

# Looking back, looking forward

## South Africa in the UN Security Council

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South Africa's 2019-2020 term as an elected non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council is a critical opportunity for the country to demonstrate its commitment to international peace and security, the global rules-based order, and its prioritisation of the African continent. This research report aims to assess the country's first year of its current term and to provide recommendations on how the country could optimally approach the remainder of its term. It provides a chronological overview of key highlights throughout 2019 and discusses the most pronounced political and institutional trends and dynamics that the country will need to grapple with this year.

## Key findings

- ▶ Having served two prior terms on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in a comparatively short space of time, South Africa has benefitted from the institutional memory associated with the council's complex and taxing processes, debates and general workload.
- ▶ South Africa's 2019–2020 term on the UNSC is viewed as a test of the country's foreign policy commitment to the broader themes of renewal and recalibration associated with the Ramaphosa administration.
- ▶ There was a growing recognition throughout 2019 and early 2020 that the country's foreign policy comprises the necessary nuance and independence to work across existing council divisions.
- ▶ South Africa's Security Council presidency month in October 2019 was a significant highlight, with particular regard to: i) engagements on the United Nations-African Union partnership on peace and security, ii) attempting to break the current impasse surrounding the predictability and sustainability of African Union-led peace operations, as well as iii) the advancement of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
- ▶ In spite of the strained working relationship among the council's two other elected African member states in early 2019, South Africa managed to play a leading role in ensuring a more coherent and coordinated African grouping on the UNSC.
- ▶ South Africa remained largely consistent with its stated foreign policy priorities on the UNSC throughout 2019, while indicating its willingness to adopt and defend positions that other council members and international observers regarded as controversial or risky.
- ▶ The increasing openness and willingness of South African diplomats and other officials to engage with the media and civil society on all aspects of the country's current term on the UNSC is a particularly positive development.

## Recommendations

- ▶ In light of considerable political and economic challenges, South Africa needs to carefully manage its multilateral commitments against the backdrop of public sentiment that demands the focus of government officials on domestic priorities. The need to justify why such multilateral appointments are critically important in advancing the national interest accordingly needs to be prioritised throughout its remaining term.
- ▶ South Africa's role as chairperson of the AU in 2020 needs to be strategically leveraged in the country's UNSC engagements throughout its remaining term. Particularly, this relates to making tangible gains on issues including the UN–AU partnership on peace and security, and the sustainability and predictability of financing for AU-led peace operations, as well as the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative.
- ▶ South Africa needs to maintain and build on the positive momentum from 2019 which witnessed an increasingly cohesive and well coordinated African member state grouping on the UNSC. Given the composition of the grouping in 2020, South Africa would do well to redouble its efforts aimed at championing collective African positions, while additionally preparing the groundwork for its 2021 successor on a defined common legacy project.
- ▶ The month of December 2020, which will dually serve as South Africa's final month of its current term on the UNSC and as the second time that the country assumes its role as council president, should be carefully prepared for months in advance. This month could ideally serve as the capstone of the country's current term, and lay the groundwork for its successor in 2021.



## Introduction

South Africa's third term in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) since re-joining the UN in 1994 reached its halfway milestone in January 2020. South Africa's current two-year term on the UNSC has occurred during a period of significant global shifts relating not only to the responses to global conflicts, but also in terms of the growing challenges facing the multilateral system itself.<sup>1</sup>

Since joining the council on 1 January 2019, South Africa has had to deal with the growing distance between the expectations of the international community and the UN system's collective capability to respond effectively to the root causes and structural drivers of conflict. There is also increasing concern over the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, the risks posed by transnational threats and the intractability of many of the world's conflicts, as well as a growing deterioration in relations between the UNSC's five permanent member states (the P5).<sup>2</sup>

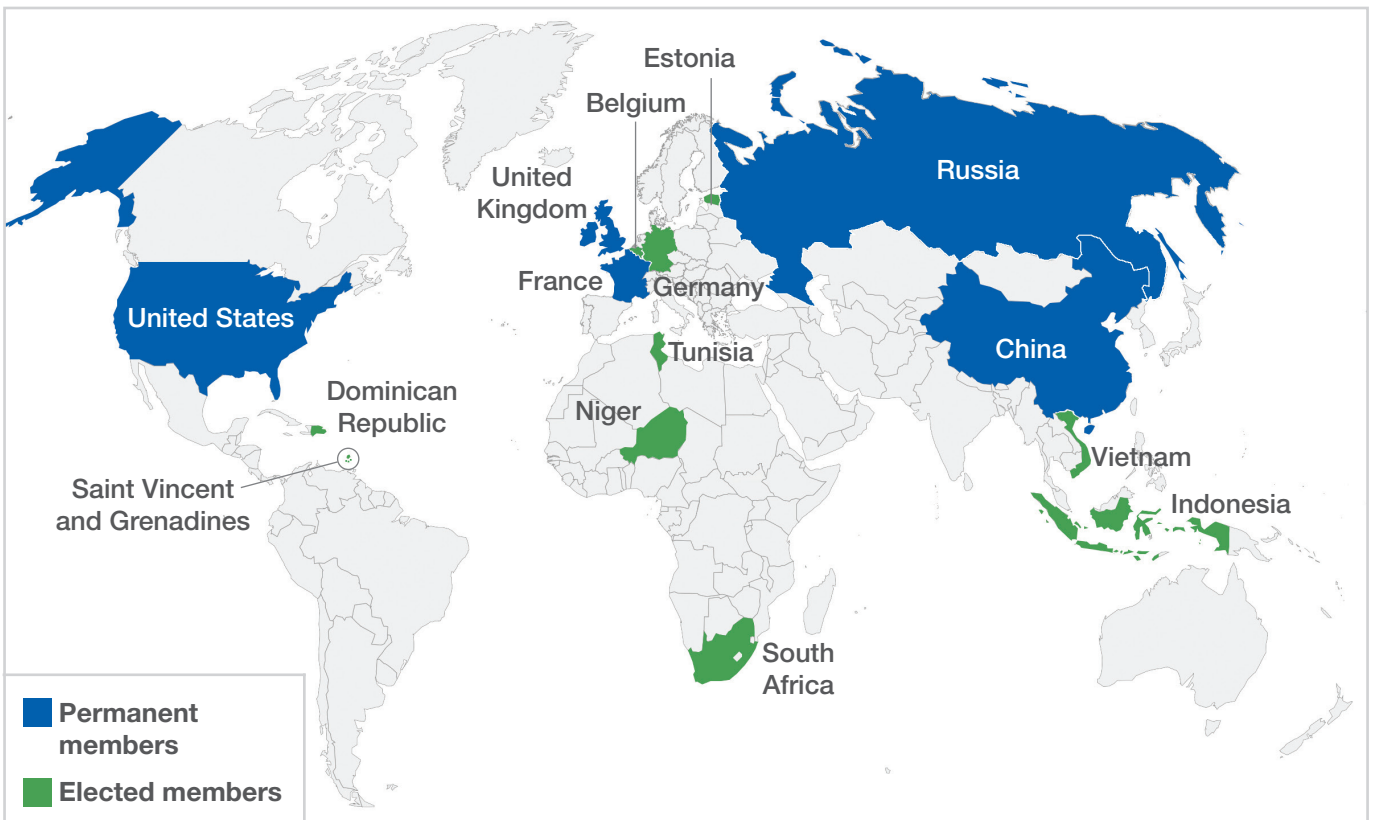
South Africa enjoys the benefit of already having served twice as an elected member state of the UNSC (the E10) in a comparatively short space of time. While still

a far stretch from the benefits of incumbency enjoyed by the P5, the vast majority of elected UNSC members do not enjoy the kind of institutional memory associated with such frequent appointments. Moreover, most E10 member states generally have to go through much more taxing and contested council election campaigns. Following from its previous terms on the UNSC, in 2007–2008 and 2011–2012, expectations for South Africa's leadership on the council have been unsurprisingly high.

For a middle power like South Africa, the value of working deliberately and strategically in concert with other global stakeholders to strengthen the multilateral system cannot be underestimated. The country's current term thus offers tremendous potential in the context of the growing scope for middle powers to play a leading role on the council. Importantly, it also provides a dual opportunity to influence the institutional development and political trajectory of the UN system during a particularly fractious period.

Against this backdrop, this report aims to assess the first year of South Africa's current term on the UNSC and to provide recommendations for the country's remaining

Map 1: UNSC members in 2020



term on the council up until 31 December 2020. This assessment will be done by taking into consideration various international peace and security developments and political and multilateral dynamics within the council, as well as South Africa's own foreign policy during a challenging domestic political period.

This report is based on ongoing desktop analysis and field research into South African foreign policy which has included four research trips to New York, in March, June and November 2019, and in February 2020. These led to numerous first-hand stakeholder interviews with officials from the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), UN and African Union (AU) officials, UNSC member state representatives, and civil society stakeholders based in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Addis Ababa and New York.

### **South Africa's foreign policy: recalibration and renewal**

South Africa's current term on the UNSC has coincided with a number of considerable challenges and opportunities associated with the country's domestic political and economic situation. The recent domestic political environment has been largely informed by the political transition associated with the 54<sup>th</sup> Elective Conference of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) on 18 December 2017, the resignation of Jacob Zuma as South African president in February 2018, and the country's general elections on 8 May 2019, which saw Cyril Ramaphosa elected as president by the National Assembly, having previously filled the vacancy left by Zuma's departure.

Adding to the complexity of these developments, various changes and new appointments have been made with regard to the Cabinet (the most senior level of the executive branch of the South African government), including the appointment of Dr Naledi Pandor as minister of international relations and cooperation on 30 May 2019. These developments have occurred against the backdrop of an extremely challenging domestic economic environment characterised by low growth, high unemployment, a constrained national budget and increasing instability largely associated with the country's public institutions and enterprises.

These dynamics have followed from a prolonged period in which the country's relative position of power and influence in the international system generally

experienced a noticeable decline.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the defining role played by South Africa in the late 1990s and early 2000s, characterised by its central role in advancing continental peace and security, the country's pressing domestic agenda throughout most of the 2010s largely led to an insubstantial and diluted foreign policy.

The priority of the current Ramaphosa administration, both domestically and on the global stage, has accordingly been one that speaks to the idea of reinvigoration and renewal. Despite a clear focus on investment and trade as a means to deal with pressing domestic challenges, the reformist agenda of the current administration has sought to reaffirm the country's place in the global order as well its commitment to regional and continental peace and security.

Much of the impetus of the Ramaphosa administration to renew and reorient South African foreign policy was initially spearheaded through the work of a dedicated foreign policy review panel which presented an interim draft report in March 2019.<sup>4</sup> Based on the central acknowledgement that the country has, in the recent past, failed to live up to its potential by insufficiently playing its expected role in Africa and on the world stage, the report argues for a number of key interventions across its foreign policy establishment.

South Africa enjoys the benefit of already having served twice as an elected member state of the UNSC

Despite the limited momentum gained by the foreign policy review draft report, its messages are indicative of broader perspectives shared by the current administration. Specifically, the panel highlighted the country's loss of global and continental influence. This was particularly emphasised in relation to missed strategic opportunities and a noticeable reversal of gains made on the international stage after South Africa re-joined the international community in 1994.

Accordingly, the panel called for an urgent foreign policy recalibration such that the country can strengthen its international stature by once again serving as a critical player on a range of issues relating to human rights and conflict resolution, among various other stated priorities. In many ways, the principal message put forward by

the panel's report called for a return to the kind of foreign policy seen in the early 2000s, characterised by the country's initiative and commitment towards institution-building and the forging of strategic alliances that situated the peace, security and development of the African continent at the centre of South African international relations.

### South Africa's role as a global player

The country's term on the UNSC has been rightly viewed as a litmus test of its commitment towards this kind of foreign policy recalibration and renewal. By playing an active and principled leadership role, particularly on issues relating to regional and continental peace and security, the country's current term on the UNSC could yield significant dividends in restoring its once vast reserves of political capital and soft power on the world stage.

South Africa's current term could yield significant dividends in restoring its political capital

South Africa's official stated priorities for its current term on the council has reflected this line of thinking. Since its election on 8 June 2018, DIRCO has communicated the country's key priorities for the council, relating primarily to its focus on African peace and security issues on the council's agenda — in line with the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative, and as part of the continental body's broader Agenda 2063 development vision.<sup>5</sup> Officially, the country has consistently alluded to five overarching foreign policy principles that guide its current term on the UNSC, namely its commitment towards:<sup>6</sup>

- i. International peace and agreed-upon mechanisms for conflict resolution;
- ii. Justice and international law;
- iii. The promotion of democracy and democratic values;
- iv. The advancement of human rights; and
- v. The sustainable development of the African continent.

Moreover, the country has specifically outlined a number of key elements of its current approach towards its tenure on the council, which include:

- i. Basing its actions, deliberations, and work in the council on its own historical experiences as these relate to conflict resolution, peace-building and mediation;
- ii. Focusing on the African continent's commitment towards Silencing the Guns as encapsulated within the AU's Agenda 2063;
- iii. Prioritising and promoting effective partnerships between the UN and other regional and sub-regional organisations; and
- iv. Seeking to improve the working methods of the UNSC in order to make the global body more representative and legitimate.

Other key priorities have taken greater shape throughout the course of 2019, particularly during South Africa's October 2019 council presidency, including the country's focus on advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, contributing to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, and working towards a more coordinated and coherent African grouping on the UNSC among the three elected African member states (the A3). In 2019, the other two A3 members were Equatorial Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.

The following sections will further analyse the country's performance during the first year leading the council, in line with current trends, challenges and successes in performing its role as an E10.

### SA in the UNSC in 2019: a three-part piece

Considering its position as a middle power, some of the most discernible expectations placed on South Africa throughout 2019, by both domestic and international peace and security stakeholders, highlighted the country's willingness and capability to play a visible and active role in influencing council outcomes. Although African issues were a key priority of its term, many stakeholders in New York consistently expressed a common expectation that South Africa would not limit its focus to African issues on the agenda of the UNSC, but would rather actively pronounce itself on and seek to influence a much wider number of council-specific country files.<sup>7</sup>

With the aid of hindsight, South Africa's performance on the UNSC in 2019 can be understood within the context of three distinct phases:

## Part 1 – Bureaucratic challenges and controversial positions

South Africa's initial three months in the council, from January to March 2019, were certainly the most complicated period of its current term. This period was particularly challenging, especially in terms of the emergent council agenda relating to developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Venezuela, as well as broader issues concerning the country's ability to quickly adapt and deploy its resources to respond to the rigours and demands of the council's workload. This led to a degree of uncertainty, particularly among Western members of the council, concerning the country's alliances and views regarding its principles and priorities.

Importantly, South Africa joined the council by replacing Ethiopia which, just a month prior, had sought to push through a contested draft resolution text on the controversial issue of using UN-assessed contributions to co-finance AU-led peace support operations (see box 3). The challenges faced by the A3 on the discussions of financing of AU-led peace support operations placed significant strain especially on the cohesion of the A3 grouping which South Africa immediately sought to strengthen.

Accordingly, throughout this period, perceptions of South Africa's role on the UNSC were generally framed in binary terms wherein the country's positions were seen as either gravitating toward Russia and China (the P2) or those of the United States, United Kingdom and France (the P3). Underlying these perceptions were concerns by many international stakeholders surrounding the nature and extent of South Africa's informed and foreign policy – especially within the context of broader tensions, divides, and competition among the Council's five permanent member states.

Compounding these early challenges were issues related to the expeditious and adequate staffing of the country's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. As previously noted, South Africa, in contrast to many other E10 members, benefits tremendously from the institutional memory associated with its two prior terms on the council. Accordingly, DIRCO was well aware of the substantive, operational and administrative demands placed upon its diplomats in New York (as well as in Pretoria) during a council term.

As a result, six dedicated officials were added to the South African permanent mission to the UN, with a total component of 17 officials. Many serve a dual Security Council and General Assembly role. This size, according to observers to the council, falls within the range of other E10 missions, which normally range between 15 and 20 officials.

While South Africa started observing council procedures from October to December 2018, many of the new staff deployed to New York only joined the South African mission between January and March 2019. In spite of this, however, a number of stakeholders in New York shared the view that the country had suffered during its first three months as a result of delayed staffing appointments, which affected its ability to optimally engage on the strenuous council calendar.

Two particular issues highlight the performance of South Africa in the first three months of 2019. Firstly, South Africa's position in Venezuela was not short of controversy. It came to a head in the council in February 2019 with two divergent resolutions tabled by the US and Russia and was seen as a major indication of the country's approach on the council moving forward.<sup>8</sup> Together with Russia and China, South Africa was one of the three countries in the UNSC that voted against a US-led resolution calling for the recognition of Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela.<sup>9</sup> While South Africa called for the need to resolve the political crisis through inclusive political dialogue,<sup>10</sup> many council members criticised its position for ignoring ongoing human rights abuses in the country.

South Africa's initial three months in the council were the most complicated period of its current term

South Africa's position on Venezuela can be seen through two particular, and complementary, lenses. First, one should consider the fact that the Venezuelan government has a likeminded position as a revolutionary group, showing solidarity between the ANC and the regime in Venezuela. Second, the Venezuela crisis is reminiscent of the challenges that South Africa faced, post-voting for the no-fly zone in Libya in 2011, where the country was criticised for supporting a UNSC resolution that contributed to the fall of Gadhafi's regime.

The second relevant issue relates to the DRC. Developments in January 2019 surrounding the DRC's elections were viewed across Pretoria and New York as a critical early test for South African foreign policy coherence with the coordination of its positions through other multilateral fora within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the AU.<sup>11</sup>

Much of this controversy rose from the initial lack of a coherent and common position by the AU and SADC on developments in the DRC. Whereas the AU initially called for election results to be suspended, and a high-level delegation be dispatched, SADC did not allude to the necessity of any such intervention and emphasised the need to respect the country's sovereignty and internal institutional processes.

This discord spilled over onto the UNSC, where member states were divided on the issuance of a press statement on 4 January 2019. Importantly, the A3 was divided on this matter; the Côte d'Ivoire supported issuing a press statement (along with France, the UK, US, and Belgium) which ran counter to South Africa's position that the council reserve all judgment prior to the official release of results by the DRC's electoral commission.

## **Part 2: Seeking independence, with AU and A3 positions as leverage**

Following the unsurprisingly stressful first three months on the council, there appeared to be a growing recognition that South Africa's positions were indeed nuanced and independent of existing council divisions, especially between the P5. The period from April to September 2019 came to be characterised by the willingness and capability of South Africa to actively identify opportunities to enhance collaboration among the A3 and to effectively leverage common AU positions – and decisions stemming from the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) – to shape council deliberations and influence UNSC outcomes.

South Africa's ongoing role in fostering A3 unity has been seen as a particularly significant priority as a means to gain leverage in many council debates and informal discussions. The country has often based its position on decisions made at the A3 level as well as decisions made in Addis Ababa by the AU. This has resulted in a considerable number of joint statements (e.g. joint A3 statement on the discussion on the protection of civilians),<sup>12</sup> co-sponsored resolutions

(e.g. a resolution on Silencing the Guns),<sup>13</sup> and even joint press conferences (e.g. during the June Sudan crisis discussion),<sup>14</sup> as compared to prior years.

South Africa's responses to political developments in Sudan over the course of 2019 have also showed its capability to leverage common regional positions within council debates and informal discussions. Specifically, throughout June, South Africa effectively worked towards championing AUPSC positions on developments in Sudan by closely working with the two other elected African members on the council, namely Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, in order to present a united African front with a coherent collective position.

South Africa's ongoing role in fostering A3 unity has been seen as a particularly significant priority

These efforts, most strikingly demonstrated by a joint A3 media briefing on 6 June,<sup>15</sup> led to a unified A3 condemnation of atrocities committed in Sudan by the country's transitional authorities, while affirming the central importance of AUPSC communiqués and decisions on the unfolding crisis for the consideration of UNSC member states.

This united A3 front played a critical role in facilitating greater UNSC consensus and compromise on how the council should view developments in Sudan, in light of clear earlier divisions across the P2 and P3. These largely centred on disagreements concerning the mandate of the council as well as the issue of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states (which informed subsequent council discussions on the mandate renewal of the UN–AU mission in Darfur).<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the situation in Sudan in June provided one of the clearest examples in 2019 of how South Africa is able and willing to adopt a firm and independent position, particularly against the P5 and other influential elected member states. Specifically, the country pushed back against pressure from Germany and the UK and prevented the UNSC from issuing a public statement before the AUPSC could meet and pronounce itself on political developments in Sudan. South Africa therefore managed to effectively utilise the AU's leverage over Sudan (given the continental body's powers to suspend



the country's membership) in order to directly inform how the UNSC responded to unfolding political developments in the country.

Coordination among the A3 has historically been weak and difficult to achieve, but South Africa largely succeeded in fostering a collective A3 position on Sudan. This was especially the case following the AUPSC's suspension of Sudan from the AU on 14 June, allowing South Africa to better forge a clear collective position which worked well in isolating Russian and Chinese opposition to the renewal of the UN's peacekeeping mission in Darfur later in the year. South Africa's role to this effect was particularly noteworthy in ensuring that the peacekeeping transition in Darfur did not negatively impact how the council responded to broader peace and security challenges stemming from political developments in the capital, Khartoum.

Coordination among the A3 has historically been weak and difficult to achieve

Beyond the case of Sudan, South Africa was also seen as particularly active in seeking out an A3 consensus on all council deliberations concerning South Sudan, the DRC, Libya and Western Sahara throughout this period. Specifically, the country was seen to play a consistent and proactive role in pushing forward collective positions on the future of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and in prioritising the need to overcome the political deadlock in South Sudan. Moreover, South Africa maintained consistent foreign policy positions on the international response to ongoing conflict in Libya, as well as what the country views as the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara – in which it voiced its concerns over the future of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these efforts, however, South Africa was less visible in collaborating with the other elected member states. Whether this was due specifically to the lack of a clear E10 champion, as seen in prior years, or simply due to the composition of the elected member states in 2019 is unclear. There

were, however, a few notable exceptions including South Africa's engagements on working methods, or the 9 May Arria-formula informal meeting on Israel's construction of settlements, convened jointly at the initiative of Indonesia, Kuwait and South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, two agenda items particularly contributed to a greater recognition of South Africa's independent foreign policy on the UNSC during this period. These were the country's active position during the April debate concerning sexual violence in conflict and the council's deliberations on political developments in Sudan, which came to a head in June.

In an open debate convened by Germany on 23 April entitled Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Conflict, South Africa joined Belgium, France and the UK in opposing requests made by the US to exclude specific language about sexual and reproductive health in a draft resolution.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the subsequent resolution that was passed<sup>20</sup> saw South Africa vote for the resolution with all other elected and permanent members, with the exception of Russia and China, both of which abstained. During the 23 April open debate, South Africa issued a strongly worded statement which underscored the country's broader commitment to human rights and its understanding that issues surrounding sexual violence in conflict and human rights are inextricably interlinked, distancing itself from positions pursued by Russia, China and the US (see box 4).<sup>21</sup>

### Part 3: Clarifying priorities and defining a strategy for the council presidency

South Africa, prior to its October 2019 presidency month, had previously served as council president three times, twice during its 2007–08 term on the council, under Dumisani Kumalo, and once during its 2011–12 term, under Baso Sangqu.<sup>22</sup> Throughout these prior council presidencies, South Africa most notably prioritised the advancement of a closer and more meaningful UN–AU partnership, particularly at a UNSC to AUPSC (or 'council-to-council') level. This was achieved in large part through the country's championing of the landmark Resolution 1809 (2008), as well as Resolution 2033 (2012) in its following term.

The unanimous adoption of Resolution 1809 (2008) is regarded as a seminal moment that set in motion how the UN sought to enhance the predictability,



sustainability, and flexibility of financing regional organisations' peace operations, with respect to a given UN mandate. South Africa's central role in driving through the adoption of the resolution was focused on challenges facing the AU's peace and security architecture and the need for the UN to play a more substantive role to this effect. Resolution 2033 (2012) was similarly informed by the country's prioritisation of such issues, and expanded the scope of the evolving UN–AU partnership with respect to structural conflict prevention.

Prior to its October 2019 presidency month, South Africa had previously served as council president three times

In these two prior terms, however, South Africa did not sponsor any particular Arria-Formula meetings –

which require a Security Council member to call these informal gatherings – but during its current term, it has co-sponsored three such meetings, on: accountability for conflict-related sexual violence (February 2019); Israeli settlements (May 2019); and responding to the needs of refugees and displaced persons (June 2019) — the last of which was sponsored by the three elected African member states on the council.<sup>23</sup>

Despite initial planning since early 2019, the preparations for South Africa's October 2019 UNSC presidency became much more noticeable after June. This preparation was particularly heightened during and after holding a comprehensive six-month review of the country's performance on the UNSC carried out by DIRCO, which took place in late July 2019. As part of this review process, a department-wide review group discussed its performance and priorities, with a strong engagement with South African and New York-based civil society.

### Box 1: Why does the UNSC presidency matter?

The role of the president of the UNSC primarily concerns setting and managing the council's monthly agenda, as defined by its Provisional Rules of Procedure. These rules, based on Article 30 of the UN Charter, were adopted at the council's first meeting in 1946 and have since been amended 11 times.

Accordingly, the council president, through this agenda-setting role, is a central actor in the procedural functioning of the council, particularly as this relates to: the approval of the provisional monthly agenda (inclusive of standing council commitments); presiding over all council meetings; authorising and issuing presidential statements on behalf of the council's member states; and interacting with the media on behalf of the council. This procedural function does, however, naturally coincide with the national foreign policy priorities of the member state representative presiding over the council in any given month.

Based on rule 18 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure, the president of the UNSC rotates on a monthly basis among each council member state according to English alphabetical order. Each member state's permanent representative to the UN (should no

higher government official be present or available) then assumes the role of council president, while remaining the representative of their state on the council.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, this is seen, especially by the council's 10 elected member states, as a key opportunity not only to showcase their respective country's commitments to global multilateralism, but dually as a platform to clearly display their country's foreign policy priorities and positions.

Beyond these priorities which are reflected through the management of the council's monthly agenda, the council president has been increasingly expected to propose, sponsor, and convene various initiatives in line with key thematic foreign policy priorities, often based under a broader single 'theme' for the month. Generally, council presidents have sought to focus greater international attention, advance certain peace and security policy processes, and forge greater global consensus on key priorities by proposing and convening open debates, seeking out particular resolutions and statements, and sponsoring or co-sponsoring Arria-formula<sup>25</sup> meetings with other like-minded council members.

Managing a packed scheduled monthly agenda while simultaneously showcasing its foreign policy priorities required careful planning and an overarching strategy that sought to optimally utilise the country's resources across New York and Pretoria. Given that the country's October presidency month was scheduled in between the presidency months of two permanent member states, namely Russia (September 2019), and the UK (November 2019),<sup>26</sup> and followed almost immediately from the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, this was a critical opportunity for South Africa to reassert its place on the global stage and display its capability and willingness to take the lead on a number of pressing international peace and security concerns as a committed multilateral stakeholder and middle power.

One of the overriding constraints with South Africa's council presidency throughout the month of October was, however, the UNSC's already taxing pre-determined agenda items (primarily based on the reporting cycles of the UN's peace operations and special political missions) that left little leeway for the country to propose new thematic debates and pursue other related council outcomes. The busy schedule in October included, among others:<sup>27</sup>

- The adoption of resolutions renewing the mandates of UN missions in Abyei, Western Sahara and Darfur;
- Discussions on the UN's other peace operations in countries including the Central African Republic, the DRC, Mali and Western Sahara; and
- Discussions on various country-specific situations, primarily in the form of expert briefings and consultations, on countries including Burundi, Colombia, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

Beyond these pre-scheduled agenda items, South Africa largely sought to leave its mark on the council by calling for two debates in the first two weeks of October on 'Peace and Security in Africa: mobilising the youth towards silencing the guns by 2020' and 'Peace and Security in Africa: the centrality of preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and resolution'.<sup>28</sup>

The first two debates noted above were largely in line with South Africa's stated priorities focusing on peace and security issues relating to the continent,

particularly in terms of the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative. The first debate, which focused on advancing the YPS agenda, notably included the AU's youth envoy, Aya Chebbi, as an expert briefer. YPS is a fairly recent agenda item in the UNSC, with only two resolutions having been adopted since 2015. Sweden and Peru, recent champions of the agenda, finished their term in the UNSC respectively by the end of 2018 and 2019, which provided an opportunity for South Africa to advance this nascent thematic area that is gaining increasing traction, particularly within the framework of the AU's Agenda 2063.

Managing a packed scheduled monthly agenda while showcasing its foreign policy priorities required careful planning and an overarching strategy

The second debate focusing on preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution further situated pressing African peace and security issues on the council's agenda, with particular regard to the critical role of more meaningful UN partnerships with sub-regional organisations in addressing the root causes and structural drivers of conflict.

These were followed by a UNSC field visit to Juba, South Sudan, on 20 October in which South Africa served as a co-lead in concert with the US (which serves as the pen-holder on South Sudan in the council).<sup>29</sup> The joint visit illustrated the willingness of South Africa to work more closely with the US, and to developing a more constructive working relationship on peace and security issues of mutual concern.

The field visit to Juba, proposed by South Africa in light of the pre-scheduled annual joint consultative meeting between the UNSC and AUPSC in Addis Ababa, intended to affirm the council's support of the newly revitalised South Sudanese peace process. Importantly, South Africa played an active role in ensuring that the meeting between the UNSC and AUPSC would take place during its October presidency month, which may have otherwise been arranged for earlier in the year during the presidency month of a non-African UNSC member state.

While this visit did achieve its intended outcome, and further highlighted South Africa's prioritisation of the continent in the UNSC, a number of stakeholders have commented that the timing of the visit was challenging.

### The UNSC visit may have unintentionally complicated much needed agreement between Kiir and Machar

A number of observers indicated to the ISS that the UNSC visit may have unintentionally complicated much needed agreement between South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar, particularly on the formation of a unified army composed

of government and opposition forces. This was a notable sticking point particularly for Machar in the build-up towards the 12 November deadline for the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).<sup>30</sup>

Some observers indicated that the timing of the UNSC visit being so close to the 12 November deadline may have provided a space for the country's opposition to delay its commitment to the deadline, in order to potentially explore and exploit new opportunities stemming from its engagement with Council member states – and the US in particular.

The following three boxes detail the three most discernible South African interventions during its October 2019 council presidency month.

#### Box 2: UN–AU Relations: advancing South Africa's key legacy project

Immediately following the South Sudan field visit, South Africa led the UNSC at the pre-scheduled 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Consultative Meeting between the UNSC and AUPSC in Addis Ababa from 21 to 23 October. The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Consultative Meeting between the UNSC and AUPSC was a particular highlight, given the country's prior efforts in 2007–2008 and 2011–2012 in championing a more meaningful working relationship between the two councils.

South Africa prioritised this issue as the theme for its two council presidency months in March 2007 and April 2008. The latter of these followed a joint meeting between the UNSC and the AU PSC and led to the eventual unanimous adoption of UNSC Resolution 1809 (2008)<sup>31</sup> aimed at strengthening cooperation between the UN and regional organisations. Following this, South Africa, throughout its 2011–2012 term, further contributed to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2033 (2012).<sup>32</sup>

This expanded on Resolution 1809 (2008) by reaffirming the critical importance of strengthening the UN–AU strategic partnership, while requesting the secretary-general to conduct an analysis of lessons learned from joint UN–AU interventions in

Darfur and Somalia. In many ways, these efforts have now come full circle for South Africa as the direct outcomes of its prior efforts can be seen in the much more institutionalised working methods between the two councils, which now include the regularised annual consultative meeting that it led in October 2019.

The agenda of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Consultative Meeting primarily focused on the situation in Libya (where discussions surrounding the potential deployment of a joint UN–AU special envoy have been controversial), developments in South Sudan and the R-ARCSS deadline, as well as the implementation of the political agreement in the Central African Republic (CAR).

South Africa's role in leading the UNSC delegation was generally regarded as a positive one by a number of interviewed stakeholders. Concerns over delays in the release of a joint communiqué were raised, however, in light of the quick turnaround time achieved following the 12<sup>th</sup> annual meeting.

The expeditious release of these joint communiqués bolster the relevance of such council-to-council engagements by allowing key stakeholders to follow up on decisions and reference key outcomes.

### Box 3: Overcoming the deadlock over sustainable financial support for AU peace operations

Since 2015, the UN and the AU have been in discussions to ensure that future AU-led peace support operations (PSOs), authorised by the UNSC, receive sustainable and predictable funding.

The US, under the Obama administration, had been a key proponent in exploring the potential for the UN to provide such support and to co-finance AU-led PSOs through UN-assessed contributions. Under the current administration, however, the US has pushed for significant cost-cutting measures across the UN system, and this has filtered into its positions on all council matters that have budgetary implications on existing and future peace operations.

Unsurprisingly, the proposal to see AU-led PSOs co-financed according to a potential 25-75 funding split between the AU and UN respectively has faced increasing scrutiny and currently appears to be deadlocked with no resolution in sight.

Picking up from the 2015 AU decision in which member states agreed to self-finance 25% of the organisation's operational budget earmarked for peace and security activities by 2020, in December 2019, Ethiopia championed the adoption of a draft resolution that sought to secure a commitment from the UNSC and to advance the discussions. The draft was never tabled primarily due to opposition from the US which threatened the use of a veto.

Key sticking points in the negotiations centred on the compliance of AU-led PSOs to the UN's standards on transparency and accountability, concerns over how the proposed 25-75 funding split would work in practice, and various other issues relating to authority, oversight, and operational command.<sup>33</sup>

The negotiations ended on a bitter note, and cohesion among the A3 in particular suffered as

a result of divergent positions that were adopted once an alternative draft text was proposed by France.

When South Africa replaced Ethiopia on the council in 2019, this issue was largely expected to be a key priority for the country. Indeed, prior to the 2015 AU decision, South Africa had already shone a spotlight on the lack of flexible, predictable and sustainable resources for the AU to pursue its peace and security mandate when it championed the unanimous adoption of Resolution 1809 during its April 2008 presidency month. The country was therefore seen as a natural champion to advance and resolve the financing issue, and expectations were accordingly high throughout 2019.

By mid-2019, South Africa achieved some progress on reworking a new draft resolution by focusing on the prior sticking points raised by the US. The A3 permanent representatives visited Washington to seek greater buy-in, and the South African mission worked closely with the US Mission to the UN in New York.

By August 2019, however, after South Africa shared the draft with the AUPSC, the country received unanticipated opposition in pursuing the matter further on the UNSC. The AUPSC argued that more time was required to discuss specific issues.

Observers noted that the AUPSC position, largely led by Nigeria and Zimbabwe, was based in large part on uncertainty concerning the role of the reinigorated AU Peace Fund. Moreover, there were noticeable divisions over whether the fund would be used solely to fund PSOs (and the hence the 25% portion of the mooted 25-75 proposal to draw on UN-assessed contributions) or whether the fund should be used to cover broader AU peace and security activities including conflict prevention and mediation.



#### Box 4: Women, Peace and Security – THE priority

The preeminent highlight of South Africa's presidency month was, accordingly, the country's role in advancing the WPS agenda and championing the adoption of Resolution 2493 (2019). As stated by the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor:<sup>34</sup>

*'The main deliverable we sought and achieved during South Africa's presidency of the Security Council was the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2493 on Women, Peace and Security. The unanimity of the resolution was important as it served to rebuild consensus in the council on the WPS agenda. The WPS agenda, and especially its recommendations on the human rights of women, has been challenged by many delegations over the last few years. The fact that South Africa as the per-holder for Resolution 2493 steered through a strong consensus-based resolution strengthens the potential for increased accountability by member states for the implementation of all the resolutions that make up the WPS agenda.'*

The final unanimous adoption of the resolution did, however, come about as a result of a fraught negotiation process, in light of political dynamics among US, Russia, and China, which have not changed significantly since the difficult April resolution

on sexual violence in conflict.<sup>35</sup> The most pressing challenge encountered in the negotiation process primarily centred on language in the resolution that called for the 'full implementation' of the WPS agenda, which was seen by some council members as too ambiguous, given their respective political positions on any references to sexual and reproductive health rights.

South Africa's initiative to push through a new resolution on WPS was therefore seen as quite risky given the potential for the US in particular to oppose the resolution, backtrack on previously agreed-to language, and consequently impede the advancement of the WPS agenda. In spite of this, South Africa pushed it through and managed to achieve a unanimous adoption of the resolution while retaining the language speaking to the 'full implementation' of the agenda.

In hindsight, this can be seen as a particularly noteworthy achievement, in spite of the risks taken, given the prior abstentions from Russia and China during the April resolution on sexual violence in conflict. From the perspective of DIRCO, this was arguably seen as a capstone of the country's October council presidency month, and one of the country's standout foreign policy achievements of 2019.

#### Key trends and dynamics in 2019

The above description of South Africa's first year in the council provides an important entry point on what have been some of its key trends, challenges and opportunities. Key stakeholder interviews conducted in New York throughout 2019 reveal a general perception that South Africa adopted a visible and active role on the UNSC quite early into its current term, in spite of certain challenges, particularly through its calculated interventions in key council discussions relating to, for example women, peace and security, political developments in Venezuela, and the ongoing question of Palestine.

These issues, however, while not directly related to particular African peace and security issues are

nonetheless stated South African foreign policy priorities — and it is therefore not entirely surprising that the country was seen to be so active on these council discussions. South Africa's agency on other council files relating to the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as scheduled mandate renewal discussions and deliberations on reports from the UN secretary-general, have been more difficult to gauge and assess. In spite of this, there have been no major indications that the country had been either inconsistent in terms of its foreign policy principles, or substantively disengaged, from such files.

In 2019, South Africa was perceived as actively playing on its multiple identities, including its national, regional and continental interests. Being a member of the A3,

SADC, AU, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) all played a role in South Africa's positioning. While these multiple identities may lead to competing interests and priorities, it also often provided a good opportunity for South Africa to further legitimise and strengthen its positions in the council.

This section will go through the main trends and dynamics that characterised South Africa's term in the UNSC in 2019.

### **Regionalism – A lacklustre E10, and the rise of the A3**

Between 2015 and 2018 the council witnessed an increasingly well-coordinated and influential E10 grouping which served as a considerable counter-weight to the divisions that cut across the P5, as well as the increasingly polarised broader multilateral environment. Considering that sub-Saharan African issues had historically been less subjected to council division, the increasing discord over African agenda items especially in 2018 did have a significant impact on council dynamics and the environment in which South Africa joined the council in January 2019.

A number of interviewed key stakeholders in New York noted that in spite of the progress made, especially over the course of 2017 and 2018, to foster greater and more meaningful cooperation among the E10, a clear member state champion focused on driving this cohesion was currently lacking – especially since Sweden's exit from the UNSC at the end of 2018.

While other initiatives by elected members, such as Germany's role in driving through the 'Alliance for Multilateralism',<sup>36</sup> have focused on broader structural issues concerning the legitimacy of multilateral bodies such as the UNSC, there has been a noticeable absence of initiatives focused on strengthening E10 cohesion during South Africa's current term on the council. A notable exception concerned issues relating to working methods, in which the E10 remain unsurprisingly unified.

To some extent these dynamics explain a rise of regional approaches in the council in 2019, notably from Europe and Africa. While all European countries in the council in 2019 were from the European Union (EU), this often contributed to coherent joint positions from that region. Interestingly, this large EU caucus on the UNSC will likely whittle down considerably from a high

of five member states in early 2020 (including the UK) to only two or three member states in 2021, depending on the outcome of the June 2020 council election (Canada, Ireland and Norway are campaigning for two places in the council). EU member state representation, on the other hand, may change dramatically. The implications of this incoming configuration will likely impact regional approaches on the council and could potentially renew interest in the E10 to function with greater collective purpose.

The role of South Africa in bringing the A3 together in many occasions, as presented above, was also another sign of increased regional positioning within the council. The central role played by South Africa in bringing the A3 together, on developments in Sudan as well as during its October presidency month, are indicative examples. These efforts particularly contributed to enhancing perceptions of the value of a unified A3 grouping in pushing through common African interests.

The increasing discord over African agenda items had a significant impact on council dynamics

The rise of such regional groupings did not, however, extend and contribute towards a more coordinated and purposeful grouping of middle powers on the council over the course of 2019. Initially, many observers speculated on the potential for countries such as South Africa, Indonesia, and Vietnam (which joined in 2020) to play a defined collective role in influencing council outcomes. This was based primarily on perceptions of shared political interests based on each country's respective positions as regional and middle powers. In spite of this, however, such a grouping largely failed to take off and live up to its potential given the divergent approaches pursued by such countries – as well as their respective willingness to take calculated risks to influence council outcomes.

### **Taking risks: swinging across entrenched council divisions**

During the first few months there was the impression that South Africa was naturally gravitating towards positions aligned to Russia and China (with Venezuela being a standout example). The following months clearly

illustrated South Africa's ability to effectively swing across the council's entrenched divisions, based on the country's own nuanced foreign policy positions and issue-specific interests. The country thus underscored its ability to take a principled stand, with little concern for what other council members would perceive as controversial.

South Africa seemed to have developed more nuanced positions, neither aligning directly to Russia and China or with France, the UK and the US

In the first three months, some feared how independent South Africa's position in the council would be, particularly following council deliberations concerning developments in Venezuela and the DRC. In subsequent months, South Africa seemed to have developed more nuanced positions, neither aligning directly to Russia and China or with France, the UK and the US. South Africa's explanation of its vote following the April debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict (in the context of the WPS agenda) and the June deliberations on Sudan are clear indicators of the nuanced direction South Africa would take in the council. This swinging position showed an element of independence in South Africa's role in the council, an issue which became further apparent during deliberations on political developments in Sudan later in the year.

### Lessons learned: the importance of public diplomacy

One of the main criticisms for South Africa's previous roles in the UN Security Council was that there were few attempts to engage with the broader South African society.

One of the most discernible lessons learned by South Africa, based on its previous terms on the UNSC, was the willingness and capability of DIRCO and the country's diplomats in New York to more regularly communicate with local and international media, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. These efforts were particularly noticeable across the government's various social media platforms, as well as the openness of various DIRCO officials to substantively engage with the public on the country's various positions adopted and defended on the UNSC.

In spite of these efforts, however, various stakeholders across New York and Pretoria noted that DIRCO could have better articulated certain issues relating to the country's overall strategy and key priorities on the council. In particular, there appeared to be a mismatch of stated priorities on a number of occasions between different officials in New York or Pretoria providing statements to the media.

Additionally, there have been persistent perceptions among key stakeholders in New York that while South Africa would present certain issues as priorities, these did not always materialise in specific interventions or active engagements in order to advance its agenda in the council.



DIRCO AND SOUTH AFRICA'S DIPLOMATS IN NEW YORK ARE MORE WILLING AND ABLE TO REGULARLY COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

## Expectations and recommendations for 2020

The environment in which South Africa is working in 2020 will have a number of similarities to what the country faced in 2019. Political divides among the P5 will likely remain, leading to increasing difficulties in achieving consensus on current and emerging global peace and security challenges. The Middle East and North Africa in particular will likely take centre stage as the most divisive UNSC files throughout the year, and, as of February 2020, have already led to serious disputes. As noted by the International Crisis Group, the first two months of 2020 have already witnessed the P5 'repeatedly over humanitarian aid to Syria, to the United States killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in Iraq, and the war in Libya'.<sup>37</sup>

Part of the reasons for such challenges reflect regional geostrategic priorities. While Libya is an important priority for South Africa, both Niger and Tunisia (which replaced Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in January 2020) maintain much more direct interests in the outcomes of the Libyan conflict.

Political divides among the P5 will likely remain, leading to increasing difficulties in achieving consensus on global peace and security challenges

This is due in part to the proximity of both countries to the broader belt of conflict that runs through the Sahel. Thus, their positions will not be based primarily on continental solidarity, but also with regard to the very real direct impact council decisions on Libya may have on their own national security. The different composition of the A3 in 2020 will thus likely play a defining role in determining how different the P5 and E10 approach to African UNSC files will be compared to 2019.

Certainly internal dynamics in South Africa and within other council members will continue impacting the approaches adopted by member states in the council. South Africa, while arguably in a more stable situation than in previous years, still faces tremendous domestic political and economic challenges. The country will therefore have to carefully manage how it balances its international multilateral commitments against the backdrop of public sentiment that demands the focus and attention of senior government officials towards domestic issues. While economic growth and development, trade, infrastructure and service delivery will undoubtedly remain the primary focus of the South African government in 2020, it will need to better frame its commitment to international peace and security.

Moreover, it will need to much more effectively justify to the public why its multilateral appointments and obligations are of similar importance to advance the country's national interests. Again, the role of public diplomacy will be absolutely vital for DIRCO and the Presidency throughout 2020, in order to illustrate the necessity of a focused foreign policy and commitment to multilateralism even during times of considerable domestic strife.



SOUTH AFRICA STILL  
FACES TREMENDOUS  
DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND  
ECONOMIC CHALLENGES



In addition, based on the country's varied internal lobby groups and public interest organisations, it is expected that the country will run into some difficulty in expeditiously putting forward more controversial positions, especially as these relate to the implementation of agreed-to ANC foreign policy priorities. This will probably mean that some of the issue areas most prioritised by ideologues within the ruling party, such as Western Sahara, Palestine and even Venezuela will likely remain high on the country's foreign policy agenda.

Domestic political developments in the US will also significantly impact the work of the UNSC throughout 2020. Considering that elections will be held in the second half of 2020, this will certainly influence how other countries perceive the US, and may signal a potential change on certain foreign policy priorities that will filter into its decisions on the UNSC.

The following bullet points summarise five targeted recommendations to South African actors, namely the Presidency, DIRCO and the South African Permanent Mission to the UN:

### **1. Leveraging its role as AU chair to strengthen UN-AU relations**

Considering that South Africa assumed the position of AU chair, for a period of one year, on 9 February 2020, there is a considerable expectation by many international actors concerning the role the country will play in advancing a more meaningful UN-AU partnership on peace and security. Although the role of the AU chair is historically largely symbolic and limited in terms of what the position can tangibly achieve, there does exist some room for manoeuvre in driving through new initiatives and shining a spotlight on issues that may require greater global attention and buy-in.

Importantly, South Africa's current role as AU chair comes at a time in which the position is understood as a significant and influential appointment, given the roles played by Rwanda and Egypt in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Prioritising issues related to the use of the AU Peace Fund, and seeking out a collective AU position on the mooted 25-75 AU-UN financing proposal, would particularly go a long way in helping the country leave its mark on the AU and UNSC in 2020.

Presiding as chair over the AU can also provide South Africa with opportunities to further advance the theme

of Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development. It is therefore recommended that South Africa more actively incorporate language and include key conceptual references to the Silencing the Guns initiative within its deliberations on country-specific files on the council. This includes, potentially, advancing UNSC Resolution 2457 (2019), which dealt with Silencing the Guns.

The annual consultation between the UNSC and the AUPSC, to be held between May and October 2020, will also be a critical component of advancing a stronger and more meaningful relationship between the UN and the AU. South Africa, as the AU chair, should seek to identify more effective ways of ensuring faster decisions on the outcomes of the meeting while proposing better mechanisms to assist member states from both the UNSC and AUPSC to follow up, track decisions, and more easily cross-reference outcomes of the meeting in their subsequent engagements.

### **2. A continuous push to bring the A3 together**

While there has been a visible effort towards developing joint positions, especially in formal statements, the continued use of joint A3 statements would be welcomed as a way to demonstrate unity among A3 members. Moreover, seeking out collective A3 positions and statements in unofficial fora and other gatherings may significantly bolster the influence and political clout of the grouping.

South Africa's current role as AU chair comes at a time when the position is viewed as significant

Therefore, South African efforts to find common ground among potentially divergent positions between itself, Tunisia and Niger will be of essential importance. It is clear that no regional blocs in the UNSC have the ability to always present common positions, but certainly when possible it shows a much stronger argument within the Council that is harder to break.

Moreover, a continuation of efforts from last year in which the A3 grouping sought to serve as a more effective bridge between the UNSC and AUPSC, by referencing the position of the AU in key UNSC debates, ought to be strengthened throughout 2020. Of particular interest is

the fact that Niger will hold the presidency in September 2020, South Africa in December 2020 and Tunisia in January 2021. The fact that the A3 will have their presidencies so close together means that, if working together, they can ensure a consistent dealing by the council on African issues by coordinating the agenda and common approaches.

In addition, there are already positive indications that South Africa, and the A3 more broadly, will seek to work more closely with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), as evidenced in a recent briefing on the CAR in which Niger provided a statement on behalf of the A3 and SVG.<sup>38</sup> SVG will hold the presidency in November, increasing possibilities for coordination of the A3 + SVG in the period of September 2020–January 2021.

### South Africa can use the working group in bringing cutting edge discussions to the UNSC

South Africa should also continue engaging with and strengthening the role of the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN. This should assist in using the AU's convening power and support in building further consensus at the A3 level as well as building trust among the rest of the UN African group.

South Africa has the opportunity to convene the African group through more pro-active use of the ad hoc working group on conflict resolution and prevention in Africa. Historically, the working group had little influence in the wider debates in the UNSC, except in the important role of coordinating the council-to-council biannual visits. Besides hosting a number of meetings in the group, South Africa can further make use of the working group in bringing cutting edge discussions to the UNSC as well as harmonising positions from the A3.

### 3. Careful preparations for the December 2020 SC presidency

Some E10 members try to do too much during their presidency, and this was possibly the case with South Africa in October 2019. December 2020 will therefore be a tricky month for the country to preside over the UNSC, given that it is the last month of its current term on the council. Therefore, it has to balance its own priorities with the number of debates that will already

be scheduled, including on mandate renewals and secretary-general reports.

While South Africa's margin of manoeuvre to fully set the agenda is limited, using the presidency month to specifically target issues that are in line with its broader priorities is key. This would allow the country to see its presidency month as a stepping stone to longer-term priorities and creating a legacy after it leaves the council. Moreover, South Africa would do well in applying some of the lessons of its predecessor, Ethiopia's, council presidency month in December 2018.

South Africa should note that the role it plays during its last month on the council, in terms of what new resolution or initiatives it may seek to champion, may drastically affect the cohesion and working relationship of different council member states, including the A3. The country should therefore remain cognisant that pushing for any potentially controversial or unrealistic initiatives could have the effect of undermining the role of its successor joining the council in January 2021, and thereby potentially undermine ongoing efforts of the A3 to champion common African peace and security priorities on the UNSC.

### 4. Early engagements with other council members on its WPS priorities

From its October 2019 presidency and subsequent statements, it is clear that WPS was elevated to one of the most significant priorities of the country in its multilateral arrangements. Therefore, there are heightened expectations for South Africa to champion this agenda in 2020.

Considering that 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325, it is expected that increased attention will be given to the issue this year.

Closely liaising with other WPS champions in the council, namely the UK and Germany, would be a wise move in order to potentially define joint strategies that can benefit the agenda as a whole. Close interactions with the US will also be critical. Considering the US often has previously directly and indirectly indicated its opposition to the inclusion of language on sexual and reproductive rights (primarily due to it viewing this issue as a domestic policy concern) in council resolutions concerning the WPS agenda, South Africa should be extra careful in proposing any new text to any future resolution. Specifically, the country should put forward

its position through text that strikes a balance between substantively advancing the agenda, while not compromising to the point that it opens up the possibility of other member states backtracking on previously agreed-to language and obligations.

The country has already played a central role in enhancing a more substantive and meaningful UN–AU partnership on peace and security

Similarly, South Africa should aim to leverage its relatively good relationship with Russia, which will serve as council president in October 2020. Given that this month is traditionally viewed as a critical month to advance discussion on the WPS agenda, South Africa should seek to play a proactive role in seeking out greater Russian buy-in and support over key historical sticking points in the agenda which it has previously opposed.

## 5. Coordinating positions with the new 2021 A3 member

The elections for new incoming council member states in June 2020 will also be important for South Africa. While African member states usually don't engage in open campaigning, the East African group has witnessed unusual competition between two African members since the second half of 2019. Specifically, Djibouti and Kenya are both openly campaigning to replace South Africa on the council in 2021, something that is very rare given the largely institutionalised manner in which the AU Summit ordinarily endorses its member states for terms on the UNSC based on regional composition.

In this regard, South Africa should further engage with both Kenya and Djibouti in ensuring that whichever country wins will be able to continue pursuing common continental views and goals in the council. Chief among these could be the continuation of strengthening the UN–AU partnership for peace and security, resolving the financing deadlock around the potential use of UN-assessed contributions to co-finance AU-led PSOs, and strengthening the role of the A3 as a bridge between the AUPSC and UNSC.

## Conclusion

2019 was a year filled with a number of high points, as well as persistent challenges, as South Africa grappled with the first year of its now third term as an elected member of the UNSC. Moving forward, South African diplomats across New York and Pretoria would do well to recognise the need to lay the foundations for a common legacy that its successor and the reconfigured 2021 A3 could pick up on and advance when it leaves the council at the end of this year.

The country has already played a central role in enhancing a more substantive and meaningful UN–AU partnership on peace and security. This is something that it is expected to further strengthen over the remaining months in 2020. Given the confluence of the country's role as AU chair in 2020, the AU's



2020 MARKS THE 20<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF  
RESOLUTION 1325

current theme of Silencing the Guns, and the country's final year of its current term on the UNSC, South Africa is well positioned to drive through a necessary international consensus on key issues impeding the fulfilment of the AU's peace and security mandate, and what UN actors and member states could do better in supporting the resolution of conflicts across the continent.

On the other hand, South Africa will likely face increasing domestic scrutiny and pressure as these key international appointments coincide with a period of prolonged political instability, as well as deep and pervasive economic challenges. South Africa's appointments at the AU and UNSC in 2020 will inevitably be seen by many frustrated local stakeholders as an unnecessary draw on the resources and time from the government when it could be more focused on addressing domestic matters.

The country will therefore need to maintain the positive steps it has taken over the course of 2019 to prioritise public diplomacy, in order to rightly justify why its ongoing efforts on the UNSC in 2020 are indeed critical in advancing its national interests.

South Africa has previously dealt with these issues, particularly during its 2011–2012 term on the council.

While domestic pressures were perhaps somewhat less pronounced during that period, the country does benefit from its considerable prior experience in terms of managing such international engagements against the backdrop of a pressing domestic agenda.

South Africa is well positioned to drive through international consensus on key issues

Moving forward, South Africa will need to optimally use its remaining term on the UNSC to support its broader push towards achieving the kind of renewal and reinvigoration being pursued by the country's current political administration. By seeking to shore up international respect for its positions, willingness, and the capability to take the lead on key global peace and security issues, South Africa could well restore its once deep reserves of political capital on the world stage. Whether it will manage to achieve this remains to be seen, but given the confluence of its other international appointments in 2020, the country is indeed well positioned to make tangible and visible gains.



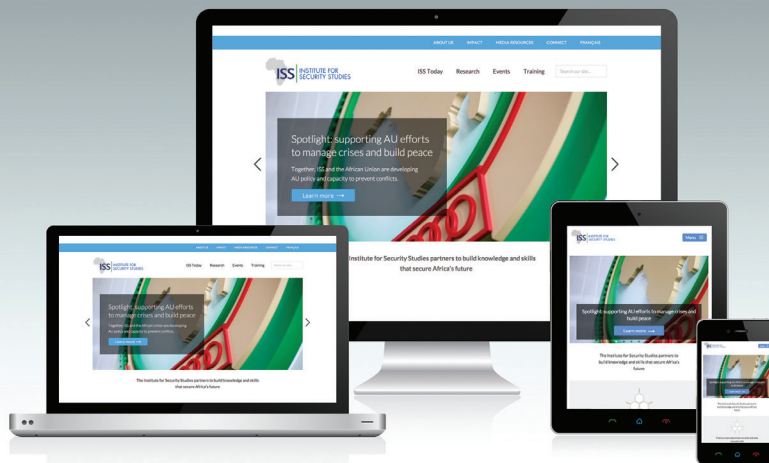
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