
10 Years of democratic South Africa's **foreign policy**

*Foreign policy over the past decade has sought to make a decisive break with the past and apartheid South Africa's discredited role between 1948 and 1989 when apartheid earned it the image and status of polecat. **Chris Landsberg** explores the new government's foreign policy which sought to contribute to key domestic objectives such as speeding up delivery and rebuilding the economy.*

Government has focused on securing redress for apartheid at home and foreign policy mirrors that, seeking 'redress' between the industrialised North and the developing South, and between Africa and its former colonisers. The cornerstones of that policy are initiatives like the African Union and its development programme the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). For Pretoria, NEPAD is about 'fundamentally' altering 'the relationship between Africa and the North, while strengthening the relationship between Africa and the South'. The clear goal is to bring about international redress by playing a bridge role between these divided blocks in world affairs.

Just as at home government has focused on restructuring old apartheid institutions and seeking to put in place new democratised institutions, so a lot of political capital has been invested in efforts like restructuring the old

Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU). We have also pushed for the restructuring of the United Nations (UN), and in particular its Security Council. The underlying thrust is towards common norms and values in defence of 'good' governance, peace, security, economic integration and collective security.

The Nelson Mandela government articulated a principled and ethical foreign policy, but the Thabo Mbeki government has ambitiously worked for a rules-based global order through a commitment to multilateralism and negotiating international rules, norms and pacts. South Africa has promoted 'global governance' by emphasising the centrality of the United Nations in global affairs, has pursued a strong disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime, and pushed for the

restructuring the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

By hosting numerous global events over the past decade, South Africa has become for all practical purposes the negotiations capital of the world. A key strategy has been the stitching together of deals between the developing and developed worlds.

Putting Africa first

Official policy states that 'Africa remained the core focus of South Africa's foreign policy'. Other policy documents of the Department for Foreign Affairs reinforce this and this in turn made Africa South Africa's comparative advantage in world affairs.

We have rejected a Big Brother role and have instead stressed partnership with African associates. Since 1995 government has articulated the vision of an African Renaissance and NEPAD is the mechanism for this vision. On the democratic governance score, we have

linked socioeconomic development and adherence to democratic principles and good governance. Foreign policy has injected into the continental governance debate the idea that governments that come to power, or attempt to retain power, through unconstitutional means must be isolated and resisted.

South Africa was instrumental in transforming the OAU into the AU. South Africa backs the continued existence of an independent and empowered African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights under the AU so as to ensure an effective delivery mechanism. South Africa accentuates the importance of an African order more committed to human rights and has a clear policy of promoting adherence to democratic benchmarks and governance indicators set up by, and for, Africans. It has for example been instrumental in setting up an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to promote democratic conduct in Africa.

Foreign Affairs has invested a great deal of effort and energy into restructuring the SADC, pushing for the implementation of protocols, particularly those on free trade, politics and defence and security co-operation. As part of its regional co-operation and integration strategy, South Africa has pushed for the establishment of the SADC Free Trade Area and appropriate SADC interventions to restore stability and security in the region. A great deal of focus was placed on boosting international investor confidence and attracting Foreign Direct Investment to the regional economy.

Conflict mediation, facilitation and resolution

Seeking an end to conflicts in Africa and the Middle East has been a key tenet of foreign policy. Its conflict resolution strategies have been highly ambitious, and at times Pretoria seemed to bite off

more than it could chew. As early as 1998 the Mandela government attempted to mediate an end to the Zaire rebellion against Mobutu sese Seko. In 1999, the Mbeki government singled out peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo as a priority, and Pretoria was instrumental in efforts to try and ensure a successful Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD), which commenced at Sun City in February 2002.

In Lesotho, policy was aimed at bringing stability, and social and economic development. Prior to the May 2002 elections, South Africa engaged Lesotho through the extended SADC Troika which involved Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Namibia. These countries aimed at bringing about a credible election in Lesotho and helped stabilise it in the post-election period.

In Burundi, South Africa long realised that there was a crucial need to strengthen the Arusha Process. Deputy President Jacob Zuma played a key facilitation role to backstop the efforts of Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela. South Africa provided specific training to Burundi to provide an internal protection unit for members of the interim government, while soliciting support for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force.

South Africa continues to emphasise the need for a credible peace in Angola, as well as the urgent need for a post-conflict reconstruction effort for that country. But something not often recognised by analysts is that South Africa holds little leverage over Angola, and its ability to move the peace efforts in any one direction is therefore limited.

South Africa continued to engage both Israeli and Palestinian authorities in seeking a resolution of the conflict in the Middle East.

The Zimbabwe question forced itself

onto the agenda as early as 1999 and South Africa's strategy of 'quiet diplomacy' vis-à-vis Harare was not a departure from past methods. For example, the Mandela government resorted to a behind-the-scenes engagement of the Sani Abacha dictatorship in 1995. Mbeki also tapped into his strategic relationship with Nigeria's Olesegun Obasanjo to try and cajole Robert Mugabe in the direction of a negotiated end to the Zimbabwe crisis. While critics have labelled quiet diplomacy as 'softly-softly' cuddling, Mbeki regards the approach as 'visionary leadership' and 'a voice of reason'.

South Africa also supported and encouraged the Sudan IGAD peace process and Egyptian/Libyan Initiative. South Africa was mandated by the OAU in 1998 to address the constitutional crisis in the Comoros and the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) provided assistance and co-operation with the relevant authorities in the Comoros.

Foreign affairs officials stressed the importance of realising the Horn of Africa UN Settlement Plan. As the chair of the AU, Mbeki participated in negotiations to end the civil war in Liberia which resulted in the departure into exile of former President Charles Taylor in August 2003.

Defending global governance

A clear foreign policy doctrine has been to reinforce the role of multilateral institutions, particularly the UN, a doctrine that seeks a new international order that would be based on multilateral approaches rather than unilateral domination. Indeed, as a pivotal state, South Africa's global leadership was exercised mainly through multilateralism.

As an expression of this keenness for multilateralism, South Africa was

steadfast in criticising the Bush administration over Iraq and tried to impress upon both the United States and the Saddam Hussein regime that they should fulfill their international obligations.

South Africa's post-September 2003 foreign policy asserted that the Republic should support the fight against terrorism. Efforts were also made to continue building strong relations with the developed world; expand and consolidate South-South relations and continue with economic diplomacy.

South Africa has long placed a premium on transforming the international financial architecture so as to prevent the use of multilateral organisations for unilateral agendas and purposes. Just as the country pursues a policy of transformation and reconstruction domestically, so its foreign policy seeks to transform the global financial architecture by working for the reform of the UN Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions, notably the World Bank and the IMF.

South Africa has long been concerned that the UN Security Council continues to mirror power relations as they were in 1945, and that reforming the Council is desperately slow. South Africa believes that, as the agency charged with maintaining international peace and security, the UN Security Council must become democratic and representative of all the peoples of the world in spearheading international peace, security and stability issues.

Also under the banner of global governance Pretoria promoted relief for humanitarian crisis situations, and sought support in meeting emergencies and natural disasters in Africa. In terms of peacekeeping, South Africa has underlined the need to develop national, sub-regional and regional capacities for peacekeeping but vowed that it would only undertake peace support duties

under the auspices of clear multilateral mandates.

Building bridges

South Africa sees itself as a bridge-builder between the industrialised North and the developing South, and stated policy is that it should seek to close this global divide by pushing for issues like debt relief, promoting capital flows, market access for Africa's trading goods, foreign aid reforms and improvement and getting Africa to commit itself to democratic governance. The tactic is to encourage North-South co-operation as well as foster solidarity between South and South. In terms of South-South co-operation we have systematically sought to tighten relations with Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt, Brazil, India and China. South Africa touted the idea of a G-8 of the South with the explicit intention to develop a co-ordinated approach to globalisation and to ensure that the developing South plays a more active and meaningful role in global institutions. In June 2003, Brazil, India and South Africa established the Tri-lateral Dialogue Forum in an effort to collectively address issues of global concern around development, trade, and global governance.

Pretoria has steadfastly tried to influence the allocation of official development assistance (ODA) by international financial institutions to the developing world. It has reminded the international donor community that emerging democracies require sustained support and assistance from partners in both the North and South. It has a policy of facilitating political dialogue with donor countries in order to promote democratisation and 'good' governance.

Trade policy pushed for both free and fair trade, and during the 2003 trade negotiations in Cancun, Mexico, South Africa formed part of the Group of 20+ who pushed the industrialised powers to

make significant shifts in terms of farming subsidies. On the developments at Cancun Mbeki said that 'structural fractures that characterise the architecture of global governance... need the intervention of these strategic partners acting in concert with many other partners from different parts of the world'.

It encouraged inter-regional co-operation on issues of mutual concern. As such, co-operation between SADC and the EU, SADC and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), and SADC and Mercosur are encouraged.

Conclusion

South Africa's foreign policy has in the main sought to imprint an image of the democratised Republic as a middle-ranked power and African pivot concerned with building partnerships, pushing for democratisation and governance, and redefining the terms of global power so as to serve the interests of the African continent. Pretoria views itself as the spokesperson for the African continent's development challenges.

Beyond Africa, foreign policy over the past decade has ambitiously attempted to bargain for redressing global imbalances between Africa and the South on the one hand, and Africa and the Northern industrialised world on the other.

South Africa has conducted a highly responsible foreign policy which seeks not only to contribute to consolidation of a young and fragile democracy at home, but also to building peace and security in Africa, while simultaneously attempting to negotiate for a redistribution of global power that will serve the interests of Africa and the global South.

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