekis-neutrality...](http://www.mg.za/print/Format/single/2010-11-29-report-cats-doubt-on-mebekis-neutrality...) accessed Dec. 1, 2010).

Yet South Africa's leaders have not accepted Mugabe's policies without question. In 2000, a joint Nigerian/South African mission tried to persuade Mugabe to abandon the policy of seizing white owned farms, in 2002 South Africa was one of three Commonwealth governments that tried to persuade Mugabe to moderate some of his policies, and in October 2010, a South African delegation travelled to Harare to try and shore up a power sharing agreement with the opposition (Ventner, 2001; Prys, 2009); Global Post, Oct. 1, 2010).

Mbeki's policy on Zimbabwe is puzzling. Did he have his ego tied to the reconciliation with Mugabe that he had been asked to bring about, as Gevisser hints (2007: 435-6 and 2009: 300)? Was it realism based on the fact that Mugabe's majority Shona people were likely to continue to rule the country (Gevisser, 2009), or South Africa's economic self-interest and interest in stability of the region? Was it a ploy not only for Zimbabwean support at the UN and elsewhere, but also that of other African governments who might feel threatened by an effective South African human rights policy or perhaps a sense of African solidarity, *tout court* (Gevisser, 2009, pp.264 and 300)? We shall attempt answers to some of these questions as we examine Mbeki's Zimbabwean policy in the context of his foreign policy overall.

### **South Africa in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): 2007-2008**

In October of 2006, South Africa was for the first time in its history elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (Nieuwkerk 2007). Here too South Africa followed a policy of Africa first, choosing to focus its presidency in March of 2007 and then again in April 2008 on the issue of strengthening the relationship

between the UN and regional organizations, in particular the AU, an initiative that highlighted the need for greater coordination of efforts in peacemaking and peacekeeping on African issues (Nieuwkerk 2007). While many anticipated SA would play a positive role in support of a human rights agenda, South Africa's first tenure in the UNSC has been variously described as controversial and disappointing for its seeming disregard for human rights issues and consistent support of illiberal states. Criticism of South Africa's tenure in the UNSC is mainly based on its position on four controversial decisions: South Africa worked with China and Russia among others to prevent the adoption of Western-sponsored resolutions condemning and imposing sanctions on Myanmar's military junta, Zimbabwe, Iran and Sudan. These decisions are discussed in more detail below. Furthermore, in April of 2007, South Africa, along with China, Russia, Indonesia and Qatar, opposed a discussion on climate change on the grounds that the Security Council (SC) was not the appropriate forum for this kind of discussion, even though South Africa had previously supported fighting climate change at the G8 Summit held in Heiligendamm (Bischoff 2003).

### ***Myanmar***

On January 12, 2007, the UK and the US introduced a draft resolution that called on Myanmar to release all political prisoners, begin political dialogue and put an end to the human rights abuse of ethnic minorities (Bischoff 2003). South Africa voted against this resolution which China and Russia later vetoed. South Africa has defended its decision by arguing that a) the resolution was not consistent with the mandate of the SC as it dealt with alleged human rights abuses in a sovereign country and therefore did not constitute a threat to regional

or international peace and security (which ironically is the argument the apartheid regime had used), b) the appropriate forum for the discussion of the issue was the Human Rights Council and c) the text would compromise the good offices mission of the Secretary General to Myanmar (Nieuwkerk 2007; Ploch 2011). South Africa further reminded the SC that such issues are better handled by regional bodies and that Myanmar's neighbours in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) did not see the situation in Myanmar as a threat to regional or international peace and security (DFA). The ASEAN is known to defend 'constructive engagement' as the most effective means to promote political change in Myanmar (Geldenhuys 2006).

South Africa's decision would have been tenable had South Africa brought up the issue in the Human Rights Council (HRC), which it did not, once again, sacrificing human rights in favour of sovereignty and non-western interference. In fact, the issue was not brought up in the HRC until after Myanmar's military junta's violent response to peaceful protests in September 2007, when 53 countries called for a special session on the issue. South Africa was not among them (Human Rights Watch 2008).

### ***Iran***

On 24 March 2007, Britain, France, Germany and the US, introduced resolution 1747 to address Iran's nuclear programme. The resolution called on Iran to respect the obligations stipulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and imposes sanctions aimed at persuading Iran to comply with earlier resolutions and to constrain the further development of its nuclear program (Nieuwkerk 2007).

South Africa initially threatened to abstain but reluctantly voted in favour of the resolution after securing a number of amendments to the text, which included the recognition of the role of the IAEA and an emphasis on negotiations (South Africa 2009). Nonetheless, Ebrahim Ebrahim, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Co-operation has stated that South Africa was ultimately forced to vote for the resolution because it did not understand UN Protocol, which dictates that if a country becomes involved in the drafting of the resolution, it cannot then vote against it or even abstain. Ebrahim stated, 'we voted for it in the end, but we wanted to vote against it. We had to explain this to the Iranians' (Rossouw 2010).<sup>1</sup>

### **South African Policies toward Sudan**

South Africa's foreign policy toward Sudan has been another disappointment for international observers who expected South Africa to make greater efforts to address what could be considered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises in recent times. South Africa-

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<sup>1</sup> The South African paper the *Mail & Guardian* claims to have found evidence that the government's policy on Iran may have been influenced by the South African based multinational MTN, which in its attempts to muscle a Turkish firm out of the Iranian cell phone market promised the Iranian government that it could persuade the government of South Africa to sell it weapons which UN sanctions did not allow Iran to have and even to get SA to change its vote at the IAEA and the UN (Naidoo, 2012). The relevant document, filed with a court in the District of Columbia (USA) also claims that MTN gave the SA ambassador to Iran \$200 000 to facilitate the deal and that in 2005 MTN arranged a private off-the-record meeting between the Iranian ambassador to SA and President Mbeki (Iran: Turkcell 2005).



Sudan relations date back to the apartheid regime when, in the early 1990s, the Sudanese National Congress Party (NCP) sought to acquire military technology to be used in a military campaign against the Sudan People's Liberation Army or SPLA (Yoh n.d.). The SPLA had in turn forged a relationship with the ANC that dated back to the 1980s, when both parties signed a memorandum of political understanding and coordinated political activities in exile. In 1991 the SPLA split into two factions and relations between the two parties were limited until the movement reunited in 2003, at which point the SPLA and the ANC, now South Africa's ruling party, signed a new memorandum of political understanding.

Under the leadership of former President Mandela, South African policy towards Sudan was characterized by solidarity with the people of Sudan and a promotion of a peaceful and inclusive solution to the conflict. More recently under Mbeki's leadership, policy towards Sudan has been very much informed by Mbeki's African agenda (Yoh n.d.). Accordingly, priority was given to supporting the implementation of a peace agreement between Khartoum and the SPLA and contributing to the stabilization of the region. While Mbeki declined to become directly involved as a mediator to the conflict in 2003, South Africa has remained a champion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and continues to play an important role as chair of the AU Committee on Post Conflict Reconstruction Process in Sudan and as a contributor to the AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur (Adebajo 2007). Moreover, since 2005, the (DFA) Department of Foreign Affairs (since renamed) has sponsored a joint initiative between the (DFA) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) aimed at increasing the capacity of SPLM cadres to participate equitably at all levels of governance (Yoh n.d.).

South Africa has remained engaged in the peace process in Sudan at the regional level, while seemingly attempting to block discussions of Sudan's human rights violations in global fora. In fact, in the UN Human Rights Council, South Africa has consistently sought to weaken efforts to address the human rights crisis in Darfur (Human Rights Watch, 2008). In 2006, South Africa opposed a resolution that denounced Khartoum's conduct in Darfur and supported instead a weaker resolution that made no reference to follow-up action by the Council or the Sudanese government's duty to protect civilians (Nathan 2008). As a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2007, South Africa opposed a resolution that proposed sanctions against combatants who attack civilians and obstruct peace efforts and against parties to the conflict that refuse to co-operate with UNAMID, the joint UN-AU peacekeeping force in Darfur (Nathan 2008). In November of that year, South Africa also opposed a US-sponsored resolution introduced in the UN General Assembly, condemning rape as a weapon of war, even though it had supported UNSC resolution 1325 of March of the same year on the elimination of grave sexual violence during armed conflict (Nathan 2008). South Africa argued that a narrow interpretation of rape could potentially make other forms of rape seem more acceptable (Bischoff 2008). Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad later stated that the US was attempting to politicize rape in the context of Sudan, while it had not done so in the Balkans (Bischoff 2008; Nathan 2008). In addition, in 2008 South Africa sided with the AU and the Arab League in support of deferring the possible indictment of Sudan's President Al-Bashir, arguing that it could impact negatively on the political process (South Africa 2009; Bischoff 2009).

Recent years have seen a strengthening of diplomatic relations between South Africa and Sudan. During President Al Bashir's visit to South Africa in 2007, Mbeki and Al Bashir signed agreements on defence, economic and trade co-operation and strengthened the existing Joint Bilateral Commission formed in 2006. In addition, the two leaders agreed that firm action by the international community should be taken against the rebels who boycotted the peace talks. While Mbeki had been critical of the rebels, he did not publicly criticize Khartoum's excessive and systematic use of force against civilians, which some governments denounced as genocide. South Africa's stance in Sudan has led many to accuse the country of appeasing Khartoum and allowing the oppression of the Sudanese people to continue. This is especially troubling given South Africa's historical struggle against apartheid and its professed commitment to human rights and democracy in its foreign policy.

In all three instances, South Africa sided with illiberal and authoritarian regimes, justifying this on the basis that internal conflict was not a threat to international peace and security and that, therefore, such issues fell outside the mandate of the UNSC. SA's position is consistent with the themes that underlay Mbeki's leadership: an overarching concern for state sovereignty, a stated preference for conflict to be handled at the regional level, and an expressed suspicion of western interference through the offices of the UN. Mbeki often expressed his distrust of the UN as a representative body and the need for South - South collaboration to prevent a new form of western imperialism. This has resulted in the subordination of human rights concerns to other factors.

## Overview of Relevant Theories

To what extent can some of the traditional theories of international relations explain the changes in South Africa's foreign policy?<sup>2</sup>

1. Classical or Offensive Realism – According to Morgenthau, states must and should seek to increase their national capability, that is, their “interest defined in terms of power” albeit in moderation or pay the price in terms of loss of the same (Morgenthau, 1993:5; Williams, 2005; Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009; Barkin, 2009; Rose, 1998). Whereas Morgenthau's successors have emphasized military over other types of capabilities, Morgenthau himself stressed that capabilities could include tangible and intangible factors, from geography to “national morale” and the quality of government (Morgenthau, 1993: 124-164; Williams, 2005; Mastanduno, 1997; Waltz, 2000). The pursuit of economic objectives and a good name are capabilities, which Morgenthau would have recognized as relevant elements of power. Keohane explains that according to the rationality assumption in realist theory, world politics can be analyzed by viewing states as unitary rational actors that seek to maximize their expected utility (Keohane 1986: 164-165). National interest is not, however, an easy concept to define. To minimize the potential for ambiguity, this

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Mandela. This is not to say that other theories, such as liberalism, neo-liberalism and neo-liberal institutionalism are of no relevance with respect to South African foreign policy. They may indeed be of some utility when it comes to explaining aspects of the country's foreign policy. But in terms of explaining the paradox of the rapid turnaround in post-apartheid South African foreign policy, the theories which offer the most promise are realism, constructivism and their variants

paper limits national interest to material, that is economic and security interests. So in terms of classical realism, what if any evidence is there that South Africa's post-apartheid South African governments pursued power as an objective that would enhance the state's economic development and capability?

2. Defensive and/or Structural Realism - emphasizes systemic over other causal factors in the making of foreign policy (Mastanduno, 1997; Rose, 1998; Waltz, 1979). Though other factors, notably domestic politics are not ruled out, structural realists favour the state's relative position within the relevant international system as the factor that is most likely to shape its foreign policy. Some realists add that the state's position within its international system in turn leads to the almost natural evolution of a balance of power (Morgenthau, 1993: 181-202; Waltz, 2000). Zakaria, as summarized by Rose (1998), adds one caution; he points out the need to take into account not just a state's raw capabilities in relation to that of other states but the extent to which the government is willing and able to mobilize those capabilities for foreign policy purposes. This caution may be of special relevance for South Africa, a country which faced and continues to face serious reconstruction and social problems after the damage caused by years of apartheid which wasted the country's human potential, not to mention the physical and psychological damage caused by sanctions. In terms of structural realism and given the fact that South Africa is militarily and economically the most capable state in Southern Africa, and that by a considerable margin, what evidence is there that the governments of post-apartheid South Africa sought to attain and retain the position of a regional hegemony?

3. Neo-classical realism occupies a halfway house between classical realism and constructivism. It is based on the assumption that the influence of structural factors such as relative power is not always obvious even to political actors themselves (Rose, 1998). The extent to which the central decision-making authorities of states seek to acquire power or react to the relevant international system can thus not be taken for granted; it needs to be demonstrated. Neo-classical realists are realist enough to suspect that the international system plays a prime role in the shaping of the foreign policy of the constituent units, and "neo" enough to realize that other factors, such as misperceptions and domestic politics, may intervene and derail the realist logic (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2007). So in terms of neo-classical realism, what evidence do we have that South Africa's foreign policy-making elite has consciously tried to a) follow a policy of regional dominance and b) used that position of dominance to the advantage of South Africa, in terms of both security and economic gain?

What all three types of realism have in common is a foundation of materialism and an assumption of rationality of the instrumental kind on the part of policy makers (Wendt, 1994). This is not the case with another group of theories that have variously been labeled structuralism and (social) constructivism.

4. Constructivism (identity based): Howarth (2008) argues that 'state identities and foreign policy can be mutually constitutive or destructive, that constructions of identity form the basis of the principles and paradigms underpinning foreign-policy framework, and that operationalization or application of these to actual situations can reconstitute state identities. Even a structural realist such as Waltz

admits that, “the impulse to protect one’s identity-cultural and political as well as economic...is strong” (Waltz, 2000). Constructivism sometimes seems to merge into the liberalism of the post-World War I era, the one that assumed that good intentions, good rules and international institutions to enforce them can build a better world. The constructivism that deals with the adoption of common norms is of this variety (Finnemore, 1996; Sikkink,1991). Wendt (1992) links the adoption of common norms to the creation of a common identity; surely governments will not seek to enslave or abuse the peoples of a country with which they identify. This idea opens up promising avenues of enquiry, for example, Nazi propaganda that deliberately created a distance between the Nazi and the peoples whom they oppressed and abused. But this is not a path that we can follow here.

It is another kind of constructivism that may be useful in understanding South African foreign policy. This, which could be labeled pure constructivism, deals with the construction of identities and sees states as anthropomorphic beings that, like individuals, seek to achieve a sense of identity and belonging (Wendt 1992). And it is this search for identity which leads governments to formulate foreign policies that confirm and deepen that identity (Wendt, 1992; Gaskarth, 2006). Identity is communal by definition. One cannot identify with oneself alone. So where do states find their sense of identity? Is the international identity of a state built on its domestic political culture (Wendt, 1994; Stairs 1982)? Or is it the international environment, a regional or world-wide climate of opinion or a regional political culture which shapes a country’s foreign policy? Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996) see states’ interests and identities “as partly constructed by their environment”. Wendt (1992) identifies various degrees of identity building on the part of international institutions,

from the looseness of the Concert of Europe to the tightness of the European Union. We label this constructivism environmental.

Cultural or institutional elements of states' environments shape national interests; identity becomes the link between the international or regional environment and the state's interests, and the preservation of that identity can in turn become an interest in its own right (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996). Constructivism can explain the reshaping of national foreign policies as the environment of beliefs and opinions in a region changes; for example, in western Europe when West Germany became an anti-militaristic model democracy, in eastern Europe when former Soviet satellites sought to become good NATO allies, and in Asia where Japan turned from militarism to anti-militarism (Ruggie, 1998). If identities do indeed shape interests, or to use the stronger language favoured by Wendt, if "interests are dependent on identities" (Wendt, 1994), then South Africa's identity as a member of the African community rather than an outcast from that community should shape and inform its foreign policy. What evidence is there that the foreign-policy makers of post-apartheid South Africa sought to express an African identity by means of a foreign policy which identified their country with others in Africa?

5. Constructivism (based on national political culture) - Conversely, or perhaps also, a state's identity could be built upon its domestic political culture (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1992; Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009; Nel Taylor and van der Westhuizen, 2001). Thus Canada's foreign policy was for decades based on a domestic tradition of compromise and negotiations within that country's federal system (Stairs, 1982) and the Scandinavian



countries' contribution to international development can be ascribed to a domestic tradition of egalitarianism (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996). Howarth (2008) contends that in a democratic setting, this process of construction and reconstruction needs to be legitimated, and the media plays an important role in that process. In a similar vein, one strand of constructivist theory sees identity as a role which emerges out of strategic interactions and is rooted in broader philosophical discourses (Klotz 2004). Klotz explains that "leaders debate in this broader language, assuaging domestic divisions; the discourse of identity shapes domestic interests into a 'national interest". Over time, they articulate collective principles, even if they disagree over specific policies. Theories of state identity in particular predict that if state identity is coherent, then policy will be consistent, but if identity is ambiguous, policy will be contested (Klotz, 2004: 5). So can we find evidence to show that South Africa's foreign policy is based on an amalgam of domestic identities that have combined to form a national identity that, inter alia, legitimizes itself by the making of a relevant foreign policy?

In this context, applying constructive identity theory to the South African case reveals that since the end of apartheid there have been competing perceptions of national identity. These have been influenced by personal leadership, firstly Mandela's, who initiated a markedly idealistic era with an emphasis on Africa, democracy, human rights and non-violent mechanisms for conflict resolution, and then Mbeki's, who maintained the focus on democracy and Africa, but who demonstrated more realist leanings, as well as internationalist and anti-imperialist tendencies. Perceptions of national identity that constrained South African foreign policy decisions can thus be analyzed with recourse to leaders' discourse.

6. Path dependency (also known as historical institutionalism) generally refers to the causal relevance of preceding stages in a temporal sequence, in other words, what happens at an earlier point in time will have an effect on later events (Pierson 2000). The effect earlier events have in relation to later events follows an increasing returns process, whereby “the probability of further steps along the same path increases with each move down that path ... and the costs of exit of switching to some previously plausible alternative – rise” (Pierson 2000: 252). In fact, Levi (1997) suggests that path dependency means that “once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice”. Applying path dependency to the South African case, where there has been a dramatic regime change, raises the question as to the point of origin of the path. Is it the foreign policy of the apartheid regime or does it consist of the foreign policy advocated by the ANC while it was still a government in waiting?

### **Application of Above Theories**

Mbeki took office at a time when the pitfalls of a foreign policy based on ethics were painfully evident and domestic political and social instability had become policy priorities. It is, therefore, no surprise that he sought to reap the rewards of South Africa's newly acquired international profile for tangible material gains. In general terms, an analysis of Mbeki's foreign policy reveals a foreign policy with visible realist leanings; Mbeki's African Renaissance, NEPAD as well as his

policy of security and wealth creation' all fall neatly within the realist paradigm and were motivated by economic interests and political influence. A stable democratic continent would attract foreign investment and SA, as the biggest economy in the continent, had much to benefit from such a scenario.

In classical realist terms, it can be said that both in Zimbabwe and Sudan, South Africa pursued a foreign policy that was, at least partly, driven by economic and security interests. South Africa's pursuit of economic interests in Zimbabwe and Sudan is evidenced by its attempts to expand trade with both countries. Zimbabwe is an important trading partner. The crisis in Zimbabwe is harmful to South African companies and its economic downturn has had negative effects on the South African economy, directly in terms of reduced spending on South African goods and services, and indirectly as the instability in the region results in a loss of international confidence and foreign investment (Adelmann 2004). However, as Adelmann (2004: 267) argues:

*the policy of quiet diplomacy also offers opportunities. Trade figures suggest that while some sectors suffer from the crisis, others directly profit from the crisis as their products substitute Zimbabwean products on the local and to a lesser extent also on the world market (...) the main economic interest of South Africa is to prevent a complete collapse of Zimbabwe (...) quiet diplomacy paves the way for further profits in the future.*

South Africa has an additional security challenge stemming from the large influx of Zimbabwean refugees, which could worsen if Zimbabwe

turns into a failed state. Therefore, from a realist perspective, quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe makes sense, at least in the short term. South Africa's 'constructive engagement' toward both Zimbabwe and Sudan was also predicated on the fact that, African solidarity, as opposed to public criticism, would amount to a better name for South Africa within the African continent, which in classical realist terms translates to power. Mbeki's SA sought to become an ally of the African continent and become a regional hegemon, but in a benevolent fashion.

South Africa's rationale for decisions in the UNSC can also be explained in realist terms, specifically with reference to defensive/structural realism. While at the regional level SA enjoys a hegemonic position, at the international level it is still an emerging middle power. As Bischoff (2009) suggests, South Africa voted on “political rather than ethical grounds”, which makes realist sense if one considers the emerging multi-polar international system. Ideologically, South Africa aligned with the emerging centers of power, mainly China and Russia. South Africa sought to become a member of the BRIC (Brazil, India, China, Russia), an effort in which it succeeded in December 2011 when the BRIC became the BRICS, while the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) grouping continues to mature (Bischoff 2009: 105).

So while at the international level South Africa remains a middle power, it used its seat at the UNSC not only to align itself more closely with other emerging middle powers, but also to retain its regional hegemony position when it comes to African affairs by consistently siding with African states regardless of their human rights record. Moreover, South Africa's attempt to refer matters before the UNSC to

other bodies such as the HRC, the General Assembly or regional organizations, was an attempt to democratise decisions, which would otherwise be decided solely by the five permanent members. When it comes to African affairs, South Africa would then be in a much better position to exercise its hegemonic power in the African continent through the African Union and the SADC, and thus maintain its role on the continent.

There is an almost equally strong case for a constructivist interpretation of Mbeki's foreign policy. President Mbeki, who had for so long lived in other African countries believed in South Africa's destiny as an African country, as is evident from his passionate "I am an African" speech.

*Mbeki possessed and acted on a world-view that joined realism to a politics of Third Worldism and racial redress... If human rights came second in Mbeki's foreign policy this was probably due as much to the former president's 'idealistic' notions of racial and South-South solidarity as it was to calculations of South Africa's interests....(Glaser 2010)*

For Mbeki being African did not mean being just like other African countries, but rather to show that Africans could adopt and practise the values of democracy, humanism and transparency that the ANC had sought for South Africa during the long years in exile and opposition. Hence his government took the initiative in creating NEPAD, provided peacekeepers to other African countries and spoke on behalf of Africa in international fora.

When the governments of Africa were almost unanimous in taking a position, such as in the case of Omar Al Bashir and the ICC, Mbeki chose not to isolate his country, as Mandela had done over Nigeria in 1996, and instead showed his Africanness by supporting the position of the other governments (Nathan 2005). The case of Zimbabwe is more complex. Mbeki's government supported Mugabe's not just with words but also with economic assistance, and South Africa has an economic as well as a security interest in the stability of its neighbour. Yet that support was not unconditional; there were times when Mbeki's South Africa tried to moderate Mugabe's policies. Nevertheless, the wish to adhere to the African principle of non-interference in others' affairs undoubtedly played a role in Mbeki's policy toward Zimbabwe. On Zimbabwe as well as on the UN Security Council, Mbeki was sensitive to criticism that his government was pro-Western or un-African (Geldenhuys 2008).

Mbeki's anti-imperialist ideology, which expresses itself in a preference for the handling of conflict at the regional level ('African solutions to African problems') is also an expression of an identity, that of the Third World as against the wealthy North and West (Bjorn 2009). It has caused South Africa not only to take up the case of poor countries in the UN but also to attempt to play a role in the all but moribund Non-Aligned Movement. This was yet another expression of identity politics on the part of the Mbeki government.

While there is considerable evidence that the search for an African identity informed the Mbeki government's foreign policy, the case for a link between the political culture of post-apartheid South Africa and its foreign policy is all but impossible to determine. For one thing, that

political culture is still in the making. For another, the political culture has only been studied to a limited extent. And lastly, there is little evidence that South Africa's foreign policy has been shaped by either the diffuse nature of its domestic ethos nor by specific domestic interests – with one significant exception. Large partly government controlled parastatals as well as some large mining firms have influenced the policy toward Zimbabwe and Sudan.

Turning next to historical institutionalism, South Africa's history of regional destabilization during the apartheid regime had constrained the acceptance of its continental leadership by neighboring countries, who had been the victims of that destabilization. Applying path dependency to the South African case must allow for the fact that a critical juncture took place in 1994 when South Africa decided to end a historical chapter in which it played the role of a regional hegemony. After 1994, South Africa adopted a co-operative role and has made efforts to maintain it that way since. Or did it? Did South Africa end the interventionist attitude it had adopted during apartheid especially toward Southern Africa in particular, which it viewed as its own sphere of interest, an exploitable source of energy resources, cheap labor and an easily accessible market for its products (Flemes, 2009)?

As South Africa sought to abandon its historical hegemon role and adopted a more democratic and cooperative stance in its foreign policy, it was forced to strike a delicate balance between becoming a leader in liberal-style development and democracy, and in this way risk being perceived as the lackey of the West, or on the other hand, expressing solidarity with other African nations. In this context, South Africa has had to carefully couch its leadership in what some scholars have termed 'soft, soft diplomacy' so as to avoid being labeled a

hegemon (Hau, Scott and Hulme 2012). Therefore, it is in South Africa's interest not to act unilaterally to impose democracy in the African continent.

South Africa's historical legacy also helps us understand South Africa's ties with a number of states whose democratic and human rights records are at minimum questionable, such as Libya, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco. These friendship ties were forged between the ANC and the respective governments during apartheid as they shared a common struggle for national liberation. Iran, Libya and Cuba in particular, were important supporters of the ANC liberation movement. Thus, the friendly relations with the above mentioned countries are not meant to demonstrate a disregard for democratic principles on the part of South Africa. They are instead an expression of the bonds forged as a result of a common past characterized by the struggle for national liberation.

There were some such bonds also in the case of Zimbabwe, but that story is more complex. Historically, the ANC had been closer to Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU than Robert Mugabe's ZANU, but President Mbeki personally supported ZANU because he realized that the majority Shona people led by Mugabe were likely to dominate an independent Zimbabwe (Gevisser 2007:431). So there were personal historical ties. And there was the fact that both the ANC and ZANU and ZAPU faced a similar situation from 1965-1980: they were forced into a bloody guerrilla war against a racist regime. But SA also has a strong economic and security interest in a stable Zimbabwe, and this factor must be taken into account along with the historical ties.



## **Analysis, Conclusions, Outlook for the Future**

We have demonstrated that the foreign policy of the new democratic South Africa is not wholly informed by a Realpolitik that set in after the initial humanitarian and idealistic impulse of the Mandela years had begun to fade. Instead that realism is tempered by the search for a new identity of South Africa as an African state. And yet this conclusion can only be tentative. Much remains to be done, particularly with respect to a possible link between the political culture of the new South Africa and its foreign policy as that political culture is itself still in the making and not yet studied.

South African foreign policy under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma will show both continuity and a break with the recent past. Foreign policy priorities under Zuma are likely to remain the development of the African continent, a promotion of multilateral cooperation and the pursuit of global governance reform. Nonetheless, these priorities will be pursued in a reality different from that of recent years. South Africa is no longer the favorite returnee of the international community, especially after its first contentious tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. And Zuma faces rising domestic challenges that have led to fractures within the ANC. South Africa has in the last decade registered 6% annual growth, strong job creation and high foreign investment (Johnson, 2008). However, poverty, unemployment and crime remain high. Maintaining macro-stability at home will be key to Zuma's success, who pledged to address domestic challenges during his term. In terms of foreign policy this emphasis on domestic issues has already begun to show a renewed emphasis on development and poverty reduction, which will require foreign investment, regardless of the state of democracy in the countries from which that investment comes (SA

DIRCO 2009 and 2012c); thus, the kow-towing to China and the good relations with Saudi Arabia.

The specific issues addressed in this paper are continuing to preoccupy the Zuma government. Zimbabwe is still an issue, and President Zuma is personally involved in the SADC effort to try and improve the state of governance in that country (Sasman, 2012; SA DIRCO 2012b). Sudan, or rather the two Sudans, still present problems of peace and good governance, and the government of South Africa has continued to treat both Sudanese governments with respect and deference. In March 2012, Zuma referred to President Al Bashir of Sudan and President Salva Kiir of South Sudan as his “dear brothers” (SA DIRCO 2012a)

For the years 2011-2012 South Africa has once again been elected to the Security Council, and two of the issues it has had to face there are those of the turmoil in Libya and in Syria. On Libya, South Africa’s position has been that the problem should be settled by the Libyans themselves (SA DIRCO 2012b.) On Syria, South Africa would have preferred to leave the matter to the League of Arab States, but it eventually supported the appointment of Special UN Envoy Kofi Annan, calling for the observance of human rights and socio-economic development (SA DIRCO 2012c and e)

It is safe to say that Zuma’s South Africa is not likely to attempt an ambitious foreign policy agenda, though it will undoubtedly seek to maintain a position of first among equals on the African continent, as is suggested by the persistent attempt in March and April 2012 to have a South African elected as Secretary General of the African

Union. If South Africa can help to achieve for the rest of African continent what it has achieved for itself in terms of human rights and democracy, that will be a boon to the people of Africa who, over the last two hundred years, have suffered from almost every imaginable human rights abuse.

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