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**Southern African anchor state:
a renewed strategic commitment
to South African conflict
management as a central
function of smart power**



By Priyal Singh

ISSUE 1, 2018



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Acronyms and abbreviations

AMIB	African Union Mission in Burundi
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ARF	African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUSTF	African Union Special Task Force
BINUB	<i>Bureau Intègre des Nations Unies au Burundi</i> (United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi)
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CSO	Civil society organisation
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DoD	Department of Defence
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FARDC	<i>Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo</i> (Armed Forces of the DRC)
FIB	Force Intervention Brigade
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICC	International Criminal Court
MAP	Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme
MONUC	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo</i> (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

MONUSCO	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo</i> (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONUB	United Nations Operation in Burundi
PCRD	Post-conflict reconstruction and development
PSO	Peace support operation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADPA	South African Development Partnership Agency
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPSD	South African Protection Support Detachment
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Abstract

This paper considers the potential future role of South Africa as an anchor state in Africa, whose legitimacy and credibility – in spite of domestic constraints – is underwritten by a strategic commitment to maintaining regional peace and security. To achieve this, the paper draws upon the “hard” and “soft” power dichotomy first alluded to by Joseph Nye, to frame an understanding of current South African international relations against a conceptual backdrop largely influenced by liberal institutionalism – as well as certain constructivist propositions, to a lesser extent. The paper considers three distinct periods in the evolution of the country’s foreign policy thinking, before discussing the most significant aspects of the current international peace and security order from the perspective of a system facing fundamental ontological change, and one which subsequently necessitates new approaches and strategies by international stakeholders. Finally, the paper puts forward an argument that privileges the idea of a renewal of aspirational South African leadership in the region. This is specifically premised on a central commitment to conflict management and the subsequent maintenance of peace and security through better application of the country’s “smart power” reserves, as well as in terms of the demands and opportunities associated with an international system in flux.

1. Introduction

Since 1994, South African foreign policy has evolved in a manner consistent with both its function as an extension of the country’s domestic agenda as well as in terms of the external expectations placed upon it, with respect to the considerable normative and moral capital accumulated as a result of its political transition towards democracy. Post-apartheid South Africa thereby stepped back into the international order as an actor whose credibility and influence was largely directed through the duality of its arguably illegitimate hard-power inheritance (relative to the economic and military standing of its regional neighbours) insofar as it was by its newfound moral capital – and the symbolic potential the latter carried in legitimising the ideological bedrock of the nascent post-Cold War international system.

The grand narrative or representation of South Africa on the international stage was one that naturally tended to favour the perception of what would later be referred to as a regional “anchor” state.¹ On all conventional indicators of power, South Africa – as a result of its historical development² – stood head and shoulders above those within its immediate neighbourhood. Barring the internal contradictions of its relative development (specifically concerning the gross inequalities across its domestic population), the country was further conferred an unofficial recognition as the de facto regional leader, based on its early explicit commitments towards espousing the central values of the prevailing international climate in terms of human rights, democracy, and a largely liberal approach to political and economic development and culture, among others. These commitments – spurred into action by the country’s first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, who further bolstered the moral capital of the “new” South Africa – in many ways validated the international political-economic zeitgeist, which underscored the merits of liberal democratic and economic values as a panacea to the scourge of violent conflict.

With a few missteps and teething problems along the way, South Africa largely made good on these various commitments in the immediate post-apartheid era, in spite of its considerable domestic agenda. Its foreign policy thinking, in terms of the duality noted above, matured as it entered into the new millennium – to the extent that domestic expectations largely came to mirror the external expectations which informed the transition period. With particular regard to matters concerning peace and security, a number of seminal official government policy papers (known as white papers) were developed during this period. These fed practically into a second, arguably “golden era” of South African foreign policy – underwritten by a more pronounced, coordinated and aspirational claim to regional leadership.

In hindsight, this golden era³ was largely premised on the idea that the country’s national interests were, in effect, intricately interwoven with the development, security and stability of its immediate regional neighbourhood, as well as that of the continent and the Global South further afield. While remaining cognisant of an underlying regional exceptionalism – again dually informed by its soft-power reserves and hard-power inheritance –

this period gave rise to then-president Thabo Mbeki's initial outline of an African Renaissance and the consequent African Agenda (as a cornerstone of South African foreign policy) that would serve this grand project. This rhetoric found practical application through assertive South African leadership within regional and continental policy-making bodies, by playing central roles in terms of the development of ground-breaking new regional institutions, through active lobbying and norm entrepreneurship⁴ across various multilateral fora, and in terms of a number of focused – and longer-term – peace and security interventions in a number of conflict-prone states in the region.

Conceptually directed by this sense of global mission, these various efforts could now, collectively, be understood by the idea of a country in search of global affirmation as a *de facto* regional anchor state, underwritten by its wilful provision of regional public goods and services. In its combined efforts to achieve this, South Africa subsequently adopted a new self-ascribed status as the “gateway to Africa” (or rather, the “spokesperson for Africa”) – essentially denoting the fact that it now fully subscribed to the notion that its exceptionalism warranted some new form of triangular international engagement with the continent; one in which South Africa could not be ignored or sidelined as an unofficial and impartial manager of regional affairs.

The country's South-South cooperation agenda was largely reinforced by this self-appointed status, in spite of the problematic nature of the label – raised more or less unofficially by a number of African states. Regardless, bold South African foreign policy posturing throughout this period, and within various multilateral fora key to the development and refinement of a Global South agenda, led to the country assuming an even greater position of relative soft power within the international system. Consequently, further unofficial international titles and acknowledgements were conferred on the country – all of which, in some way, underscored the promise and potential of South Africa as an increasingly capable and assertive regional anchor state in the responsible maintenance of the global order. Now, in addition to its self-appointed status as

the gateway to and spokesperson for Africa, the country was externally endowed with the title of, among others, an “emerging power”;⁵ as well as being a “rising democracy”.⁶

The central challenge standing in the way of sustaining this position, however, has in more recent years become increasingly stark in light of the extent to which this position was constructed on certain assumptions tied to the power duality previously mentioned. With respect to South Africa’s hard-power inheritance, it was assumed – on the basis of the prevailing economic logic and the policy commitments it spurred into effect – that even in spite of the considerable domestic challenges it faced, growth and development would progress at a pace largely in line with what was required to maintain an increasingly aspirational (and expansive) international agenda.⁷ Moreover, it was assumed that the country’s increasing regional and international role (with particular regard to peace diplomacy, trade and investment) would result in a self-reinforcing loop of tangible economic benefits, thereby providing for a sustained and growing regional and international role. Similarly, in terms of South Africa’s soft-power reserves – built off the moral capital accumulated as a result of its liberation struggle and peaceful transition to democracy – there was an underlying assumption that over time this would grow and become that much more pronounced, based on the nature of the country’s international commitments, priorities and engagements. Specifically, the assumption here was that given the clear conceptual basis and direction provided for by the prescripts of its constitution as well as other official government white papers, among other things, South Africa’s actions and behaviour on the international stage (and the consequent profile dependent upon this) would likely reinforce its capacity to influence and affect global developments, based on the strength of its existing moral capital.

The latter consideration is especially critical given the fact that much of South Africa’s foreign policy, premised on its perceived leadership role and arguable exceptionalism, had been largely influenced and constructed specifically on the mortar of this moral capital – with conventional understandings and indicators of hard power arguably playing only a

secondary function in solidifying this status. The erosion of this fundamental pillar of the country's capability to project influence and power throughout the international system would therefore appear that much more problematic than fluctuations across conventional indicators of its relative hard power in the region. This conundrum has clearly surfaced in the latest period of South African foreign policy. Against a backdrop of sluggish economic performance and growing threats to the institutional base established in its formative transition years, a series of missteps – in which the country has taken a decided turn towards pragmatism – has eroded its commitment to the normative bedrock upon which it has staked its identity and interests. This has subsequently raised considerable concern surrounding its future prospects as a reliable regional anchor state. Such concerns have further raised the question of whether South Africa has unduly overextended itself in terms of its foreign agenda, and whether a decisive refinement of its priorities are needed to stem its waning international stock as an emerging power and the gateway to Africa.

Adding to the complexity of these current challenges is the fact that the nature of the external international environment – which privileged the dominant ideas contained within the anchor state, emerging power and rising democracy paradigms – is witnessing a period of profound ontological change. As notions of sovereignty appear increasingly archaic in a system now saturated by evermore influential non-state actors and new technologies that pay scant regard to their transnational properties and implications, the manner in which competing national interests are pursued (while maintaining the image of a positive-sum game) have become exponentially more complicated endeavours, requiring greater levels of administrative and technical coordination, responsiveness and public interface.

To arrest this situation and reaffirm its place as a reliable, committed and capable regional anchor state, this paper argues that South African policymakers ought to reconsolidate and refine the country's bloated foreign policy agenda, specifically on the basis of a clearly defined hierarchy of priorities. To this effect, this paper further argues that regional conflict management (broadly defined, and inclusive of conflict prevention and resolution),

and the subsequent management of regional peace and security, should logically sit at the top of this hierarchy of priorities. The underlying rationale for this argument, premised on certain central tenets of liberal institutionalism, is elaborated on in the latter sections of the paper, while further underscoring the idea that the better application of South African “smart power” could effectively raise the profile of the country as a reliable, committed and capable regional anchor state – even in spite of various domestic challenges and contradictions with respect to its hard-power profile. Based on this, the paper concludes by asserting that South Africa’s potential future role as a regional anchor state need not necessarily be understood as a direct function of conventional indicators and conceptions of hard power. Especially against the backdrop of an international system in flux, should a refined foreign policy agenda be pursued that once again recognises and invests in the centrality of the country’s moral capital as a fundamental pillar of its capability to project power and influence – and one that is logically premised on the relative utility of playing a leading conflict management role – then South Africa may well decisively reassert itself as a credible regional anchor state.

2. Theoretical framework: liberal institutionalism, soft power and the limits of the anchor state paradigm

The conceptual framework employed throughout this paper draws heavily on existing work that has been developed across the liberal research programme in international relations. Specifically, the central tenets of liberal institutionalism, dating back to some of the original ideas of Robert Keohane, are critically important in making sense of South Africa’s foreign policy trajectory since 1994. The conceptual framework put forward here is also influenced by the hard-power and soft-power dichotomy first alluded to by Joseph Nye. In addition – and remaining cognisant of some of the incompatibilities between the two – this framework is further tempered by some of the more recent developments within the application of constructivist thought to international politics, most notably the work of Alexander Wendt.

As a starting point, it is important to note again the arguably fortuitous time in global affairs in which South Africa re-emerged onto the international stage as a democratic state. Against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War and the various associated developments that came in its immediate aftermath, it is no stretch of the imagination to assume that this was indeed a moment ripe for change and fresh thinking on how international actors ought to conduct their affairs in a dramatically different international system. This emergent global order – at least in the dominant thinking across the West – was one that tended to agree with, and increasingly invest in, the underlying logic of the liberal research programme in international relations, and specifically the central tenets of what is now referred to as liberal institutionalism.

2.1 Liberal institutionalism

As a structural theory of international relations, akin to the realist school of thought that came before it, the liberal research programme accepted certain key assumptions (later criticised by constructivists) concerning state actors and the system in which they operated – often within a principal-agent analytical framework. While an in-depth appraisal of the theory is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that this liberal approach to understanding international affairs similarly rested on an acceptance of anarchy (the idea that there is indeed no authority greater than the sovereignty of individual state actors), as well as the primacy of rational, self-interested or self-serving state behaviour, given the “self-help” system as a consequence of anarchy. Largely as a response to the dominance of realist thinking, however, liberal institutionalism stressed the significance of institutions as critical international instruments that could be used effectively to constrain, guide and positively influence the behaviour of state actors – such that greater cooperation could be achieved on the basis of positive-sum game-making.⁸ The underlying logic here, as posited by Keohane and various other key proponents, was that institutions led to a reduction of transaction costs, made commitments more credible, changed the incentives for states to cheat or renege on existing obligations, provided focal points for more effective cooperation, linked various – otherwise

disparate or competing – foreign policy issues together, and generally facilitated the operation of reciprocity.⁹ Even more significantly, however, proponents of liberal institutionalism argued that with respect to security issues, institutions were important in that they provided greater (and more readily available and credible) information or intelligence to state actors, while further laying the basis for their conduct to be instructed by various norms and rules – and thereby ultimately leading to greater system stability and predictability.¹⁰ Therefore, in this sense, institutions were regarded as both independent and dependent variables with respect to state actors and the international system in which they conducted their affairs. In other words, institutions could develop as a result of state agency, and dually – in turn – potentially direct and influence future state behaviour and agency, and the consequent nature of the broader system that would otherwise be thought of as the sole dictator of this behaviour.

The contribution of liberal institutionalism is especially important in making sense of South Africa's early claims to continental leadership, particularly during the country's foreign policy golden years when it embarked on a grand strategy that was essentially underpinned by its creation of new (and maintenance of existing) continental institutions. The evolution of the country's role conception as a regional leader and anchor state was, therefore, in many ways, grounded on an underlying commitment to the logic of liberal institutionalism, and can consequently best be understood and explained within the conceptual framework provided for by its proponents.

2.2 Soft power

The second strand of thought to inform the conceptual framework of this paper, still generally within the liberal international relations research programme, is the contribution first made by Joseph Nye with respect to the idea of soft power and its application by state actors in the international system. In a 1990 *Foreign Policy* essay, Nye argued that traditional understandings of state power (primarily based on military force and the relative size of a nation's population, territory and economy, among other factors)

were becoming increasingly irrelevant in explaining the capabilities of certain states to direct, control and influence the behaviour and actions of other such actors.¹¹ Using this standard baseline of power as a starting point, he further posited that certain observable trends suggested that another, more attractive, means of exercising state power could be distinguished:

A state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other states want to follow it or have agreed to a situation that produces such effects. In this sense it is just as important to set the agenda and structure the situations in world politics as to get others to change in particular cases. This second aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants – might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power or ordering others to do what it wants.¹²

Nye expanded on this idea by noting that political leaders have long understood the power of attractive ideas, and the need to set political agendas and frameworks of debate in such a way as to shape the preferences of others. In this sense, soft power found a direct link to the significant (albeit often intangible nature of) state power that could be derived – and, in turn, projected, either wilfully or not – through resources such as culture, ideology and institutions. Nye went further than simply making this distinction, as he went on to argue that there was indeed some sense of equivalency between conventional or traditional conceptions of state power (based on the ability to dictate or command the behaviour and actions of others) and this new, more attractive notion of power that rested on a state's ability to co-opt the actions and behaviour of others (based on the attractiveness of its ideas, culture and institutions). To this effect, he noted:

If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power.¹³

In other words, the exercise of soft power adds a third (and novel) dimension to a state's foreign policy toolbox – beyond those that fall into the carrot-and-stick typology. The application of this distinction is particularly important in understanding the rationale of South Africa's foreign policy through each of the three identified eras discussed later in this paper. The areas of greatest utility here, however, refer to the ways in which the country, since 1994, has constantly attempted to leverage its soft power in such a way as to maximise its relative international position among other regional and global anchor states, which may possess far greater hard-power profiles. By actively positioning itself as a country whose dominant domestic values and ideals are closely mirrored by global norms, and by using the weight of the moral capital it accumulated through its liberation struggle as a starting point, South Africa has generally sought to influence the global agenda (and pursue its national interests) without the need to resort to costly coercive measures.

The ability of the country to better identify, invest in and deploy its soft-power reserves moving forward will be a critical factor in determining whether it maintains its relatively influential international position, in spite of various challenges that could well erode its hard-power profile while it grapples with its pressing domestic agenda. Perhaps more importantly, the safeguarding of its existing soft-power base, through a more refined and coordinated foreign policy agenda that recognises the value of this, would further be a critical factor in maintaining this relatively influential international position. Nye's hard-power and soft-power dichotomy is therefore a critical cornerstone of this paper's conceptual framework, insofar as it can be used to determine the nature of South Africa's soft power and how this may be better utilised to pursue its interests as a capable and effective regional anchor state, with respect to maintaining regional peace and security.

2.3 Understanding the anchor state

In addition to the conceptual basis provided by liberal institutionalism and the hard-power and soft-power dichotomy, this paper draws on the

somewhat loosely defined idea of the regional anchor state. In opposition to the conception surrounding a regional hegemon, for example, the use of the term “anchor state” appears far more appropriate for an analytical discussion of South Africa’s power-projection capabilities – and willingness to project its power – across the region. As will be later elaborated, post-1994 South Africa does not fit neatly into the conception of a hegemon (in spite of the best efforts of certain scholars) for a number of reasons concerning, among other things, political willingness to employ coercive (carrot-and-stick) foreign policy measures, the coordination of its various commercial and political interests, and historical sensitivities surrounding the regional legacy of the apartheid state.¹⁴ This has led to the country being described as a “reluctant regional hegemon”, denoting the fact that in terms of its hard-power and soft-power profiles, South Africa generally fits the mould of a regional hegemon, barring its somewhat ambiguous foreign and domestic policies that tend to either avoid or completely circumvent such a label being ascribed to the country.

In any case, the idea of an anchor state – while, in many respects, qualitatively similar to that of a regional hegemon – appears to be a far more appropriate conceptual term to understand the country, given the greater weight that this attaches to the importance of the external (international and institutional) environment in which a state conducts its affairs. To this effect, external perceptions of power, responsibility, capability and commitment become that much more important in understanding the role and behaviour of certain states, especially within their respective regional neighbourhoods. Thus, whereas the idea of a regional hegemon seems biased in favour of traditional or conventional understandings of state power, the more recent usage of the term “anchor state”, although loosely defined, appears to underscore more contemporary conceptions of power, specifically contextualised with respect to the operation of this power within a broader international institutional system.¹⁵

More specifically, the term often ascribes commitment to, and support of, regional states that are viewed by other dominant global powers as the most preferable countries to serve in the effective maintenance and upkeep

of the existing global institutional order.¹⁶ Given the prevailing international system since the late 1980s, such nations are often expected to embody the dominant ideals and values of the liberal, institutional and rules-based global order – and thus to serve as a potential vanguard for its greater development. In this way, the attribution of the term is most often externally ascribed, and is premised on an implicit principal-agent power dynamic between dominant (global) hegemons and what they often describe as (their favoured) emerging powers. Thus, an undercurrent of status-quoism cuts across this narrative, wherein revisionist powers – those who staunchly seek to challenge the existing rules of the game that underpin the international system – are often sidelined in terms of the recognition of their emergent hard-power and soft-power profiles in favour of states that are more likely to develop and expand these international profiles, in accordance with the established rules of the game. External expectations, therefore, play a fundamental role in the ascription of anchor state status – akin to associated terms such as “rising democracies” or “emerging powers”, as will be later discussed. A 2009 Council on Foreign Relations article, focusing on anchor states in Africa, underscores some of these issues, when it argues that:

South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya are considered sub-Saharan Africa’s anchor states. Each country is the financial and infrastructure hub of its subregion, and each has played a robust role in regional peace and security. The United States has supported these states with the expectation that each would foster stability among its neighbours. Yet with all three embroiled in pressing domestic issues, questions about the utility of this strategy abound. Some experts say the anchor states will continue to play an active role in pan-African issues. Others see a worrying leadership vacuum.¹⁷

As can be evidenced from this statement, discussions on regional anchor states generally refer to an implicit connection between a larger international power or hegemon (in this case, the United States) and the capability and commitment of less powerful nations, although relatively influential within their own respective regions, essentially to serve as regional managers in the upkeep of the international order established and primarily maintained

(or anchored) by the larger power. In sum, international support and recognition is directly associated with meeting external expectations – such that causality flows from the latter to the former.

Ascribing this status to South Africa, therefore, largely denotes the broader external expectation that it will effectively serve as the most committed and capable stakeholder in the upkeep and management of the existing international system within the southern African region – and, arguably, the continent. Consequently, it may then be assumed that the country's own soft-power profile (as a result of this implicit recognition) would become further enhanced and refined over time, should it effectively embrace this role in terms of policy and the concomitant actions that result from this across the region. Referring back to the excerpt from the Council on Foreign Relations article, it is important to note that the expectations alluded to were directly attributed to the ability of South Africa to remain as the uncontested financial and infrastructure hub for the southern African subregion, as well as in terms of its commitment and capability to play a robust peace and security role. This latter consideration is especially important given the central argument of this paper: that the country's continued legitimacy and credibility as a regional anchor state, in the face of considerable domestic challenges that could erode its hard-power profile, may well be reaffirmed by a renewed strategic commitment to the maintenance of regional peace and security.

2.4 A constructivist proviso

While the theoretical influences that inform the framework of this paper are largely captured in the three general areas discussed above, a final rider – provided by more recent work in the application of constructivism to international relations – is a critically important consideration in light of the various structural assumptions upon which liberal institutionalist theory is premised. Again, an in-depth appraisal of the theory is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worthwhile to remain cognisant of certain core constructivist propositions in understanding the nature and direction of South African foreign policy – in spite of this paper's primary reliance on the conceptual lens provided by the liberal international relations research

programme. Moreover, given certain observable trends with respect to global political developments over the last few years, a reading into constructivist literature may provide great utility in determining the limits of state power, institutional influence and non-state actor agency in a system undergoing profound ontological change.

To this effect, the most important issue to account for refers to the critique (and subsequent disregard) by constructivists of the immutable and irreducible nature of the structure of the international system. Whereas the liberal research programme axiomatically progresses from the perspective that the international system is anarchic by nature, and that states thus operate in a competitive, self-interested and self-help system, constructivist thinkers point to various theoretical shortcomings and inconsistencies within structural approaches to international relations – insofar as it is argued that this structure is, in fact, constructed by various factors relating to the processes and practices that states (and other international actors) engage in with one another.¹⁸ This, in turn, informs the way in which the limits of power and influence across institutions, states and non-state actors are conceived. Thus, where liberal institutionalists may prioritise questions concerning the way in which institutions may transform state interests (and influence the behaviour of international actors), constructivists, on the other hand, go further in questioning how certain practices and processes actually constitute these various subjects, given the equal ontological status that they attach to the principals and agents that structural theorists would otherwise reify in opposition to the other.¹⁹

The primary contribution of such a proviso to this paper, therefore, lies in the acknowledgement that causality does not necessarily flow only in one direction, between the state and the external institutional system in which it operates. While it may be assumed that South Africa's attempts to create regional institutions, among other things – in accordance with a foreign policy that sought to expand and capitalise on its hard-power and soft-power profiles – was a product of planned and coordinated state action, it should be recognised that such institutions (through process and practice) also influenced, and left an indelible mark on, how it went about conducting this policy over time.

3. Historical overview and analysis

While the relatively recent foreign policy history of post-apartheid South Africa could, in many ways, be understood as a single continuous timeline of events – based, in no small part, on the evolution of the country’s claim to regional and continental leadership – there are certain periods in this history that stand distinctively on their own merits. Therefore, it is instructive to define and discuss these particular periods in relative isolation, before weaving together a more general narrative surrounding the nature and direction of the country’s evolving international relations. Accordingly, this section intends to identify and define three of these particular time periods, to highlight and discuss the evolution of the country’s foreign policy vis-à-vis its claims to regional and continental leadership on the back of its relative hard-power and soft-power profiles throughout the region. In so doing, this section aims to underscore the ways in which such claims resonated with the country’s commitment to the maintenance of regional peace, security and stability, with particular regard to its envisaged conflict resolution role across the continent. Conversely, this section aims dually to understand how these hard-power and soft-power profiles, in turn, influenced the country’s claims to leadership, and whether such claims were (and still are) credible, rational and ultimately sustainable.

3.1 Re-emergence and practical idealism: the Mandela years (1994–1999)

As previously alluded to, South Africa’s re-emergence on the global stage as a democratic state coincided with a period of profound international change. Coupled with its own lessons and the culture inculcated as a result of its drawn-out liberation struggle, this early formative experience subsequently imbued the transition period with the dominant international values and prevailing economic and political ideology of the time. South Africa (in many ways not dissimilar to the examples that were made of the former Soviet Republics) was used as an unofficial poster-child for the success of liberal-democratic values as a central pillar of the emergent post-Cold War international system.

The country's international re-emergence in many ways (intentional or not) thus symbolised and validated the triumph of the prevailing international political-economic zeitgeist. In addition, the profile of South Africa's first democratically elected leader, Nelson Mandela, bolstered the rising stock of the country as a committed, capable and, arguably, exceptional new international actor. This relatively enviable standing on the global stage could not have stood in starker contrast to the morally repugnant pariah that was the apartheid state just a few years prior. As a result, the contours of the country's soft-power profile, and its attendant international standing, had already been somewhat predetermined on the basis in which its peaceful transition to democracy resonated with the ideals and values of this emergent international environment.

From the outset, the symbolic persuasiveness, ideological attractiveness and moral authority attached to the idea of the new South Africa placed the country squarely in the international spotlight and underscored an additional dimension of its then-deep reservoir of soft power from which it could easily draw upon: its potential. A seminal essay by Nelson Mandela, published by the Council on Foreign Relations just a few months before his monumental election to lead the country, clearly indicated the priorities, direction and commitments of South Africa's future foreign policy. To this effect, Mandela outlined and discussed six core pillars upon which the country's future foreign policy would rest:²⁰

1. that human rights issues are central to international relations, as they extend across political, economic, social and environmental concerns;
2. that only the promotion of democracy across the world could ensure just and sustainable solutions to the problems faced by all its peoples;
3. that considerations surrounding justice and respect for the rule of law should guide the relations between nations;
4. that peace is the goal for which all nations should strive, and that internationally agreed to and non-violent mechanisms should be employed where necessary;

5. that the concerns and interests of Africa should be reflected in South Africa's foreign policy; and
6. that economic development depends on growing regional and international cooperation.

Beyond this, Mandela placed particular emphasis on the fact that the country, based on its own historical experiences and struggles, would not allow itself to be indifferent to the rights and plight of other nations and their peoples, by asserting that “[human] rights will be the light that guides [the future South Africa’s] foreign affairs”.²¹ Moreover, he astutely pointed attention to the critical importance and significance of the southern African region as commanding top priority for South Africa’s future foreign policy, in acknowledgement of the apartheid state’s historically destabilising regional mission, the interconnectedness (and imbalanced nature) of the regional political economy, and the need to rebuild and solidify trust and mutually beneficial relations moving forward.²² To this effect, Mandela specially argued that the new South Africa would resist any pressure to pursue its own interests at the expense of the subregion as a whole, and that in terms of peace and security, militaristic approaches would give way to the creation of regional structures and institutions for crisis prevention and management.²³ He concluded the paper by boldly proclaiming that the time had now arrived for the country to assume its “...rightful and responsible place in the community of nations...”, by highlighting his belief that South Africa possessed not only the resources but also the concomitant commitment to make its own positive contribution to “...peace, prosperity and goodwill in the world in the very near future”.²⁴

The potential of the new South Africa, as a committed stakeholder in the upkeep and maintenance of the prevailing international order – with particular regard to its stated peace, security and developmental role vis-à-vis the southern African subregion – had therefore been made explicitly clear to other international actors. In retrospect, it is all the more clear that Mandela perceptively tapped into the essence of the immediate post-Cold War, liberal, institutional and rules-based international system,

and accordingly marketed the symbolic and normative utility of the country that he would soon come to lead as a key stakeholder in maintaining this system. Such an early expression of commitment, capability and potential clearly bolstered the moral, ideological and normative attractiveness of the country as it shed the shackles of apartheid and re-emerged on the global stage as a legitimate international actor with a deep, newfound reservoir of considerable soft power.

As the new government undertook a widespread process of transforming the old structures and organs of state power, its institutional foreign policy architecture was similarly restructured and expanded upon – in many ways reflective of the growing discrepancy between its hard-power and soft-power profiles. Indeed, as noted by Garth Le Pere: “...[B]y the end of 1994, there were 136 countries with representation in South Africa... [and the country]... joined or was readmitted to 16 multilateral organisations, concluded 86 bilateral agreements and acceded to 21 multilateral treaties.”²⁵ This almost meteoric international re-emergence, coupled with the prolific reputation of Mandela, subsequently gave way to a period of early norm entrepreneurship, in which the country effectively leveraged its soft power to play a leading role in establishing and maintaining a new and reinvigorated normative bedrock for the emergent global system. This status was primarily based on the country’s principled leadership approach towards, among other things, its efforts aimed at reforming continental institutions and its promotion of democracy, as well as peace and security, in conflict-affected states.²⁶ More significantly, in terms of its hard-power and soft-power profiles, this early, expansive investment in strengthening its institutional diplomatic infrastructure coincided with a period of considerable military downsizing and demobilisation (largely reflective of, and in line with, certain international trends following the end of the Cold War). However, such endeavours were much more acute in South Africa, in light of the government’s broader transformation agenda that oversaw sweeping reforms of the country’s security sector, among other things.

The boldness of this approach did not come without its fair share of growing pains. As the then-youngest African nation, and in spite of its

comparative hard-power and soft-power international standing, the idealism of the Mandela administration drew considerable ire from certain African leaders – insofar as claims began to surface, from naiveté to accusations of the country having a Western, imperialist agenda to the abuse of its dominant position in the region.²⁷ The 1995 Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) rebuke of President Mandela's denouncement of his Nigerian counterpart, Sani Abacha, following Nigeria's execution of writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, is an early – often referenced – example of such claims.²⁸ South Africa subsequently backtracked on its call for sanctions against Nigeria, arguably gaining a greater and more nuanced understanding of its role and the sensitivities surrounding it in the region.

Three years later, however, the country once again found itself in a precarious situation, with respect to the political developments in its landlocked neighbour, Lesotho. Following allegations of fraud stemming from its May 1998 parliamentary elections, widespread rioting broke out across Lesotho, leading Mandela to announce the establishment of a formal commission of enquiry (composed of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe) to determine the nature and truth behind the allegations.²⁹ The subsequent findings of the commission, however, did little to quell the country's ongoing instability. By September 1998, a Southern African Development Community (SADC) military intervention – led overwhelmingly by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in conjunction with troops from Botswana – had been deployed, with a mandate to “...to prevent any further anarchy and to create a stable environment for the restoration of law and order”.³⁰

While the intervention, known as Operation Boleas, was officially a SADC-mandated mission, serious concerns quickly arose that pointed to the operation's legality and, ultimately, its legitimacy and credibility, given the dominant, primary role that South Africa had played. In many ways, Operation Boleas marked a significant milestone in the national consciousness of post-apartheid South Africa, as it was the first-ever incident in which the country militarily intervened (through the deployment of its troops) in a foreign country. Accordingly, the lessons learnt through this

formative experience underscored the general direction and foreign policy priorities of the Mandela administration, with particular regard to the evolution of the country's thinking on matters concerning the maintenance of regional peace and security. This evolution was largely premised on the idea of better institutionalising its regional peace and security responses (to ensure greater regional and international legitimacy and credibility), in line with its newfound constitutional-democratic culture and prerogatives. To this effect, and from a policy perspective, three key documents emerged during the Mandela administration which established the necessary framework for South Africa to conduct its peace and security affairs in the region better, and which subsequently came to decisively inform its understanding of its role as a de facto regional anchor state. As will be seen, the evolution of the country's thinking on what are now referred to as "peace missions" largely came to signify the sharp end of its soft-power-based approach towards the maintaining of regional peace and security. In conjunction with its efforts to build, reform and anchor regional peace and security institutions, these can thus be understood as the two primary pillars of this overarching regional strategy; the elements of which may be found in official government policy papers as far back as 1996.

3.1.1 The 1996 White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa

The first notable government policy paper that spoke directly – albeit, not at great length – to the external role of South Africa vis-à-vis the maintenance of regional peace and security was compiled in 1996 and followed a relatively comprehensive drafting process. The 1996 White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa³¹ (hereafter referred to as the 1996 White Paper) outlined and detailed a number of fundamental principles, policy positions and orientations in light of the country's envisaged future role in the southern African region, as well as further abroad. The development of the paper was led by then-Minister of Defence, Joe Modise. Through different draft iterations, it included inputs from political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs), the country's defence sector, the then-Joint Standing Committee on Defence and the Portfolio Committee on Defence, prior to being submitted and approved by Cabinet.

Through its different chapters, the 1996 White Paper discussed a wide range of pertinent considerations relevant to the effective defence of the country. Among other things, these included civil-military relations, human resource issues, land and environmental issues, arms control and the defence industry, as well as budgetary considerations. However, the paper also critically spoke about the challenge of transformation vis-à-vis national security and defence, as well as the strategic environment in which South Africa had found itself within a global, regional and domestic context. It went on to detail the role and functions of the country's defence forces, with considerable attention paid specifically to the country's engagement with international peace support operations (PSOs) within this context. For the purposes of this study, however, three key insights may be gleaned from a reading of the 1996 White Paper: issues surrounding transformation, the recognition and underlying understanding of the country's strategic environment, and the manner in which the (hierarchical) roles and responsibilities of the defence forces were oriented to match and address these two prior concerns.

With regard to the issue of transformation, a critical factor that had characterised the shape and nature of South Africa's reoriented defence and national security policies and practices during this period was the considerable challenge (and subsequent arguable success) of integrating former statutory and non-statutory forces into the SANDF. As one of the most stark commitments towards national reconciliation and unity post-1994, the Mandela administration took considerable effort in establishing a more representative SANDF, which entailed bringing together and integrating forces that were enemies in arms not too long before. Indicative of the country's broader transformational political processes, the defence forces similarly underwent considerable structural, bureaucratic, operational and policy-level changes. Thus, in spite of the relative size and development of the SANDF during the mid-1990s, the top-down calls for structural change that ran through all arms of the body necessitated a period of considerable reorganisation and reorientation. Moreover, and in

line with broader global trends, this was a period of significant downsizing and demobilisation, following the end of hostilities associated with the Cold War and the country's peculiar external strategic environment.

Underpinning this transformative period was the explicit recognition, as contained in the 1996 White Paper, that "...after two and a half decades of isolation, South Africa has been welcomed back into the international community... [and that]... the country's foreign relations have been transformed from an adversarial mode to bilateral and multilateral cooperation".³² In a similar vein, the 1996 White Paper posited that "...[while] the potential for instability and conflict remains, the salient fact is that the government is no longer unrepresentative and at war with its own people and neighbouring states in Southern Africa".³³ It therefore becomes clear that a definitive about-turn was needed with respect to the country's armed forces, to align the roles and responsibilities of the SANDF to the policies, aspirations and character of the new South Africa. To this effect, the new approach to security – as argued for throughout the 1996 White Paper – stressed the need for the SANDF to assume a more defensive orientation and posture, whilst underscoring in equal measure the fact that its primary function should be understood strictly to be in the defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.³⁴ Moreover, there was the distinct acknowledgement that the country faced no immediate conventional military threat, and did not foresee any external military aggression in the short to medium term.³⁵

Based on this understanding of its strategic environment, as well as what was required in terms of effective transformation, the 1996 White Paper put forward a number of recommendations vis-à-vis the roles and responsibilities of the SANDF. These included the need to rationalise, redesign and rightsize the SANDF – which was still, for the most part, designed to fulfil the defence and security requirements of a now-outdated external strategic (and domestic) environment associated with the pre-1994 apartheid state. This early policy document already hinted at what may now be understood as a definitive hesitancy (on the part of senior political actors)

to utilise the armed forces for anything beyond sovereign and territorial defence, given the particular strategic environment and transitory period of military rationalisation and redesign that was required to meet the demands and context of post-1994 South Africa. More broadly, the paper further showed official overarching preferences towards conflict prevention, and common security arrangements (especially at the regional SADC level), as well as confidence-building measures and other non-violent modes of engagement.

At this point, it is important to note that in 1996, South Africa officially understood and approached issues surrounding international peace operations or missions primarily through the prism of the SANDF and the associated political and institutional chains of command, control and accountability that governed this organ of state. With specific regard to the vocabulary and jargon contained in the paper to convey this message, the term “peace support operations” featured almost exclusively, and was further contextualised with respect to the country’s re-emergence as a legitimate international actor, and its concomitant responsibilities to participate in the upkeep and maintenance of the international system. To this effect, the 1996 White Paper clearly denoted two types of PSOs in which the SANDF may become involved:³⁶

- peacekeeping, which entailed military operations undertaken without resort to force and with the consent of the major parties to a dispute, to monitor and facilitate the implementation of a peace agreement; and
- peace enforcement, which entailed the application or threat of force, pursuant to international authorisation, to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order.

In light of this, the paper asserted that “...in the short-term, such participation will be regarded with a fair measure of caution since the political and military dynamics of these operations are new to South Africa and the Defence Force... [and that]... the integration of the former

statutory and non-statutory forces is still underway”.³⁷ This degree of caution was further elaborated on in the paper by underscoring the need for new or revised operational doctrines and operational procedures, as well as the equally pressing task of facilitating greater public awareness and parliamentary debate on the complexities surrounding such involvement in PSOs. Furthermore, and as an important rider to balance the largely military undertones of the paper’s position towards PSOs, it was added that the country’s participation and contribution towards such operations would extend to the provision of equipment, logistical support, engineering services, communication systems, and medical personnel and facilities.³⁸

Given this cautionary approach, and the appraisal that PSOs were considered primarily within the ambit of the SANDF’s secondary roles and functions, the 1996 White Paper consequently listed a number of conditions that ought to be met, should the country seek to become involved in specific PSOs. Among other things, these conditions included the need for parliamentary approval and the exercise of its oversight; the need for clear mandates, objectives and exit strategies prior to parliamentary approval; and the need for international authorisation, ultimately based on the primacy of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC). The paper thus provided a solid footing on which the new South Africa could begin to conceptualise, develop and refine its engagement and approach towards international peace operations, premised primarily on considerations surrounding:

- the country’s immediate external environment following years of isolation as an aggressive and militaristic pariah state, the effects of which were particularly acute at a regional level;
- the transitory period required to rationalise, redesign and rightsize the SANDF vis-à-vis the need for transformation, and the need to respond appropriately to the maintenance of regional peace and security;
- the general aversion to employ the armed forces for anything beyond their primary role as a safeguard of the country’s sovereignty and

territorial integrity, and the consequent preference for non-violent conflict resolution practices;

- the importance of first seeking authorisation and sanction by concerned international, continental and regional peace and security actors, prior to any direct involvement or participation in international PSOs; and
- the country's involvement in international PSOs, which should primarily be understood, at an operational level, within the secondary roles and functions of the SANDF.

3.1.2 The 1998 Defence Review

While the 1996 White Paper concerned itself primarily at the level of broad policy by seeking to establish a policy framework and the main principles for the defence of South Africa's democracy, it also expressly called for a defence review to elaborate on the framework. While the country's approach to regional and international peace missions was not the main focus of the 1998 Defence Review, it provided critical insights and clues into the country's policy orientations surrounding this issue, and the consequent evolution of its broader soft-power profile vis-à-vis maintaining regional peace and security. The review sought to expand on the policy considerations of the 1996 White Paper through "...comprehensive long-range planning on such matters as posture, doctrine, force design, force levels, logistic support, armaments, equipment, human resources and funding".³⁹ Specifically, this was undertaken through the consideration of a wide range of issues dealing with, among other things, the presentation of options regarding the size, roles and structure of the SANDF; issues concerning doctrine and posture of the "core force approach"; and the strategic and technical implications of the constitutional provision that the SANDF should be primarily defensive in the exercising of its functions.

A number of other notable issues formed the core focus of the 1998 Defence Review, but these considerations fall beyond the scope of this paper. However, in a dedicated chapter the review did elaborate on certain policy issues – stemming from the 1996 White Paper – concerning South

Africa's approach towards international PSOs vis-à-vis its armed forces. This chapter drew upon the content of the 1996 White Paper, while further elaborating on issues concerning the types of PSOs, authority and decision-making, departmental and operational considerations, and training and force design. Arguably, the most important contribution here was the now official – albeit still rough – classification schema used to distinguish the different types of PSOs, and the subsequent nature and level of engagement required by the country to play an effective role in the maintenance of regional and international peace and security. Expanding on the 1996 White Paper's allusions to peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the 1998 Defence Review put forward (and detailed) three more types of interventions within the general rubric of PSOs:⁴⁰

- Preventive diplomacy: This involves diplomatic action taken in advance of a predicted crisis to prevent or limit violence. In particularly tense situations, preventive deployment of military forces may support such action. The deployment may be aimed at deterring violence, assisting local authorities to protect threatened minorities, securing and maintaining essential services, and ensuring access to an area of operation.
- Peacemaking: This is a process consisting of diplomacy, mediation, negotiation or other forms of peaceful settlement of conflict that seeks to end disputes and resolve the issues which give rise to conflict. Military forces may be required to support this process.
- Humanitarian or relief activities: These activities may constitute a discreet operation or be part of the operations described above. Such activities, in which military support may be required, include the provision of humanitarian aid, disaster relief, healthcare, and assistance to refugees and displaced persons.

The 1998 Defence Review provided one of the first official appraisals of the post-1994 South African government on the numerous dimensions (and phases) associated with PSOs, spanning the time-versus-intensity conflict spectrum. Beyond this, the review echoed the general propositions

of the 1996 White Paper, with particular regard to the importance of authority and sanction – stemming first from the UNSC, and subsequently through the respective continental and regional structures which should, in some way, support and endorse the mandate of South Africa’s involvement in international PSOs.

Importantly, within the authority and decision-making subsection of the chapter on international PSOs, the 1998 Defence Review clearly denoted the manner in which such requests and mandates were to be administered internally by the country, pointing to the centrality of the then-Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) – now known as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). Specifically, the review pointed to the fact that all requests for the country’s participation in international peace operations would be routed through the DFA, which would, in turn, work with the Department of Defence (DoD) (among other relevant government departments and agencies) to determine the nature and level of involvement that South Africa could potentially provide, whilst further determining the scope of the mission and its objectives.⁴¹ Following these efforts, Cabinet – ultimately responsible for all final decisions – would then be briefed on the nature, scope and parameters of the potential mission. The authorisation of the president concerning the deployment of any SANDF personnel would then be required (in line with the Constitution), with Parliament ultimately playing a supervisory role in reviewing the president’s decisions.⁴²

The 1998 Defence Review also explicitly acknowledged the importance of training, noting: “ [Peace support operations]... are fundamentally different from ‘traditional’ approaches to fighting wars... [with the]... differences manifest in the mission, objectives and doctrine of these operations, and in the role and tasks of the forces involved therein.”⁴³ Accordingly, particular emphasis was placed on the need for thorough training prior to any SANDF deployment, especially on issues concerning the rules of engagement, as well as the typical operational-level tasks that may be expected during such participation. These include ceasefire monitoring and maintenance, checkpoint operations, medical assistance to the civilian population, crowd control at food distribution points, and the apprehension of criminals.

It was also deemed essential that SANDF troops who participate in such operations be thoroughly briefed in the various relevant aspects of international humanitarian law, to ensure the country's compliance to international legal and humanitarian obligations and commitments.

The 1998 Defence Review provided several important contributions to South Africa's official understanding of – and approach to – international peace operations, building on the 1996 White Paper. It did this most notably in terms of the broadened typology that could be drawn upon to categorise different forms of engagement and participation, as well as the particular manner in which requests for such engagement would be administered internally by the state apparatus. Moreover, the review pointed attention to the importance of issues surrounding the training of SANDF deployments in responding to such requests, whilst echoing the 1996 White Paper's emphasis that at an operational level, such requests should be understood through the prism of the SANDF's secondary roles and functions.

3.1.3 The 1999 White Paper on South Africa's Participation in International Peace Missions

Almost directly following the release of the 1998 Defence Review, the White Paper on South Africa's Participation in International Peace Missions (hereafter referred to as the 1999 White Paper), approved by Cabinet on 21 October 1998, was tabled in Parliament on 24 February 1999. Since its release more than a decade-and-a-half ago, this white paper arguably remains the most salient official document dealing specifically with South Africa's approach to and understanding of international peace operations. Whereas the preceding documents thus far discussed alluded to the country's role and understanding of international peace operations, these were framed largely within broader policy prescriptions relating to democracy and defence writ large. The 1999 White Paper is thus especially significant given the document's central focus, aim and scope, which sought to "...describe the nature of contemporary peace missions and to provide clear and concise inter-departmental policy guidelines on South African participation in such missions".⁴⁴

What was especially elucidating, across the paper's various chapters, was the greater discussion surrounding South Africa's philosophy concerning international peace missions. More generally, however, the 1999 White Paper – importantly, and for the first time in an official policy paper – broadened the country's existing understanding of peace operations beyond the role of the SANDF, by including in its prescriptions a civilian as well as police dimension. In addition, the 1999 White Paper made a significant contribution to South Africa's understanding of and approach to international peace operations by arguing that despite the complex admixture of humanitarian, military and security-related factors, such operations are fundamentally political initiatives, and should be primarily understood as such by all concerned stakeholders and actors. To this effect, the 1999 White Paper explicitly underscored the necessity of basing all future participation in international peace missions on the extent to which such involvement advanced the country's national interests, with particular regard to six key principles:

1. South Africa's commitment to the promotion of human rights;
2. a commitment to the promotion of democracy;
3. a commitment to the promotion of justice and international law in the conduct of relations between nations;
4. a commitment to the promotion of international peace and agreed-to mechanisms for conflict resolution;
5. a commitment to the interests of Africa in world affairs; and
6. a commitment to economic development through regional and international cooperation.⁴⁵

This broadened political focus necessitated a greater elaboration on the operational roles, responsibilities and functions of organs of state, ministries and departments, far beyond previous allusions to the centrality of the DoD and DFA. Underpinning the relationship between national interest and South Africa's participation in international peace operations was an appraisal of the how the country's approach to conflict resolution, in general, was informed by its own recent history – and the subsequent reputation it

had built around this approach within the international system. Specifically, it was posited that this interest and experience “...in the peaceful resolution of seemingly intractable conflicts compels... [the country]... to participate in peaceful missions to alleviate the plight of other peoples who are struggling to resolve similar conflicts”.⁴⁶

While this arguable historical imperative was drawn upon as the overriding consideration in framing the country’s national interest to participate in international peace operations, the 1999 White Paper also touched upon a number of other associated dimensions of such engagement that would advance the interests of the country. Issues such as the greater professionalisation of deployed personnel, the further development and refinement of its approaches towards international peace operations through experience, and the benefits associated with greater international collaboration and cooperation in matters of mutual interest, were referred to in this regard. Most importantly, however, the 1999 White Paper noted that “[participation in international peace operations]... is increasingly [understood as] a prerequisite for international respectability and for an authoritative voice in the debate on the future of international conflict management and the reform of intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, the OAU and the SADC”.⁴⁷

In line with its general theme of expanding South Africa’s official understanding and approach to international peace missions as primarily political endeavours, the paper provided a more detailed and inclusive frame of reference to distinguish between the various types of interventions that could officially constitute an overarching peace mission. To this effect, the paper underscored the need for clarification and consistency on issues surrounding the terminology and definitions relating to international peace operations. This was provided for in light of the rapid evolution of UN peace operations from “...classical peacekeeping (involving military interposition to monitor interstate ceasefire agreements) to complex multidimensional interventions where the military component is but one of many participants within an involved peace process”.⁴⁸ Accordingly, the paper argued that if the country was to play any significant role in supporting and contributing

to international peace operations, then issues surrounding such vocabulary and working definitions would become increasingly important, insofar that meaningful and effective policies could be developed and implemented in a clear and coherent manner. Thus, akin to the 1998 Defence Review, the 1999 White Paper explicitly provided various categorisations and working definitions that were intended to clearly describe the toolbox at the disposal of the country in its international efforts to support peace – including peace missions, PSOs, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping operations, peace enforcement and peacebuilding, among others.⁴⁹

This set of working definitions have largely remained in place in official documents up until the present day, and have served to broaden the conceptual scope in understanding the country's involvement in such missions as exercises that are primarily political in nature. Terms and concepts crucial towards defining specific policy positions and stances within international structures and multilateral fora (such as peacemaking and peacebuilding) thus came to be officially recognised as equal components – to be considered and invested in – should the country seek to play a meaningful role in maintaining regional, continental and international peace and security. Based on these working definitions, the paper went further in detailing the key elements of what the country's "philosophy" with respect to international peace missions ought to be, at both a policy and operational level. These key elements were largely reflective of South Africa's broader foreign policy aspirations, and were thus based on a number of considerations relating to its envisaged role as a responsible member of the international community, with specific reference to its good standing in the UN, OAU and SADC. There was also a clear emphasis placed on addressing the causes of armed crises and instability that allow conflict to persist, and that South Africa should therefore view its involvement in peace missions as longer-term endeavours, inclusive of pre-conflict and post-conflict interventions that incorporate preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding in equal measure.⁵⁰

Lastly, the 1999 White Paper focused on the particular principles that should be accounted for in any instance wherein South Africa would participate in an international peace mission. This section of the paper

essentially echoed prior official policy documents, inclusive of the 1996 White Paper and 1998 Defence Review, although there was a significant degree of elaboration on each of the specific principles. Importantly, issues surrounding national interest (with respect to the six considerations discussed previously) were given priority as the central basis for participation. However, additional emphasis was placed on the need for clear regional and international mandates to allow for more effective interventions, as well as considerations surrounding capacity and resources, domestic mandate and budget, regional cooperation and foreign assistance.⁵¹

3.1.4 Towards a self-assured regional anchor state

As can be seen above, significant early progress in terms of South Africa's foreign policy were registered during the Mandela era. The country's re-emergence onto the international stage as a legitimate, democratic nation fortuitously coincided with a period of significant international change that in many respects, bolstered and rewarded the relative soft-power profile of the country, whilst attaching considerable value to the nation as a potential regional leader. This formative experience, as the country grappled with the intricacies of regional and continental politics, often translated into the development of new policy frameworks that were imbued with a sense of the practical idealism often associated with the politics and ideology of the Mandela administration. In this sense, the white papers considered above denote not only the early impetus of the country's leadership to establish an international security policy framework that was congruent with the constitutional character of the new South Africa, but dually pointed to the country's underlying aspiration for recognition as a responsible regional leader, whose foreign affairs were informed, guided and bound by a robust institutional system and policy framework.

Thus, from 1994 to the dawn of the new millennium, it can be argued that South Africa's soft-power profile had, in many ways, driven the country's international agenda – wherein its implicit, underlying regional and continental leadership aspirations were effectively endorsed and supported by an international system that rewarded normative (policy-level) congruence. The early express commitments of the Mandela administration

in respecting, upholding and maintaining a foreign policy driven by human rights – and, by extension, various other central pillars of the liberal institutional and rules-based global order – further bolstered the potential of South Africa as a responsible regional leader. Throughout this period, the country's efforts in undertaking deep and meaningful reforms – and engaging in various internal policy processes and reviews to give effect to these various commitments – all worked towards solidifying the soft-power reserves of the state, with respect to the international attractiveness of South Africa's social, political and economic ideas, policies, commitments and obligations. Moreover, the development of the country's policy framework, which specifically spoke to its role in terms of regional conflict management and the maintenance of peace and security, provided a solid footing for the further refinement of its own role conception as a regional leader in sub-Saharan Africa.

By the end of 1999, South Africa had formally been drawn into complex regional matters concerning peace and security in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), primarily on the back of the early initiative displayed by Mandela to serve as a facilitator and key interlocutor in both cases. These interventions marked the beginning of South Africa's broader, longer-term activities in both countries, in which it subsequently played a key leadership role in terms of various bilateral and multilateral peace missions. Again, while it is important to note that the country's hard-power profile, in relation to other regional actors, naturally credited its claims to regional leadership (with respect to economic size, military expenditure, etc.), South Africa's assertive regional peace and security interventions during this period could still be seen as primarily informed by its soft-power profile.

Table 1: Selected Indicators of South African Influence (1993–1999)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Gross domestic product (GDP) growth (annual %)	1.23	3.20	3.10	4.30	2.60	0.50	2.40
Foreign direct investment (FDI), net inflows (% of GDP)	0.01	0.27	0.80	0.55	2.50	0.40	1.10
Military expenditure (% of central government expenditure)	7.56	7.60	6.30	5.54	5.12	4.50	4.53
Military expenditure (% of GDP)	2.42	2.49	2.12	1.76	1.58	1.38	1.27

Source: World Bank Databank (see Appendix 1).

As can be seen in the table above, the country's economic growth during this period was generally unremarkable, whilst its military expenditure (as a percentage of GDP) steadily declined, in line with its own internal security sector reforms and in terms of broader international trends relating to the downsizing, demobilisation and rationalisation of military forces throughout the 1990s. While these may be regarded as somewhat simplistic, descriptive proxy indicators to gauge the country's hard-power profile, they do underscore the fact that South Africa's early regional leadership posturing vis-à-vis peace and security was conducted against the backdrop of a struggling economy, significant internal institutional reforms and declining military expenditure (as a percentage of GDP as well as government expenditure). Thus, it could be argued that the country's early progress in terms of its bold and assertive international re-emergence, and its efforts aimed at garnering recognition as a regional leader, all occurred against the backdrop of a hard-power profile that was, in fact, largely at odds with such an aspirational foreign policy. In other words, the early progress and remarkable international strides made by South Africa during the Mandela administration could be seen as a direct function of the country's soft-power profile.

3.2 Towards an African Renaissance: the Mbeki years (1999–2008)

While the contours of South Africa's regional and international role and profile were established during the Mandela administration, the full potential of the country to serve as a responsible, committed and capable regional leader were, in many ways, affirmed (both internally and externally) under the administration of former president Thabo Mbeki. Throughout his tenure, South Africa went further in explicitly staking its claim to the title of regional leader – based in no small part to the popularisation of the grand, strategic vision of an African Renaissance and the role and responsibilities of South Africa, through its foreign policy, in supporting and further refining the achievement of a more stable, secure and prosperous continent. Consequently, the African Agenda as a cornerstone of South African international relations emerged as a critical conceptual and strategic policy domain during this period, and went on to inform the now-central idea that the development and security of South Africa was intricately interwoven with that of the broader continent. This was a period in which regional and continental interests (with particular regard to peace, security and economic development) were conceptually enmeshed with South African national interests – and which, consequently, laid a more robust basis for an even bolder foreign policy of active internationalism.

Importantly, it was during this period that the notion of South Africa as the gateway to and spokesperson for Africa entered into the official and unofficial lexicon surrounding the country's foreign affairs. Indeed, the externally conferred title of South Africa as a regional anchor state became further popularised by various international actors during this time, while concerns surrounding the potential abuse of its regional hegemony (and the implications of this) captured the imaginations of numerous South African and continental scholars and intellectuals. Throughout the Mbeki administration, the country fully assumed the mantle of regional leadership, and sought international recognition of its regional role, stature and influence, with an increasingly ambitious foreign policy, underwritten in large part by its deep reserves of soft power. By projecting itself as a natural regional leader, committed to the maintenance of regional stability writ

large and informed by its newfound liberal, democratic and institutional culture (which still resonated well with the prevailing ideological bedrock of the international system), the country positioned itself to generate further significant soft-power gains throughout this period.

As will be argued below, one of the country's primary strategies that had been used throughout the Mbeki administration, dually to utilise and further enhance its soft-power-based approach towards regional leadership, was its provision of regional public goods. Specifically, the development, refinement and support provided by South Africa vis-à-vis regional and continental institutions, mechanisms and policy frameworks – geared towards fostering closer (and more predictable) relations, and in support of greater peace, security and stability – was a central feature throughout this period. South Africa's soft-power projection thus became, in large part, the defining feature of the country's international relations during the Mbeki administration.

3.2.1 A ripe moment for a renewed African institutionalism

While the history and philosophy surrounding the idea of an African Renaissance fall beyond the scope of this paper and far predate Mbeki's first use of the term (the first articulations of the idea are often accredited to key figures who spearheaded the development of pan-Africanist thought), a general understanding of the term, with respect to its specific usage by Mbeki, is necessary to better make sense of the overarching rationale that informed South African foreign policy throughout this period. One of the most concise appraisals of this is provided by Rok Ajulu, who argued that the effective starting point of South African discourse concerning Mbeki's idea of an African Renaissance dated back to his 1996 speech in Parliament, titled "I am an African". Ajulu's assessment was that while Mbeki's calls for African renewal were not the first, what was particularly novel was the specific context in which this call was made with respect to "...the end of the cold war, the emergence of the 'market' as the central organising principle of global economy, the accelerated globalisation of world economy and, finally, the worsening position of the African continent at the marginal pole of the world economy".⁵²

By building off two broad interpretations of South African discourse surrounding the African Renaissance, posited by Peter Vale and Siphon Maseko – which pointed to a competing “Africanist” interpretation (based on the idea of a reassertion of Africanness through the construction of a new African history, identity and culture) and a “globalist” interpretation (which focused on Africa’s regeneration within the context of a globalising world economy) – Ajulu argued that “...it may be more appropriate to regard [Mbeki’s] African renaissance as a contested policy terrain alongside the ideological contestation witnessed in Africa’s quest for an economic alternative”.⁵³ By tracing the evolution of Mbeki’s own public deliberations and pronouncements on this idea, Ajulu argued that Mbeki’s idea of an African Renaissance had been predicated on two interlinked and underlying lines of reasoning. The first related to the fact that economic development (in the context of rapid globalisation and Africa’s marginal place in the international economic system) should be based on fostering the productive forces of capitalism.⁵⁴ Linked to this was the idea that political stability is directly linked to functioning and vibrant democracies, insofar as this draws legitimacy and authority from popular will.⁵⁵ Following this – and again based on his review of Mbeki’s own public deliberations and pronouncements concerning what would constitute such a renaissance – Ajulu came to the conclusion that the overall idea seemed to rest on three key pillars:⁵⁶

1. the need for all Africans to mobilise and assume control of their own common destiny, and thereby serve as a bulwark against kleptocratic regimes on the continent;
2. the urgent need to further establish a continent-wide democratic culture that respected human rights and, above all, good governance; and
3. the need to establish and pursue a programme of economic regeneration that could effectively address the pitfalls associated with Africa’s relatively marginal place in the international economic order.

Taken together, Mbeki’s notion of an African Renaissance was one that was deeply rooted – and dependent – on the external international context

in which this clarion call had been made. At its core, the idea of a new African Renaissance was a rallying cry that sought to provide the basis – and loose policy parameters – with which regional and continental stakeholders could mobilise, develop consensus around common interests and chart a way forward towards a new political, economic and security order. The underlying motivation behind this, as alluded to above, was primarily a response to significant international trends and developments since the early 1990s, with particular regard to the ever-increasing pace of globalisation and the implications of this vis-à-vis the erosion of sovereignty (which disproportionately affected smaller, weaker states), as well as the subjugation of labour by the market at a global level and the subsequent marginalisation of Africa (given the continent's relative position in the international system).

What was perhaps lost in the rhetoric and idealism that this new vision came packaged in, however, was the potential role that had been envisaged by South Africa for South Africa – as a leading nation that would shoulder the responsibility of driving forwards this new era of African renewal. In hindsight, it could be argued that as the discourse on African Renaissance matured and began decisively to inform and guide South African foreign policy, the country crossed over into a new era of regional and continental relations entirely, as the self-appointed leader and spokesperson for the continent. The evolution of this role conception was consequently concretised at a policy level within the rubric of the country's African Agenda. What was initially a term used to denote the broad prioritisation of the continent in terms of South African foreign policy – based on the understanding that its own developmental and peace and security interests were intricately interwoven with that of the continent – the African Agenda came to encompass a more focused policy agenda during this period; one which ultimately played a central role in the projection of South African soft power in its pursuit of regional leadership.

Building on the notion that there could be no socio-economic development without peace and no peace without development, the country's African Agenda incorporated various policy-oriented initiatives

and action-oriented interventions (as constituent elements of its foreign policy) that sought to address through a multipronged approach what it deemed to be the most pressing continental issues. These included:⁵⁷

1. the need to strengthen and support continental institutions – with particular regard to the newly constituted African Union (AU) and its associated organs, structures and normative frameworks;
2. contributing towards the achievement of a common SADC agenda, while strengthening its governance and decision-making capacities;
3. contributing to post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) across the continent; and
4. contributing towards continental peace, security and stability by playing a greater role in multilateral peace missions and stabilisation efforts, while strengthening bilateral relations and supporting the establishment of continental response mechanisms.

Thus, a gradual but decisive push for a new continental institutionalism emerged on the back of the early conceptual framework provided for by Mbeki's African Renaissance, and the subsequent policy framework encapsulated within the country's African Agenda. The evolution of South Africa's role conception as a regional leader (with respect to its own appraisal of its soft-power and hard-power profiles in the early 2000s) further informed its international relations throughout the Mbeki administration. Accordingly, this prioritised the establishment and development of a greater continental institutional system, geared towards responding to the most pressing challenges in terms of the peace–security–development nexus. The effective renewal of Africa was therefore conceptualised in such a way that other (external) international actors would specifically have to recognise the central role and agency of South Africa whenever engaging with the continent on matters concerning peace, security and development. Consequently, the early, underlying basis for the general claim of South Africa as the gateway to, or spokesperson for, the continent was established (for better or worse) during this period. This further bolstered the

country's soft-power profile, thus providing an even greater international position of power and leverage with which it could pursue its interests and global agenda.

As alluded to earlier, the chief strategy that had been employed throughout this period, to give effect to the role conception developed by South Africa – as a regional leader vis-à-vis the African Agenda – rested squarely on its provision of regional public goods. Specifically, these referred to the country's extensive contributions in the conceptualisation, lobbying, establishment, refinement and harmonisation of regional institutions and institutional frameworks, with a particular emphasis on the normative elements of these. To this effect, South Africa played a central role in the establishment of the African Union, with Mbeki subsequently assuming the role of the organisation's first chairperson in 2002. This event, in and of itself, was a particularly remarkable moment in the collective political trajectory of the continent, insofar as the organisation's Constitutive Act mandated the establishment of various constituent institutional structures and organs to respond better to the peace, security and development of its member states. These included the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the Executive Council, specialised technical committees, the Pan-African Parliament and the Commission, among various others.

Moreover, the AU's Constitutive Act made a decisive break with the past by making provision for intervention in any member state "...pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity".⁵⁸ This effected a paradigmatic shift from the non-interference of its predecessor (the OAU) to a more secure future based on the principle of non-indifference. Indeed, in the years that have followed, this particular stipulation has underpinned the ongoing development of a continental peace and security architecture, as well as areas of international law, with respect to the growing understanding that, as argued by Solomon Dersso, "...state sovereignty [now] finds its limits in the protection of human security."⁵⁹ While the previously absolute – and arguably sacrosanct – nature of member state

sovereignty became subject to a common, normative peace and security agenda, the Constitutive Act expanded on the idea that human security was, in many ways, directly tied to broader concerns surrounding democracy, human rights and good governance.⁶⁰

Thus, South Africa played a central, leading role in the development and refinement of the AU's institutional architecture, as well as in terms of a more refined, overarching, normative framework for the continent. Indeed, the country's "gradualist" approach in seeking to persuade other African states to conduct their affairs on the basis of common norms and principles, while supporting key continental institutional organs that promoted representativity and accountability, provided considerable dividends throughout the Mbeki administration.⁶¹ Through its provision and support of these regional public goods, South Africa managed effectively to lay the groundwork for a proactive and constructive foreign policy that adequately leveraged – and further enhanced – its own soft-power profile throughout the continent, as well as further afield.

The even greater emphasis placed by the country on supporting the development of institutional frameworks and mechanisms specifically geared towards continental conflict prevention, management and resolution went further in solidifying international recognition of South Africa as a committed and responsible regional leader vis-à-vis the maintenance of peace, security and stability, in line with prevailing global expectations. Indeed, the central role played by the country in the conceptualisation and establishment of what is now referred to as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – which essentially denotes the institutionalised responses and processes of relevant AU peace and security structures in tandem with those of the continent's regional economic communities and mechanisms – cannot be disregarded, given the ongoing evolution of this critical endeavour to achieve effective operational coherence, coordination and responsiveness towards addressing the scourge of violent conflict throughout Africa.⁶² To this effect, the now well-established idea of an African Standby Force (ASF) – as a central component of the APSA and

which is based on, and leverages the capabilities of, various regional standby brigades – is one that is often attributed to South Africa's early instrumental efforts across the AU system to ensure member state support and buy-in.⁶³

More than this, however, South Africa affirmed its commitment to its African Agenda by establishing bilateral diplomatic representation in the vast majority of all AU member states,⁶⁴ directing the bulk of its foreign diplomatic expenditure to the continent⁶⁵ whilst becoming one of the largest contributors to the budget of the AU and its associated organs and agencies.⁶⁶ The early 2000s also saw the promulgation of the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF) Act in Parliament, which laid the basis for the establishment of a proactive funding mechanism to enhance South African international cooperation with other African states on matters concerning, democracy, good governance, conflict prevention and resolution, and humanitarian assistance, among others.⁶⁷ The ARF was particularly significant insofar as it was the first time that the concept of African Renaissance had been woven into domestic legislation. It also introduced a novel approach to channelling donor (third party) funds to recipient projects or programmes.

Beyond the immediate institutional frameworks and processes surrounding the AU, however, South Africa (and Mbeki, in particular) played a leading role in articulating the development of a new continental socio-economic development blueprint, in the form of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Stemming from a 2001 merger of the earlier work conducted on African economic regeneration by Mbeki, in conjunction with former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo and Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, with respect to the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA Plan for Africa (led by former Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade), NEPAD subsequently became a programme adopted by the AU, and received considerable early international support.

Premised on four central goals – the eradication of poverty, the promotion of sustainable growth and development, greater African

integration with the global economy, and the greater empowerment of women – NEPAD placed a premium on redressing the continent’s marginal place in the international system.⁶⁸ What is especially important here, however, is the almost exclusive responsibility assumed by South Africa in promoting NEPAD among other international actors and intergovernmental organisations,⁶⁹ and the consequent (further) development of the country’s role conception as a critical interlocutor – or conduit – that could not be bypassed by international stakeholders interested in engaging with the continent as a whole. Indeed, the establishment of the NEPAD secretariat (along with the Pan-African Parliament) in South Africa further reinforced (for better or worse) the growing perception of South Africa’s centrality vis-à-vis the institutional and normative frameworks and structures of Africa, writ large.

Similarly, during this period, South Africa – primarily through the direct initiative of Mbeki – played a further leading role in the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which was established in 2003 by a high-level NEPAD committee as a voluntary instrument to facilitate the review and appraisal of governance-related performance across AU member states. Mandated to promote the adoption of policies and practices in line with the AU’s normative frameworks and member state obligations, the APRM was primarily geared towards enhancing good governance, and a culture of self-based and peer-based appraisal among AU member states.⁷⁰ Specifically, performance and progress was measured across four distinct thematic areas: democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development.⁷¹ While it operated as an independent body (constituted under a memorandum of understanding among AU member states) throughout the Mbeki administration, in more recent years the APRM has become more formally integrated into the institutional structure of the AU system, although this process is still ongoing. Irrespective, the APRM has featured prominently as an innovative instrument that has underscored the continent’s commitment to good governance, whilst further reinforcing the role conception of South Africa as a committed, capable and responsible regional leader.

3.2.2 Putting policy into practice

While South Africa's foreign policy emphasis on the construction and refinement of a regional institutional architecture progressed throughout this period, the country dually prioritised its leadership role conception in terms of engaging in direct – and oftentimes bilateral – peace and security-based interventions across the continent. Guided by the policy frameworks developed during the Mandela years (with particular regard to the white papers previously discussed), South Africa significantly increased its on-the-ground engagements with conflict-affected states in the early and mid-2000s – in spite of the fact that no single country posed any direct or conventional threat to its own peace, security and stability. To this effect, Chris Landsberg posited that “it is probable that no other country... [in Africa]... has made the huge political and financial and military resource investments in peace and security as South Africa”.⁷² He further asserted that “the Mbeki government did not hesitate to spend economic largesse and engage in expansive peacekeeping operations so as to win confidence in, and support for, the African agenda”.⁷³ Throughout this period, the country's commitment to the maintenance of regional security considerably validated its own conceptual basis for policy to regard the interests of the region as being intimately interwoven with the South African national interest, as well as concretising external perceptions of its role as a committed and responsible regional leader.

The most telling indicator of this, in contrast to previous years, was the country's decisive shift in priority from playing an almost exclusive peacemaking role to one that fully encompassed the broader notion of peace missions – inclusive of regional peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peace diplomacy elements, among others. While South Africa played various bilateral and multilateral roles to this effect in the early and mid-2000s, in countries such as Ethiopia/Eritrea, the Comoros, Liberia, Sudan (Darfur), Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire, among others, the country's most comprehensive engagements were often focused on its commitment towards peace and security in Burundi and the DRC.

South Africa was formally drawn into the Burundi peace process in 1999 when former president Mandela was appointed as the facilitator of the Arusha Peace Process, following the death of former Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere. Mandela's initial mediation as part of this process marked the beginning of South Africa's greater role in Burundi in supporting the achievement and advancement of peace in the country. This may be delineated according to the initial political intervention by Mandela as well as a subsequent security intervention, which together may be understood as the longer-term peace mission. The resultant Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which came into effect on 28 August 2000 following Mandela's mediation efforts, was signed without the endorsement of Burundi's main rebel movements, and thus had the effect of deleteriously affecting the maintenance of a ceasefire.⁷⁴ In addition, the agreement proposed that a transitional government be established, but this was boycotted by some of the rebel groups, and conflict continued.

Consequently, given the prevailing Burundian political and security environment, South Africa's security intervention was spurred into motion by Mandela's request for additional support from the Mbeki-led South African government for SANDF troops to be deployed to Burundi to support the peace process, by protecting returning politicians – a request that was acceded to in October 2001. This deployment of 754 SANDF personnel, known as the South African Protection Support Detachment (SAPSD), was specifically mandated to provide support for the implementation of the Arusha Agreement, as well as to protect Burundian politicians returning to the country from exile, and served as an early pioneering experience for South Africa in international peace operations.⁷⁵

As the Arusha Agreement also made provision for security assurances, in the form of international troop deployments, South Africa – given its prior commitments in the country – found itself in a key central position to devise a strategy in support the nascent peace process. The strategic and operational foundations of this process were informed by a range of engagements with the AU, as well as a number of regional actors. The country's initial SANDF deployment in 2001 to protect returning political leaders therefore served

as a forerunner to a broader, longer-term peace mission in the country that would, in time, lay the basis for a number of subsequent multilateral peace operations under the auspices of the AU, as well as the UN.⁷⁶ Specifically, what followed was a one-year AU deployed peace operation in Burundi from April 2003, known as the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB), in which South Africa served as one of the major troop-contributing countries. This transitioned into the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) – and, as this mission drew to a close, the mission’s South African contingent remained active in Burundi in the form of an AU Special Task Force (AUSTF) from December 2006, alongside a reconfigured UN peace mission known as *Bureau Intègre des Nations Unies au Burundi* (United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi) (BINUB).

Throughout all these different iterations, South Africa played a central role in terms of both broader strategic matters and on-the-ground operational and administrative issues. The country’s engagement in addressing the Burundian conflict has also been regarded as particularly significant in the period just prior to the SAPSD deployment, given the fact that there had been little international political will (specifically at the level of the UN) to deploy any military force to protect returning politicians, as stipulated in the terms of the Arusha Agreement, in the absence of a clearly defined ceasefire agreement.⁷⁷ The early initiative and role played by South Africa has thus come to be regarded as a critical factor that had sustained Burundi’s peace process during this period, and ultimately enabled the country to advance towards greater security and stability in the years that followed. Moreover, given the relatively narrow mandate of the SAPSD, South Africa again played a decisive role in shoring up international support (and donor contributions) for the establishment of the regional peace support force that eventually took the form of AMIB – and which was the AU’s first officially mandated regional peacekeeping mission.⁷⁸

As part of AMIB, South Africa played a key role in assisting the AU with planning, whilst SANDF personnel formed the majority of headquarters staff.⁷⁹ While supported with additional troops – most notably from Ethiopia and Mozambique – as well as technical support from its international

development partners, South Africa was regarded as the primary actor that most substantially footed the cost of the AU mission – which, at its peak, consisted of approximately 3 500 troops who were mandated to carry out extensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) work across Burundi.⁸⁰ Once a ceasefire agreement was arrived at, however, the mission was subsequently “re-hatted” under the auspices of the UN. This paved the way for a better resourced and longer-term engagement – one in which South Africa similarly played a key role as the largest troop-contributing country.

Upon the withdrawal of ONUB, however, Burundi’s security situation remained precarious, as certain insurgent groups continued to disrupt the peace process. South African troops were thus requested to remain in the country, leading to another rehatting exercise of SANDF troops – from ONUB to the AUSTF. This mandate subsequently expired in June 2009, with several hundred SANDF troops returning to South Africa in December of that year, having directly supported the DDR of over 21 000 combatants. This effectively signalled the end of over eight years of direct South African engagement in Burundi.⁸¹

South Africa’s rationale and early initiative to play a lead role in the Burundian crisis had been argued as largely informed by humanitarian, moral and material considerations. Specifically, Burundi presented an early test for the country in displaying its willingness to advance peace and security throughout the continent by drawing on its own long-standing conflict resolution experiences, whilst further signalling its commitment towards advancing a continental developmental-security agenda in line with its reasoning that security and stability were fundamental prerequisites for development to take place. Accordingly, South Africa’s interventions in Burundi, throughout this period, were closely linked and contextualised within the framework provided for by NEPAD. Such humanitarian, moral and material considerations become especially pronounced given that South Africa’s participation in international peace missions was not seen as a primary function of the SANDF – as alluded to in the aforementioned white

papers – given its own pressing domestic agenda in terms of transformation, restructuring and broader development priorities, as well as the fact that Burundi presented no significant security and strategic threat to the country.

This overarching foreign policy rationale was further exemplified in South Africa's direct peace and security interventions in the DRC. As in the case of Burundi, South Africa's initial conflict resolution efforts in the DRC followed Mandela's initiative to support the country through a period of political transition, marked by considerable insecurity and instability. These early engagements were informed by the broader political and security dynamics of the Great Lakes Region, and the precarious conflict environment that arose during mid-1990s as a result of various factors surrounding the lack of regional cohesion and integration, weak institutions, competition over resources and Western disengagement with the region, among other things.⁸² Within this environment, South Africa, in line with its emergent thinking that linked its own security and development to that of the continent, sought to cushion the fallout that followed the beleaguered Mobutu regime, in recognition of the central importance of the DRC vis-à-vis peace and security across the greater region. The prevailing conflict environment in the DRC during this period was compounded by instability to the east of the country, resulting in substantial refugee inflows and heightened unrest along its eastern borders. South Africa therefore attempted to placate the situation by admitting the DRC into SADC, thereby providing greater control and influence over the peace and security trajectory of the country.⁸³

While this move led to a considerable degree of polarisation across SADC member states, it nonetheless indicated the willingness of South Africa to readily intervene and play a decisive regional leadership role. A series of diplomatic initiatives were subsequently established, leading to the Lusaka peace talks and the establishment of a roadmap towards peace. The implementation of the Lusaka Agreement, however, was heavily dependent on the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to oversee its different components. Again, South Africa moved quickly (in August 2000)

to play a central role by announcing its commitment to contribute troops, as well as additional operational and logistical support, to the mission. As argued by Gilbert Khadiagala:

The signing of the Lusaka agreement propelled SA to the position of a lead nation in the DRC in line with Mbeki's emerging doctrine of a proactive and assertive African policy underwritten by the determination to reverse the spectre of civil wars. This leadership entailed three critical components: taking unilateral initiatives, acting within the SADC framework, and serving as Africa's lead interlocutor with the outside world on issues of security and economic development. These three roles shaped South Africa's multifaceted engagement in mediation and peacekeeping in the DRC.⁸⁴

Parallel to this, South Africa addressed the growing polarisation in SADC by working towards building consensus on a common approach to the conflict in the DRC. The country's subsequent peacemaking efforts with respect to the Inter-Congolese Dialogues, which took place at Sun City in 2002, led to the Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the DRC (unofficially referred to as the Pretoria Agreement). This agreement – essentially a power-sharing, transitional political arrangement – led to South Africa assuming a key role in terms of the International Follow Up Committee that was established to monitor the transition period in the DRC (whilst continuing the task of steering the disputing parties towards a transitional government). Prior to this, however, South Africa's efforts to mobilise international support paid considerable dividends following the passing of UNSC Resolution 1279, which authorised the *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo* (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (MONUC) to monitor the peace process and the subsequent conflicts that ensued in the Ituri, Kivu and Dongo regions. This was accompanied by a firm SADC communiqué for the expeditious deployment of the mission.⁸⁵

Throughout the early to mid-2000s, South Africa therefore played a considerable, multifaceted leadership role in seeking to address the Congolese

conflict. It focused on diplomatic, military and mediation initiatives that, among other things, sought the admittance of the DRC into SADC; facilitated an initial ceasefire and roadmap towards peace; attempted to establish a common regional response to the conflict; oversaw and facilitated the Inter-Congolese Dialogue process; drummed up international support for the authorisation of MONUC; steered the disputing parties towards a transitional government; attempted to build trust among other regional actors involved in the conflict; committed approximately 1 400 SANDF personnel by the time of the 2006 DRC election; and contributed extensive logistical and technical support to the 2006 DRC election process (inclusive of a bilateral observer mission of over 100 technical personnel).⁸⁶

Thus, by 2007 – the year in which the mandate of MONUC was extended – South Africa’s varied, parallel and complementary interventions were seen as broadly reflective of its envisaged leadership role in the Great Lakes Region, whilst indicative of its commitment to the advancement of peace and security across the continent, in line with its prioritisation of the African Agenda. These interventions underscored the country’s growing awareness, willingness, capacity and understanding of its envisaged peace and security role across the region, in line with its thinking around the interlinkages between its own peace, security and development vis-à-vis that of the continent. Since 2007, South Africa has played an ongoing role in the DRC, with particular regard to the operational contributions of the SANDF as part of the *Mission de l’Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo* (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (MONUSCO). However, this role has not been as extensive as that played in the years surrounding the country’s 2006 election processes.⁸⁷

The cases of Burundi and the DRC serve as considerable expressions of South African policy throughout this period, with respect to the previously discussed white papers as well as the country’s broader role conception vis-à-vis the African Agenda. First, in both cases, it is clear that the country did not shy away from playing a decisive leadership role, and initiated key diplomatic processes and preventive diplomacy engagements. Second, South

African peace and security interventions in both countries were informed by – and sought domestic and international approval for – a growing awareness that linked its own peace, security and development with that of the continent. This was especially clear given the fact that neither case presented any direct threat to its own national security. Rather, they called into question South Africa's commitment to the management of regional and continental peace and security, on the basis of its envisaged, aspirational role conception as a committed and capable regional leader.

Moreover, both cases affirmed South Africa's foreign policy priorities with respect to its support of an emergent AU peace and security architecture, that would (in time) grow to be more responsive and effective in assuming greater responsibility over the continent's security concerns. Another key issue highlighted by both interventions was the priority given by South Africa in seeking out and securing clear regional and international mandates in its response to both crises, first exhausting all diplomatic peacemaking options before considering the deployment of SANDF troops as part of the various multilateral peace efforts that had been authorised. Lastly, both cases highlighted the country's broadened understanding of the elements that constitute effective peace missions in matters concerning multidimensionality.

3.2.3 An uncontested regional leader: South African power convergence

Towards the end of the Mbeki administration, and guided by its overarching commitment to the African Agenda, South Africa had arrived at an advantageous relative position within the international system. The country's efforts – geared towards the achievement of greater regional peace, stability and development through its provision of regional public goods in the form of a new African institutionalism, as well as its direct peace and security interventions across the region – appeared to have paid considerable dividends. Key international actors, as well as various African states, increasingly came to regard South Africa as a central, if not primary, actor that could not be ignored with respect to regional and continental affairs.

Indeed, the idea of South Africa as the gateway to, or spokesperson for, the continent was an almost ubiquitous catch phrase to capture the essence of the country’s aspirational international relations by 2008. Accordingly, it was around this time that the externally conferred anchor-state status began to be attached to South Africa. In many ways, this validated the country’s own role conception as a committed and capable regional leader, while further reconciling this with the long-standing external expectations of the country to live up to its potential and fulfil this role.

Table 2: Selected Indicators of South African Influence (2000–2008)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
GDP growth (annual %)	4.20	2.70	3.70	2.95	4.55	5.28	5.59	5.36	3.19
FDI, net inflows (% of GDP)	0.71	5.98	1.28	0.45	0.31	2.53	0.23	2.20	3.45
Military expenditure (% of central government expenditure)	5.10	5.47	5.78	5.27	4.73	4.82	4.47	4.06	3.82
Military expenditure (% of GDP)	1.39	1.48	1.53	1.47	1.36	1.38	1.29	1.18	1.15

Source: World Bank Databank (see Appendix 1).

A stark qualitative difference between this period and that of the late 1990s, however, pointed to the evolution and growing convergence of the country’s hard-power and soft-power profiles. Where there once had been a considerable (albeit under-recognised) disparity between these profiles, the early and mid-2000s were characterised by a significant period of sustained South African economic growth and development. Following its early nation-building period, greater policy certainty and predictability (among a host of other variables) bolstered not only the ideological and

normative international attractiveness of South Africa, but dually enhanced the country's standing as a sensible destination for FDI, as well as a base for business opportunities that sought to break into larger regional and continental markets.

As can be seen in Table 2, in spite of the robust economic growth during this period (and with respect to the country's growing regional and continental peace and security footprint), South Africa's military expenditure – both as a percentage of GDP and central government expenditure – rose steadily until 2003, and remained somewhat stable before declining once again. Regardless, these expenditures (as a percentage of GDP and government spending) did not reach the levels of the early and mid-1990s, in spite of the country's more ambitious regional and continental role conception vis-à-vis the African Agenda. What is notable, however, is the fact that in total aggregate terms, military expenditure – in line with the country's sustained economic growth and (somewhat more inconsistent but still significant) receipt of inward FDI – was noticeably higher than under the Mandela administration.

The country's hard-power profile and stature had thus been converging in a manner consistent with the underlying soft-power potential that it had previously relied upon to project its power and influence across the region, as well as the greater international system. Indeed, as argued by Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman⁸⁸:

...South Africa's self-identification as a lodestar for international business activity – based on its internationally recognised financial systems, its business-friendly environment and its (sometimes questionable) knowledge of the rest of the continent – defies its limited experience in some parts of Africa but remains an important expression of a deracialised account of its exceptionalism in the African continent.

Of course, there were various setbacks throughout this period that eroded the soft-power and hard-power reserves of the state. The arguable failure of South Africa to intervene effectively and stem the ongoing political and economic malaise in Zimbabwe was one such notable example in which the

country did not live up to its own role conception, as well as the external expectations placed upon it. Overall, however, this period was generally characterised by the growth of the country's soft-power and hard-power profiles, and the subsequent convergence of the two, ultimately leading to its much sought-after validation as a committed, capable and responsible regional anchor state. Thus, in hindsight, the latter years of this period could be thought of as the apex of South African foreign policy vis-à-vis the fulfilment of its envisaged regional leadership role conception, underwritten by the effective leveraging of its growing, and convergent, soft-power and hard-power profiles.

3.3 Overextension and decline: a turn toward pragmatism (2009–present)

Following a brief yet tumultuous period in South Africa's political landscape that witnessed the defeat of Mbeki as the leader of the ANC, and his subsequent resignation as the country's head of state, a new executive administration had emerged following the ascendancy of Jacob Zuma to the presidency in May 2009. From the outset, and from a strict foreign policy perspective, there appeared to be no significant deviation from the course already charted by the country's previous administrations vis-à-vis the priority afforded to the country's African Agenda – as well as, more broadly, in terms of South–South cooperation. Indeed, as alluded to by Le Pere, the essential leitmotifs of post-1994 South African foreign policy (in terms of rhetoric and policy) have all been liberally referenced by the Zuma administration as critical undercurrents of the country's contemporary international relations.⁸⁹

In contributing to a stronger AU, supporting regional and continental peace and security, and effectively fulfilling its own role conception as a regional leader, the Zuma administration has, in large part, echoed the very same foreign policy priorities, values and principles that had come to define the country's prior executive administrations. Thus, based on such a clear continuation of policy predictability, it would have been assumed that South Africa's steadily growing (and convergent) soft-power and hard-power

profiles would most likely follow this positive general trajectory – leading to further gains, over time, that would bolster the country’s relative international standing and entrench its position as a regional anchor state.

To this effect, a number of foreign policy successes were registered by the Zuma administration, particularly in its early years. The administration’s successful regional lobbying among both SADC member states and other AU states in support of former Foreign Affairs minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma’s election as chairperson of the AU Commission was one such standout achievement. With Dlamini-Zuma at the helm of one of the most vital AU institutions, South Africa’s influence across the continent (in spite of the clearly continental mandate of the chairperson) was well assured, in various ways, given the political-ideological inclinations of Dlamini-Zuma as well as the access and relationships that South African political figures maintained with the office.

Further afield, the Zuma administration, building off the positive momentum generated by Mbeki – and the notion that South Africa was the de facto global representative for Africa based on its relative and convergent soft-power and hard-power profiles – consolidated the country’s multilateral South–South efforts through its admission into the Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) grouping of major emerging world powers. By 2011, South Africa had been fully incorporated into the workings of the group and subsequently featured in each of its annual summits. A key highlight of the country’s involvement was its hosting of the 2013 BRICS Summit in Durban. Among other things, this summit laid the groundwork for the creation of a new BRICS Development Bank, intended to rival other Western-dominated global financial institutions such as the World Bank.

In terms of peace and security, under the Zuma administration (particularly in the administration’s early years) South Africa largely continued playing the role that had been clearly established in prior years. During its second term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC (2011–2012), South Africa played a leading role in strengthening multilateral cooperation between key peace and security organs of the UN and the

AU, culminating in the unanimous adoption of UNSC Resolution 2033.⁹⁰ Priority had also been given to strengthening the role of the AU and SADC vis-à-vis regional and continental peace and security, through South Africa's support of the further development and refinement of a coherent, continent-wide peace and security architecture. Indeed, following the inadequate response of continental peace and security institutions in the case of Mali's 2012 conflict, South Africa championed a new continental rapid response mechanism that was subsequently officially adopted and established by the AU Assembly at its 21st ordinary session in 2013.⁹¹ However, this was divisive among certain member states, given the hesitation and associated challenges surrounding the establishment of what some regarded to be a parallel mechanism to the existing (albeit underdeveloped) idea of an ASF rapid deployment capability, within the structural framework of the APSA.⁹²

In spite of this, and remaining cognisant of the longer-term utility of such an initiative, South Africa's leading role on this matter effectively underscored the further continuation of its existing African Agenda, in line with the fulfilment of its regional and continental role conception. This was further exemplified by the country's ongoing commitment towards supporting peace, particularly within its regional neighbourhood, through its mediation efforts in Madagascar's 2013 political crisis, its central role in addressing ongoing instability in Zimbabwe, and the facilitation role it played towards the consolidation of peace and stability in Lesotho in recent years.

Building on its earlier commitment to peace in the Great Lakes Region, South Africa's more recent involvement in the DRC followed the evolution from MONUC to MONUSCO in 2010. Its contribution to the mission was primarily based on SANDF support in the form of Operation Mistral, which had consisted of numerous military observers, staff officers and over 1000 personnel who constituted the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) – authorised by UNSC Resolution 2098 to neutralise, disarm and prevent the expansion of armed groups in the DRC.⁹³ In February 2010, in conjunction with Operation Mistral (later referred to as Operation Bulisa), the SANDF subsequently engaged in two additional operations in

the DRC. This included Operation Teutonic 1, conducted in cooperation with Belgium, which consisted of a small contingent tasked to assist with the reconstruction of the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (Armed Forces of the DRC) (FARDC), the integration of the various other armed forces, and broader security sector reform.⁹⁴

While these efforts have largely resonated with South Africa's envisaged role conception, premised on its ongoing pursuit of regional leadership, various signs have pointed to significant challenges and power-projection constraints. These are especially stark when viewed against the country's earlier responses to instability and insecurity in the Great Lakes Region. The fact that South Africa did not contribute a second battalion to MONUSCO to support the FIB, opting rather to rehat and "re-role" its existing battalion deployed in and around the eastern city of Goma, is indicative of this – and perhaps reflective of broader concerns, as highlighted in the country's most recent defence review.⁹⁵

3.3.1 The 2014 Defence Review

Given the considerable changes to the country's strategic environment since the release of the 1998 Defence Review, a similar review had long been expected and called for to critically assess the country's defence policy. Following a lengthy and comprehensive process that spanned a number of years, a new Defence Review – undertaken by a Defence Review Committee that had been mandated dually by the DoD and the Department of Military Veterans – was completed, accepted by Cabinet and submitted to Parliament in May 2014.⁹⁶ This review (hereafter referred to as the 2014 Defence Review) specifically sought to address many of the shortcomings and gaps of the 1998 Defence Review, and is still undergoing a Parliamentary process of review and debate pending a final endorsement.

While the 2014 Defence Review is a particularly arduous read – spanning well over 300 pages and covering issues as diverse as the role of defence within a developmental state, force generation guidelines, and defence management and resource systems – the central issue of concern raised by the review refers to its indictment of the "critical state of decline" of the

SANDF, and the implications of this with respect to the country's role and profile across the region.⁹⁷ The review posited that, since the 1998 review, the SANDF had neither sufficiently performed, nor had it been adequately invested in, to serve effectively and complement the country's international status and strategic posture, as well as what it referred to as South Africa's "inescapable continental leadership role".⁹⁸

The 2014 Defence Review further elaborated on the essential *raison d'être* that should inform the operations and functions of the SANDF – and, by extension, the role of the country's armed forces beyond its borders. It can be assumed that this more elaborative and definitive understanding had been arrived at following the experience gained from the numerous international interventions undertaken by the country since the release of the 1999 White Paper, as well as the country's broader multilateral and bilateral diplomatic peace efforts during this period. Whatever the specific reasons may be, the 2014 Defence Review clearly argued that, at a regional level, the country's national security "...inextricably hinges on the stability, unity and prosperity of the Southern African region, and the African continent in general..., [that]... Africa is at the centre of South African policy, and that the growth and success of the South African economy is further intrinsically dependant on the enduring peace, stability, economic development and deepened democracy on the continent."⁹⁹ The review further emphasised that security and development go hand in hand, and that South Africa, in concert with like-minded African states, should therefore maintain a vested interest in playing a continental leadership role insofar as conflict prevention and conflict resolution is concerned.¹⁰⁰

These policy prescriptions, while largely aligned to the country's aspirational foreign policy in pursuit of regional leadership and anchor state status, were tempered by the review's appraisal of a number of critical deficiencies that cut across the SANDF and the country's broader defence sector. Specifically, the "critical state of decline" of the SANDF, as previously alluded to, had been informed by a number of key factors and considerations, among other things relating to:¹⁰¹

- the fact that the country (at the time of the review’s public dissemination in 2014) spent less than 1.2% of GDP per year on the military – leading the Defence Review Committee to conclude that the country’s defence force was effectively underfunded by 24% with respect to its current size and composition;
- the obsolescence and unaffordability of many of its main operating systems;
- the inability to meet current standing defence commitments;
- the lack of critical mobility; and
- the current balance of expenditure between personnel, operations and capital, which was both severely disjointed and institutionally crippling.

In addition, the review highlighted the fact that given current levels of funding, such a situation – if left unaddressed – has the potential to significantly fragment the country’s defence capability, and that the country is therefore faced with two options: to allocate a greater share of national expenditure towards the defence forces, or to significantly scale down its level of ambition and commitment.¹⁰² Thus, in spite of the review’s argument for a greater regional peace and security role to be assumed by the country, based on certain shortcomings of the SANDF it is apparent that South Africa may well be at a crossroads in either allowing policy to drive and inform greater investment in its armed forces, or in scaling down the country’s level of ambition and commitment to play a continental leadership role, with particular regard to maintaining regional peace and security.

3.3.2 Waning international influence

Beyond the waning influence and capability of the country’s defence force to fulfil the obligations associated with its “inescapable continental leadership role”, South Africa’s soft power dually came under acute strain throughout this period. In spite of the ideas contained in the well-intentioned 2011 White Paper on South Africa’s foreign policy (titled *Building a better world: the diplomacy of ubuntu*¹⁰³), for example – which sought to clearly take stock of and articulate the country’s soft-power strengths – Ubuntu has

been generally overused and simplified into a catchphrase, as opposed to being utilised in a way that has led to a significant or tangible translation into a coherent foreign policy over time.¹⁰⁴ Some of the most significant events that have cumulatively led to the erosion of its soft-power profile include South Africa's various refusals to grant a visa to the Dalai Lama; its bungled handling of UN Resolution 1973, which sought to establish a legal basis for military intervention in the Libyan civil war; and the obtuse bilateral security arrangement between South Africa and the Central African Republic that resulted in the deaths of 13 SANDF soldiers in March 2013¹⁰⁵ (remaining cognisant of the fact that this arrangement was established before the Zuma administration). There have also been more recent failures to abide by its own domestic laws, in accordance with the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC): to arrest and surrender Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir to the ICC in June 2015, and the subsequent failure by the Zuma administration to abide by the legal process surrounding the country's consequent intention to withdraw from the ICC (a matter that was ruled to be ultimately unconstitutional and invalid).¹⁰⁶ These developments, among others, have contributed to changing international perceptions of South Africa as a capable, responsible and committed regional anchor state, and have consequently put significant strain on the soft-power reserves of the state to maintain its relative international position.

Thus, in spite of certain positive developments, South Africa's relative international standing has diminished in recent years. Various international factors and trends (associated with the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as more recent global and domestic political developments) have challenged the country's capability in maintaining and growing its soft-power and hard-power profiles. However, when comparatively assessed against the myriad external challenges faced by the country's previous administrations, these do not adequately explain the seemingly lethargic current state of South African regional and continental leadership. To this effect, some observers have pointed directly at the steady erosion of South Africa's soft-power foundations, among other things relating to various foreign policy actions that have had a deleterious impact on the country's international

moral capital, normative agency and, by extension, its relative political stature within the international system.¹⁰⁷ This explanation is primarily premised on a reading of South African international relations as one that has become characterised by a number of considerable strategic missteps under the Zuma administration, increasing policy-level and action-level incoherence and incoordination, and – perhaps most significantly – the arguable relegation or subjugation of foreign policy concerns with respect to competing domestic priorities. For example, the laborious process related to the establishment and operationalisation of the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA),¹⁰⁸ which was first hailed in 2010 as a key innovation to advance the country's regional and continental profile and intended to build off and ultimately replace the ARF, is indicative of this latter concern.

Consequently, the groundwork that had been laid to effectively enmesh the country's domestic concerns and international relations through the conceptual evolution of what constituted its national interests (encapsulated within the general rubric of its African Agenda), appears to have become increasingly disentangled and erratic in recent years – to the detriment of a coordinated, coherent and effective foreign policy. While certain internal, structural, institutional and economic weaknesses have become increasingly pronounced since 2009 – and have been alluded to as significant constraints on the capability of the country to fulfil its envisaged regional leadership role conception – such factors have historically been overshadowed by the potential of the country to overcome these obstacles. However, this potential has been increasingly called into question, based in no small part on the arguable neglect of the country's soft-power profile – which, as previously discussed, has historically served to maintain international confidence in the general stature of South Africa as a potential regional anchor state (in spite of periodical fluctuations associated with its hard-power profile).

Thus, under the Zuma administration, South African foreign policy – while echoing the leitmotifs of prior administrations at a policy level – appears to have abandoned the early idealism and subsequent continental-institutionalist bent of the Mandela and Mbeki eras, and has adopted a more

pragmatic posture. To this effect, Gerrit Olivier posits that "... [under the Zuma administration]... the substantial ideological-intellectual overlay Mbeki introduced in foreign policy made way for pragmatism, boiling down to what seems to be a mixture of the Mandela and Mbeki policies, but lacking in the qualities such as leadership, depth, sophistication, clear-headedness, authority and resolve to be expected from a country like South Africa".¹⁰⁹

While a more pragmatic foreign policy could well have led to a number of potential soft-power and hard-power gains for the country (especially if utilised effectively to account for a number of significant changes that have occurred across the international system in recent years), a broad assessment of what has transpired since 2009 leads to a somewhat mixed record of successes and failures. Within this context, the general disregard and consequent underinvestment in the maintenance of the country's soft-power profile – based on what can only be explained as myopic material considerations – appears to have been one of the most significant factors that have undermined the country's pursuit of regional and continental leadership. Accordingly, Le Pere observed that South Africa's once-lauded international role as a "norm and value entrepreneur [is no longer] as redolent or assertive as it once was".¹¹⁰

More than this, one of the most incisive indictments on the current state of South Africa's foreign policy can be found in the National Development Plan (NDP), which provides a long-term vision and developmental blueprint for the country, leading to the year 2030. In its chapter on "Positioning South Africa in the world", the NDP puts forward a number of observations that outline the contours of the general malaise surrounding the country's international relations, including that:¹¹¹

- the country has experienced a relative decline in power and influence in world affairs;
- South Africa has lost a great deal of moral authority – as a power resource – that it enjoyed in the period immediately after the 1994 election;

- South Africa's foreign relations are becoming increasingly ineffective and that the country is sliding down the scale of global competitiveness and overall moral standing – noting that this apparent decline is part of the overall demise of the golden decade of African diplomacy, spanning 1998 to 2008;
- the country's relative decline in global standing has led to material losses in regional and continental bargaining, and in trade and investment opportunities;
- despite playing key roles in peace settlements on the continent, South Africa has gained little by way of expanded trade and investment opportunities;
- as a middle-income country, South Africa is diplomatically overstretched – raising questions concerning the cost-effectiveness of its operations;
- South African diplomats fall short in terms of implementing or following up on the various policy statements and in which agreements they may be involved; and
- there is a marked dislocation between the efforts of South African business leaders and its government leaders and officials.

Accordingly, the NDP urgently recommends that high-level task teams be constituted to conduct definitive research studies that focus specifically on South African national interests, the role of the country in the context of African geopolitics and, more broadly, South Africa's role in the world, with particular regard to multilateral relations.¹¹² The NDP also calls for the strengthening of DIRCO's research capabilities, suggesting that the department works in close collaboration with the country's academic and business communities to develop its foreign policy moving forward.¹¹³

Thus, remaining cognisant of the difficulty in empirically accounting for fluctuations across a country's soft-power profile, a definitive negative trend can clearly be established in the post-2009 period, as it relates to South Africa's power-projection capabilities. Similarly, as can be seen in Table 3 below, consideration of some of the rudimentary elements that constitute

the country’s hard-power profile further mirror a distinct downward trend. The power convergence between the country’s hard-power and soft-power profiles, discussed previously, has therefore largely remained in place. However, this was now functioning in a distinctly detrimental manner that runs counter to its aspirational foreign policy imperatives, in pursuit of a greater claim to regional and continental leadership.

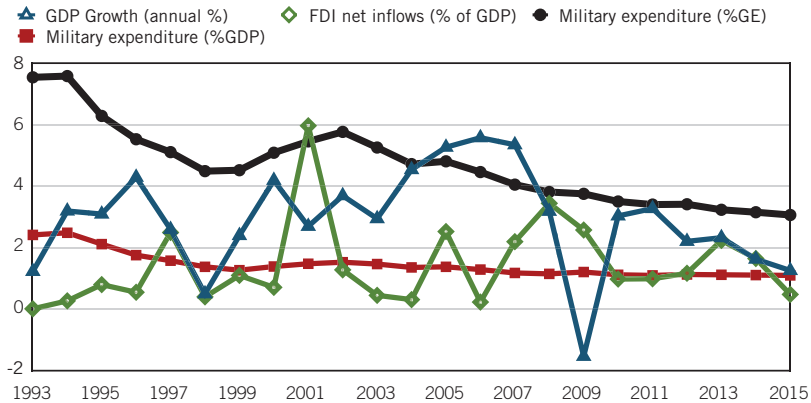
Table 3: Selected Indicators of South African Influence (2009–2015)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
GDP growth (annual %)	-1.54	3.04	3.28	2.21	2.33	1.63	1.26
FDI, net inflows (% of GDP)	2.58	0.98	0.99	1.17	2.24	1.65	0.48
Military expenditure (% of central government expenditure)	3.76	3.51	3.41	3.42	3.24	3.16	3.07
Military expenditure (% of GDP)	1.21	1.12	1.10	1.13	1.12	1.11	1.10

Source: World Bank Databank (see Appendix 1).

The post-2009 downward trend in some of the proxy elements associated with South Africa’s hard-power profile becomes much starker when plotted and viewed against the relative performance of these variables throughout each of the country’s prior democratic administrations (since 1994), as can be seen in Figure 1. What is especially telling about this is that when juxtaposed against general trends relating to the country’s soft-power profile, prior downturns in hard-power projection did not necessarily equate to contractions in its soft-power projection over similar periods of time.

Figure 1: Trends in Selected Indicators of South African Influence (1993–2015)



Similarly, prior instances of economic underperformance and military expenditure cutbacks did not lead to situations the same as the current lethargic state of South African regional and continental leadership, characterised by a declining relative international position of influence. If anything, an argument could be made that the country's deep reserves of soft power (which had been maintained, grown and invested in by prior democratic administrations) had the overall effect of buoying the country's relative international standing throughout the various negative fluctuations associated with its hard-power profile. Therefore, this begs the question of how best South Africa could reverse this current situation, better fulfil its envisaged international role conception and reassert itself as a committed, capable and responsible continental leader, in accordance with its existing African Agenda and in line with the global expectations of the country as a regional anchor state.

4. Regional conflict management as an anchor of smart-power projection

Moving forward, South African policymakers would do well to recognise that fluctuations in the country's hard-power profile do not necessarily serve as an adequate rational basis for which to alter, disengage or scale back on

international efforts that would otherwise have the potential to bolster the country's soft-power profile – and, consequently, its relative international position of influence. While foreign policy throughout the country's various democratic administrations has, for the most part, remained fairly consistent, the significant changes at a practical or operational level that have been observed reflect a growing preoccupation with domestic matters, at the expense of the country's relative international standing. The various recent foreign policy missteps and tactical blunders (discussed previously) that have called into question the capability and commitment of the country to fulfil its envisaged role conception as a regional leader are, arguably, reflective of this general underinvestment in the maintenance of the country's soft-power profile. Such myopic, material concerns are often far more damaging to the country over the longer term, as these often lead to actions or policies that (directly or indirectly) disregard the extent to which the country's reserves of soft power have effectively buoyed South Africa's relative international standing since 1994, in spite of considerable domestic challenges. In addition, policies or actions based on the prioritisation of short-term domestic matters at the expense of international concerns dually disregard the value and utility of the country's soft power to directly affect international outcomes that could potentially allay or address such pressing domestic concerns over the longer term.

The most concerning aspect associated with these recent trends, however, relates to the underlying presupposition that the country's hard-power profile ought to be regarded as the primary basis on which it can effectively stake its claim to regional and continental leadership. While there is no denying the fact that South Africa's comparative economic and military size vis-à-vis other SADC and AU states is a central determinant of its approach to regional and continental affairs, this is a misguided approach, as it naively assumes that requisite levels of economic growth and development will be achieved to consistently drive – and legitimise – its claims to regional leadership. In recent years, other continental powers have far outperformed South Africa on certain economic benchmarks of progress, and further afield, the country lags far behind many other emerging powers – many of

which are not represented in the intergovernmental and multilateral fora in which South Africa regularly features (on the basis of its potential as an emerging power and regional anchor state).

Thus, there is a definitive need for the country to revisit and refine the original idea that its development and security is inextricably interwoven with that of the broader continent. In so doing, the country's leaders and policymakers need to fully acknowledge and embrace that South Africa's national interests – with particular regard to peace, security and development – are deeply enmeshed with those of its immediate regional neighbours, as well as those of the continent. Similarly, as called for in the NDP, South African leaders and policymakers should prioritise an urgent action-oriented inquiry surrounding the country's national interests vis-à-vis contemporary African geopolitics and broader global trends and developments. Arriving at a more streamlined, clear and concise foreign policy agenda would particularly benefit the country insofar as it would direct and concentrate finite resources towards policy areas and interventions that yield tangible gains. In this regard, Narnia Bohler-Muller argues that in recent years, South Africa has attempted to "...serve too many international agendas and [is] thus over-extended in its international engagements, which [has contributed] to the lack of a clear foreign policy focus".¹¹⁴ As further elaborated by Bohler-Muller, this policy-level overextension has the potential to undermine and dilute the effectiveness of the country's foreign engagements, figuratively leading it to burn more bridges than it is able to build or maintain.¹¹⁵

Compounding the challenges associated with such an overextended foreign agenda, some observers have also underscored the problematic lack of a hierarchical prioritisation of foreign policy goals.¹¹⁶ This lack of specificity – in conjunction with certain structural and institutional shortcomings already discussed – has been argued to often lead to conflicting goals and priorities (within government structures) that disperse actions and interventions, and which could otherwise be more effectively directed and coordinated, to register and achieve more tangible foreign policy goals.

Should the country's leaders heed and act on the various concerns and recommendations outlined in the NDP and the 2014 Defence Review, among other documents, they would do well to first prioritise and decisively address these two interrelated hurdles, which are currently standing in the way of the country being able to fulfil its envisaged role conception. Policymakers should also pay particular attention to the incredible utility of the country's soft power in historically maintaining South Africa's relative international position of influence, in spite of significant fluctuations in its hard-power projection capabilities over time. Most importantly, however, the country's leaders should delve further into the constitutive elements of the country's soft-power profile, with a view towards prioritising, refining and reinvesting in those elements (or soft-power policy domains) that have historically yielded the greatest gains for the country – and which would, most likely, yield the greatest gains for the country moving forward. This should be regarded as a central – if not critical – exercise that ought to be undertaken if South Africa is to fulfil its own regional leadership role conception effectively, in line with the African Agenda, in accordance with international expectations of the country as a capable and credible anchor state, and as an actor that cannot be ignored as a responsible and impartial manager of continental affairs.

Finally, building on the above, it may be logically assumed – based on overarching historical trends in the hard-power and soft-power profiles of the country over the course of the three democratic administrations since 1994 – that the sharp end of the stick of South African soft power has undoubtedly been its efforts that have been geared towards regional conflict management and resolution. From policy-level endeavours and technical and financial support of multilateral fora and processes to its wilful provision of, investment in and disproportionate burden-sharing of regional public goods (primarily in the form of continental institutions) and on-the-ground interventions of the SANDF through bilateral and multilateral peace missions, it is undeniable that some of the greatest international gains made by the country (which have tremendously bolstered its relative international standing) have been specifically premised on its ability to take the lead and effectively manage regional peace and security.

Thus, a new direction for conflict management – as a direct function of South African smart power (soft power working in tandem with its hard-power projection capabilities) that primarily reflects a renewed strategic commitment to its central role as a manager of regional peace and security – should be vigorously explored by policymakers in their efforts to revitalise the country's claims to regional and continental leadership. This reaffirmed commitment to the country's regional conflict management role, based on prior trends, could be assumed to further establish a self-reinforcing loop that would bolster South Africa's soft-power profile and lead to greater gains in its relative international standing over time – in spite of what may transpire as a result of domestic challenges associated with its hard-power projection capabilities.

This new direction could, for example, take the form of prioritising the full operationalisation of SADPA, ensuring greater strategic coordination and coherence across government departmental clusters relevant to the maintenance of regional peace and security, and reinvesting in the provision and maintenance of regional institutions (while supporting the development of domestic hubs or centres of excellence to better serve the processes and operations of these structures). Most importantly, however, would be the need to heed and act decisively on the concerns and recommendations provided for in the review of key official policy documents such as the NDP, as well as the country's latest defence review.

The significance of a more assertive South African peace and security leadership role across the continent cannot be undervalued, especially in light of recent trends that have called into question the underlying rationale that has informed prevailing international practices and approaches towards conflict management and its constitutive elements *vis-à-vis* mediation, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, stabilisation efforts and post-conflict reconstruction and development. The recent review processes of the UN in 2015, for example – which took stock of three critical global reports on international peace operations,¹¹⁷ the UN's peacebuilding architecture¹¹⁸, and on women, peace and security¹¹⁹ – are reflective of the current introspective and reformist international climate surrounding future global policies and practices dealing with conflict management and resolution.

The issue at the heart of this increasing disillusionment with the current state of global peace and security refers to the way in which the changing nature of conflict has essentially outpaced the responses of global conflict management institutions and actors, and the consequent growing distance between commitments (and expectations) with actual capabilities (and results). To this effect, recent statistics on armed conflict now suggest that a negative reversal of over two decades of post-Cold War peace has occurred,¹²⁰ with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) arguing:

Peace is not being well served by national governments or the array of international institutions, forces and instruments that are currently devoted to enhancing security and international stability. If peace is not actually in retreat, it is certainly under serious pressure.¹²¹

In various respects, these emergent global threats to international peace, security and stability, which have outpaced prevailing institutional and state-led conflict management responses and mechanisms, are part and parcel of a broader global failure to establish and implement collective actions and strategies that account for the current ontological dynamism of the international system. Certain structural and institutional rigidities associated with deep-rooted assumptions about the inherent nature of the international system itself have largely led to these outdated global responses. Indeed, a considerable number of modern threats to international stability often completely disregard and circumvent the international institutional structure that has been developed on the basis of such notions as state sovereignty, the balance of power between state actors, and the power and influence of ideology, culture and religion vis-à-vis material concerns. Thus, modern threats to global peace, security and stability, in general, have collectively challenged the prevailing logic and underlying bedrock of the post-Cold War liberal, rules-based and institutional international system.

The growth, proliferation and increasing agency of non-state actors (both armed and violent as well as those regarded as peaceful and legitimate) over the past two decades is indicative of the need for traditional global actors to revise their underlying assumptions of the current global order –

and, accordingly, to rationalise their responses to international peace and security. Similarly, the considerable concentration of power by transnational private entities and commercial hubs further poses a direct challenge to the now seemingly outdated conceptions surrounding the primacy of nation-states within the global system, and the subsequent status that they enjoy across its institutional peace and security architecture. In addition, the privatisation and corporatisation of security – which often services security vacuums in weak, undercapacitated states for the benefit of elite, private, transnational commercial interests – is another prime example of these trends, along with the oft referred-to cases of growing violent extremist non-state groups across the periphery of the international order. A recent succinct appraisal of this period of profound global change is provided by Anthoni van Nieuwkerk – who, building on the work of Crocker, Hampson and Aall,¹²² observes:

...[I]t appears as if global order is breaking apart, national sovereignty is changing, boundary lines are becoming more fluid, new norms are forming, old norms are withering away, [and that]... there is a systematic transformation occurring in which some regions are on the rise, some in decline, and some in open revolt.... In this diffusion of agency, authority, and action, it seems that the world has slipped its moorings and is drifting.¹²³

In this evolving international system, outdated conceptions of international order – which confine and have rigidified collective global conflict management responses – ought to give way to an emergent peace and security agenda that specifically aims to close the aforementioned distance between international commitments and expectations, on the one hand, and capabilities and results, on the other. The re-establishment of trust and legitimacy in a new, rationalised global compact for peace, across a much greater cross-section of the international community, could go a very long way in ensuring a more sustainable, inclusive and peaceful global order in light of the various threats that have surfaced in recent years.

Against this backdrop, the future potential utility of South Africa as a more committed, capable and responsive manager of regional peace and security, in line with its envisaged role conception, cannot be underestimated. As an emergent international peace and security agenda for the future takes shape, existing global actors committed to reforming the international system – such that the configuration of power is more reflective of current realities and is consequently geared towards a more equitable and sustainable future – need to take the lead in charting a new way forward. Emerging revisionist powers from the Global South, by virtue of the trajectory of their historical development and their subsequent place in the current international system, may be best placed to challenge and dismantle the prevailing conflict management approaches and practices that are rooted in outdated assumptions of global order. Thus, displaying the necessary capability, aptitude and initiative in playing an effective leadership role at a regional level would go a great way in allaying uncertainties about the security and stability of southern Africa through this period of considerable change and volatility across the international system. It would also dually bolster and secure the relative international standing of South Africa to play a more robust and influential role moving forward. Moreover, should the country fulfil its envisaged regional leadership role conception effectively, in line with the African Agenda and in accordance with global expectations of it as a capable and committed anchor state, South Africa could well enhance its regional and continental standing by serving and championing common SADC and AU member state interests in a manner that is reflective of its commitment to the ideas contained within its conception of African renewal and renaissance. In this way, South Africa could leverage this period of profound global change and international peace and security volatility to its advantage, by prioritising its soft-power projection capabilities through a strategic commitment to conflict management and the maintenance of regional peace and security – in spite of domestic challenges related to its hard-power profile.

5. Conclusion

Over the course of the three democratic administrations since 1994, a number of discernible, overarching trends have characterised the fluctuations in South Africa's relative international position of power and influence, as well as its subsequent capability to pursue its envisaged regional leadership role conception. By considering these trends through the application of a hard-power and soft-power analysis and against a conceptual framework informed by the central tenets of liberal institutionalism, it becomes evident that the country has, in general, been able to maintain a relatively influential global position of influence, primarily as a result of its significant reserves of soft power. Indeed, during periods in which the country prioritised, maintained, invested in and effectively leveraged elements relating to its soft-power profile, significant international gains had been registered by South Africa – in spite of negative domestic trends and developments that could have had the effect of constraining its power projection capabilities. In more recent years, however, the country has experienced a particularly acute decline in its relative international standing. Among other things, this likely corresponds to an observed failure (specifically at a practical and operational level) to prioritise the various soft-power elements that have had the effect of historically buoying the country's position of influence and power during periods of considerable domestic challenges.

These developments are particularly concerning, as they relate directly to the long-term viability of South Africa as a committed, capable and responsive regional anchor state, in line with the country's own regional leadership role conception, as encapsulated within its African Agenda foreign policy domain. Moreover, remaining cognisant of the fact that the country's aspirational international relations and foreign policy agenda is underwritten to a large degree by an implicit understanding that it is the de facto spokesperson for (and gateway to) the broader continent, a declining relative international position of power and influence may spur into effect longer-term and more tangible losses as they relate to South Africa's capability to fulfil its envisaged regional leadership role conception vis-à-vis the rise of other, more competitive global and continental powers.

Should the country's leaders and policymakers heed and act on the various concerns and recommendations raised in recent official policy papers that call attention to the need to address the country's waning international stock as a committed and capable regional anchor state, they would do well in first recognising that one of the most critical elements of the country's soft-power profile since 1994 has been its role in terms of the management of regional peace and security. To this effect, regional conflict management and conflict resolution have led specifically to tremendous international gains in solidifying the country's claims to regional and continental leadership, whilst dually buoying its relative international standing – in spite of fluctuations associated with key traditional determinants of its ability to project influence and hard power. South Africa's wilful provision and disproportionate burden-sharing of regional public goods (in the form of institutions and multilateral for a) that have been geared towards more effective conflict management, should therefore be fully appraised by the country's leaders and policymakers in an effort to renew a strategic commitment to the further development and refinement of these moving forward. Similarly, the country's leaders should take stock of the historic utility of South Africa's direct peace and security interventions across the continent, and the way in which these efforts have significantly contributed towards advancing national interests vis-à-vis the fulfilment of its envisaged regional leadership role conception.

By making clear and coherent action-oriented commitments to the longer-term maintenance of regional peace and security through various ongoing conflict management and resolution efforts, South Africa may well be able to reassert itself on the global agenda as a committed and capable regional anchor state, whose power and influence is once again effectively underwritten by policies and practices that leverage its soft-power reserves (as it works in tandem with its hard-power projection capabilities). However, such a strategy must take place alongside broader efforts that aim to reprioritise, invest in and maintain the country's soft-power profile as reflective of the ideas, norms and priorities of the broader liberal, rules-based and institutional global order. While these various normative elements of the current international system may not be as clear (or rigid) as

they once were – given the considerable ontological dynamism of the system as a result of recent global peace and security trends and developments – South African policymakers would benefit greatly in identifying the role and prospects of a more refined, focused and aspirational foreign policy vis-à-vis the challenges and opportunities associated with this current period of global change and volatility.

In so doing, South Africa may be able to arrive at a far more advantageous relative international position that potentially could lead to various policy-level and operational-level gains and benefits. These could be utilised to offset many of its current domestic challenges, which would otherwise constrain its capability to project its power and influence, particularly across its immediate regional neighbourhood. Moreover, a more advantageous relative international position, underwritten by a strategic commitment to the management of peace and security, would better solidify its claims to regional and continental leadership, and would therefore allow for much greater agency and flexibility in championing regional and continental interests as the broader global system undergoes this period of profound change. The institutional malleability of the international system during this current – arguably transitional – period should therefore be seen by South African leaders and policymakers as a critical opportunity for the country to reclaim lost ground as the *de facto* spokesperson for, and gateway to, the continent, by recognising the historical utility of its soft power – and duly to reprioritise and better leverage its role and responsibility as a committed, capable and responsible manager of regional peace and security.

Appendix 1

All selected data used in this paper from the World Bank's online Databank were drawn from the World Development Indicators dataset (last updated 06/01/2017).

Indicator name	Long definition	Source
GDP growth (annual %)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 US dollars. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.	World Bank national accounts data, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) National Accounts data files.
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)	FDI is the net inflow of investment to acquire a lasting management interest (10% or more of voting stock) in an enterprise operating in an economy other than that of the investor. It is the sum of equity capital, reinvestment of earnings, other long-term capital and short-term capital as shown in the balance of payments. This series shows net inflows (new investment inflows less disinvestment) in the reporting economy from foreign investors, and is divided by GDP.	International Monetary Fund, international financial statistics and balance of payments databases, World Bank, international debt statistics, and World Bank and OECD GDP estimates.

Indicator name	Long definition	Source
<p>Military expenditure (% of central government expenditure)</p>	<p>Military expenditures data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) are derived from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) definition, which includes all current and capital expenditures on the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; defence ministries and other government agencies engaged in defence projects; paramilitary forces, if these are judged to be trained and equipped for military operations; and military space activities. Such expenditures include military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions of military personnel and social services for personnel; operation and maintenance; procurement; military research and development; and military aid (in the military expenditures of the donor country). Excluded are civil defence and current expenditures for previous military activities, such as for veterans' benefits, demobilisation, conversion and destruction of weapons. This definition cannot be applied for all countries, however, since that would require much more detailed information than is available about what is included in military budgets and off-budget military expenditure items. (For example, military budgets may or may not cover civil defence, reserves and auxiliary forces, police and paramilitary forces, dual-purpose forces such as military and civilian police, military grants in kind, pensions for military personnel, and social security contributions paid by one part of government to another.)</p>	<p>SIPRI, Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.</p>

Indicator name	Long definition	Source
<p>Military expenditure (% of GDP)</p>	<p>Military expenditures data from SIPRI are derived from the NATO definition, which includes all current and capital expenditures on the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; defence ministries and other government agencies engaged in defence projects; paramilitary forces, if these are judged to be trained and equipped for military operations; and military space activities. Such expenditures include military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions of military personnel and social services for personnel; operation and maintenance; procurement; military research and development; and military aid (in the military expenditures of the donor country). Excluded are civil defence and current expenditures for previous military activities, such as for veterans' benefits, demobilisation, conversion and destruction of weapons. This definition cannot be applied for all countries, however, since that would require much more detailed information than is available about what is included in military budgets and off-budget military expenditure items. (For example, military budgets may or may not cover civil defence, reserves and auxiliary forces, police and paramilitary forces, dual-purpose forces such as military and civilian police, military grants in kind, pensions for military personnel, and social security contributions paid by one part of government to another.)</p>	<p>SIPRI, Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.</p>

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