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## South Africa in Africa: An Assessment

### INTRODUCTION

Few if any states emerge from periods of radical political and social transformation saddled with such high and immediate international expectations, and during the three presidential terms that have been served since South Africa became a democracy, the country has done much to meet them. Since 1994 South Africa has been the primary catalyst for regional and sub-regional integration in Africa, the main architect of a new and evolving political, economic and security superstructure on the continent, and a tireless advocate of Africa's interests on the international stage. The country's reintegration at both the sub-regional and continental level has been the leaven for Africa's rapid democratisation and reinvention as an increasingly stable and united region committed to good governance, security and economic growth.

### SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY

South Africa's role in Africa has undergone three distinct changes in the past 17 years. The release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 brought to a gradual end the near total (public) isolation of this country from most of its African neighbours. Pragmatic and often *sub rosa* relationships could be converted into open, gradually improving interactions. These were epitomised by South Africa's opening diplomatic missions in countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Madagascar, Egypt, Tunisia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the apartheid era.

South Africa's foreign policy from 1994 may be characterised as 'principled', based as it was on the values of the new South African constitution. Human rights were described as a cornerstone of that foreign policy. In addition, because the Mandela administration wished to avoid the charge that South Africa was a newly-arrived bully in the region, it avoided taking strong stands on issues that concerned its neighbours and other countries in Africa.

Moreover, the perceived affront to the dignity of leaders who had formerly been the 'big men' of the region (such as Robert Mugabe), and whose prominence had been eclipsed by Mandela's, was taken into account.

A distinct turning point came in 1999, when Thabo Mbeki was elected president on the retirement of Mandela. He espoused a foreign policy agenda based on the theme of an African Renaissance. He went on to develop the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

The Mbeki presidency has been characterised by a greater emphasis on African issues, conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace-building, institution-building and governance. He has also devoted much energy to the development of sound relations and dialogue with countries of the developed world in order to advance 'the African Agenda'. The entry points for achieving continental goals are provided by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and Nepad.

South Africa's engagement with Africa rests on three pillars:

- strengthening Africa's institutions, both regionally (the Southern African Customs Union —SACU and SADC) and continentally (the AU);
- supporting the implementation of Africa's socio-economic development programme, Nepad; and
- strengthening bilateral political and socio-economic relations by way of effective structures for dialogue and co-operation.

The Mbeki foreign policy may be characterised as pragmatic rather than principled, although strong stands are taken on issues of importance to Africa or to the global South.

South Africa's involvement in Africa belies the tension that exists between South Africa's capacity to lead (as perceived by people both inside and outside the

country) and the resultant assumptions about what the country should do, as against the government's fear of being seen as a 'big brother'. South Africa's foreign policy has therefore sometimes come into conflict with its own much-vaunted principles and the basis of South Africa's constitutionalism.

Mbeki has been a 'foreign policy president'. Although the general trend of South African foreign policy after Mbeki is unlikely to change, it is unclear whether his successor will have the same level of interest and engagement. South Africa will continue its focus on Africa, although depending on the profile of the new cabinet and indeed the president, there may be a deepening of solidarity with the South and that constituency's global agenda. An inkling of this tendency can be seen in South Africa's alliances within the Security Council during 2007.

Its ability to stay engaged in a constructive manner on the international stage and in Africa is dependent to a large degree on its coming to grips with not only its huge developmental deficits internally but the pressures that are starting to surface concerning its failure to provide services.

Furthermore, South Africa's status and projection of influence are also partly the result of its smooth transition and its subsequent political and economic stability, the latter in particular. Its remarkable achievements include reducing debt, narrowing the budget deficit, and ensuring predictability

in the investment environment. This gives South Africa additional credibility in the international arena, in which many countries view South Africa as a responsible partner. To maintain and build on its current role in foreign affairs, South Africa must recognise the crucial importance of securing the ongoing democratic consolidation and stability of the state.

## TRADE, INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

South Africa's continental engagement economically is both consciously and unconsciously coloured by its gigantism relative to the size of the other economies in the region. South Africa has the largest and most sophisticated economy on the continent, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$239 billion, 40 times larger than that of the average sub-Saharan economy. South Africa's GDP represents 25% of the total for Africa and one-third of sub-Saharan Africa's economy. It accounts for almost two-thirds of the GDP of SADC and 60% of all intra-SADC trade.

The rest of Africa represents 8,8% of South Africa's total trade. It is the only region with which South Africa maintains a significant trade surplus (see Table 1). This country's total trade with the rest of the continent has grown by roughly 659% since 1994. Exports to other countries in Africa increased from R8.6 billion (\$1.3 billion) in 1994 to R53.4 billion (\$7.6 billion) in 2006. There has been an equivalent increase

in imports from Africa during the same period — from a low base of R2.3 billion (\$0.4 billion) to R29.4 billion (\$4.2 billion). Over the last 15 years this substantial trade surplus has played an important role in partly offsetting the effects on South Africa's domestic economy of the enduring trade deficit with the European Union (EU).

South African imports from the rest of Africa, especially from countries outside SADC, consist largely of commodities, oil in particular.

Whereas South Africa offers a wide range of benefits to the sub-region, enabling most of the countries within it to procure goods and services more cost-effectively, the persistent trade imbalance between South Africa and the other states of the region poses a major political problem.

The challenge for the South African government is to manage its trade relations with the rest of the continent in a way that alleviates some of the developmental problems many of these states are experiencing while playing an active role in the 'scramble' for African investment and trade markets.

Although South Africa is the premier economy in the region, external actors are more important in the trade and aid spheres, with the exception of the members of the customs union, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland (the BLNS countries).

The countries of southern and eastern Africa, with few exceptions, trade predominantly with the EU.

**Table 1: South Africa's trade with Africa (R million) - 15 largest trading partners**

Country	1994		2006		Total trade 2006	Rank in 2006	% Change in total trade
	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports			
Zimbabwe	1,021.6	2,459.4	4,633.3	7,410.6	12,043.9	2	246
Mozambique	91.9	1,406.8	318.6	6,240.4	6,559.0	5	337
Zambia	103.9	1,158.4	1,842.2	7,984.9	9,827.2	3	679
Angola	16.9	311.8	2,486.1	4,739.1	7,225.0	4	2 098
Nigeria	21.2	63.6	9,285.9	4,001.1	13,287.0	1	15 568
Kenya	28.1	664.7	171.6	3,244.0	3,415.7	6	393
Mauritius	15.1	541.3	259.5	1,995.5	2,255.1	9	305
Tanzania	15.9	183.2	305.3	2,765.2	3,070.6	7	1 442
Malawi	187.0	622.0	531.0	1,686.5	2,217.1	10	174
DRC	353.6	349.7	49.2	2,554.5	2,603.0	8	270
Ghana	22.6	80.9	81.7	1,736.8	1,818.8	11	1 657

Source: [www.thedti.gov.za](http://www.thedti.gov.za)

## Investment: The Role of Private and Public Companies

The arrival of non-racial democracy in South Africa opened opportunities for a much wider group of private sector companies and parastatals, heralding the rapid continental expansion of South African firms into areas normally eschewed by traditional investors in Africa. Today, South Africa is regarded as among the top five investors in the region, and many South African companies are leaders in their sectors. Examples are the telecommunications giant MTN and Africa's largest retailer, Shoprite.

South Africa's investment in African countries is distributed as described below (using figures produced by Reg Rumney of BusinessMap):

- Mozambique 34%
- Nigeria 14%
- Namibia 8%
- DRC 8%
- Lesotho 7%
- Tanzania 6%
- Zimbabwe 6%
- Other 17%.

The sectoral breakdown of investment is:

- Telecommunications 24%
- Mining 19%
- Electricity 18%
- Steel and other metals 13%
- Oil and gas 10%
- Other 16%.

South African foreign investment amounted to R36,668 billion in 2004. Its investment in Africa is but a tiny portion — less than 5% — of the total.

Other African states have tended to perceive South African corporate penetration as part of a grand plan by 'South Africa Inc.' to dominate the continent. The assertive, business-like approach of South African corporates contrasts significantly with that of the SA government.

For South Africa, remaining attuned to the concerns of some African states is important. However, the government recognises that South African investment can, and should, play a significant role in the continent's development. South African firms are clearly contributing in a positive manner.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S MULTILATERAL TRADE AGENDA AS IT AFFECTS THE REST OF AFRICA

South Africa stands to gain more from a successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round of international trade negotiations than does the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The key concern for the Africa group is to fight against any preference erosion. It follows that the less agricultural tariffs and the subsidies that favour them are liberalised, the greater the benefit to the group. On the other hand South Africa has a competitive agricultural sector, and believes that subsidies must be reduced and disciplined.

### Regional Economic Integration

In terms of the 1991 Treaty of Abuja, Africa has been divided into five economic regional communities (RECs): North Africa; West Africa; Central Africa; East Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands with Southern Africa, using the existing regional economic communities (RECs) as the building-blocks of an African Economic Community, which is expected to materialise by 2028.

### Southern Africa

Southern Africa has two significant regional organisations, SADC and SACU, the Southern Africa Customs Union.

### SACU

One of the underlying principles of the existing customs union is the 'equitable division of customs and excise revenues'. A formula, renegotiated on several occasions, is applied to increase the proportion of the revenues paid over to the smaller states, thereby providing a form of budgetary assistance or subsidy by South Africa to its less economically developed partners.

An extremely high proportion of the revenue of Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia comes from customs duties on imports.

### SADC versus SACU

Although only the former organisation is recognised by the AU as a building-block, SACU provides a stronger base for a regional economic community for Southern Africa than SADC.

South Africa, the dominant regional power, views regional integration via SACU as a priority. Therefore South Africa may prefer to support SACU's

economic integration agenda, but to entrust non-economic issues to SADC. It is not clear that the BLNS countries support this approach.

### NEPAD

Nepad is an ambitious and innovative attempt to combine idealistic policy formulation with hard-nosed developmental principles. Its purpose is to accelerate the eradication of poverty and inequality in Africa; to place African countries on the path to sustainable growth; to halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process; and to do so in a partnership with the North. It also places obligations on African leaders to adopt good governance and to root out corruption.

### Continental Integration

The debate on continental integration is an initiative spearheaded by Libya's Gaddafi and Senegal's Wade. Gaddafi proposed a United States of Africa (USA). Although South Africa pays lip-service to the idea, it believes that continental political integration cannot be an immediate goal; nor does it offer a solution to Africa's problems.

The AU project, on the other hand, is one on which South Africa is focusing its energies. This country is one of the five largest contributors to the AU's finances; it serves on the Peace and Security Council; it houses the Pan-African Parliament and also the Nepad Secretariat, which has been incorporated as a programme of the AU. South Africa sees strengthening the continental institutions as critical to realising the objectives that the AU has set itself.

The AU project has moved from a narrow definition of state security (which revolves around issues of sovereignty) to the broader context of human security. On one level, South Africa played an instrumental role in shifting the discourse. On another, however, in the everyday practice of international relations, South Africa sometimes reverts to a traditional approach — that is, accepting the narrow definition of state sovereignty (particularly with regard to Zimbabwe).

## PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

Since 1994 South Africa has worked assiduously at helping resolve African conflicts. According to James Barber,

this country's approach to continental peace-making was shaped by a combination of 'values, experiences and practical considerations'.

By the beginning of 2006, three-quarters of all UN peacekeeping resources, including nine new missions since 2004, were dedicated to Africa. Roughly half of all peacekeepers deployed in those missions and a large portion of the command staff are African.

Poverty alleviation, political and economic inclusion and protection of democratic processes are now as much part of the discourse on security as military capacity and border protection.

### **The Security Mandate**

African leaders have identified the components of a well co-ordinated security system that provides internal and external links and does not rely solely on state actors. However, African security needs will remain limited for some time by the lack of economic and military capacity in individual states.

### **Electoral Democracy**

The 14 current members of SADC have held 53 elections since 1992 — a regional average of 3.5 per year. This reflects how quickly democratic ideals have become entrenched, not just in southern Africa but across the continent, since the end of the Cold War.

South Africa has been an active and vocal advocate for democratic processes at both the regional and continental level since 1994, and has sent monitoring teams to observe polling operations in countries across Africa.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The South African conflict resolution model rests on three pillars: preventive diplomacy, peace-building and peace-making.

Since 1994, South Africa has taken the lead in four significant conflict resolution attempts. The countries concerned were Burundi, the DRC, Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan (Darfur). The record is mixed, but it is not without notable successes. South Africa has deployed personnel to various peace missions, such as to AMIS (651 military and 125 police), MONUC (1 268), and UNMEE (5), and to missions in Burundi

(751), Uganda (2) and Nepal (5). It has been ranked number 1 in Africa on representation of women in mission deployments.

Perhaps the most significant constraint on South Africa's responses to conflict in Africa is its own ambivalence. While Pretoria has provided a bold vision and vigorously supported the building of Africa's new diplomatic and security architecture, there remains an element of hesitation, possibly a legacy of South Africa's apartheid past.

### **South Africa: the Economic Magnet**

As the home of the biggest economy in sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is seen by many people from other African states as promising a better life than they can expect in their own countries. Despite acute xenophobia and notable instances of violence and crime perpetrated against migrants by South Africans, this country has become an attractive destination for sub-Saharan African migrants, particularly from SADC countries.

Migration can be a politically-charged topic, not only within South Africa, but in other African states. Ordinary South Africans tend to believe that foreigners take jobs away from locals and exacerbate the country's already high levels of crime. On the other hand, people from neighbouring states view South Africa's attempts to keep other Africans out as reminiscent of the former regime.

The value of the remittances that migrant workers send from South Africa to other countries in the region has increased, from less than \$2 billion in 1990 to \$8 billion in 2005.

### **SOUTH AFRICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD**

South Africa has been identified (or has identified itself) as the representative of Africa in a number of global organisations and groupings:

- South Africa is a member of the G20 Finance, established in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis.
- Since the G8 meeting in Okinawa in 2000, President Mbeki has interacted with representatives of the world's major economies as a spokesman and representative of Africa. South Africa is one of the Outreach 5 (also known as the G5) countries, an initiative of the G8, where he acts as

Africa's spokesperson.

- South Africa uses its presence in the UN Security Council (UNSC) to voice the concerns and interests of the Africa group, as well as those of the G77. The positions taken by South Africa in the SC also show that it is working to question the existing power configurations in the SC (and in the world in general).

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

South Africa's foreign policy on this continent has both altruistic and more self-serving aims (although the latter would never be admitted in public in as blunt a way). These two elements help to explain South Africa's role in Africa.

The moral underpinnings are well-known, and are often presented as motivating all of South Africa's undertakings.

But South Africa is less comfortable with the articulation of imperatives that are 'in the national interest'. This discomfort extends to a reluctance to offer open criticism of other African leaders, as is seen most clearly in the case of Zimbabwe's president. Ironically, withholding censure undercuts South Africa's moral stance at the very moment it is trying to promote principled approaches. South Africa's pre-eminence as the partner of choice for governments and organisations outside Africa is a source of resentment in some quarters on the continent.

There are strong normative elements in any foreign policy, because the espousal of certain beliefs and values becomes identified with (rather than opposed to) the national interest. Such values may include sustainable development for all the people of South Africa and the continent; fairer international trading and security systems; and a commitment to bringing peace to the whole of Africa. All of these are interests South Africa shares with every other state on the continent.

Clearly South Africa's African agenda is critical. This country cannot insulate itself from developments in its neighbourhood. Also, much of its prosperity rests on its ability to create zones of stability in the Southern African region and beyond.

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