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Rejoining the high table

South Africa and the UN Security Council

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On 8 June 2018, South Africa was elected for the third time as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, for the period 2019 to 2020. The South African government now has the opportunity to develop a strategy that will guide the country's actions in the Security Council. This report reflects on what South Africa can realistically expect to achieve in the Security Council, based on current trends of Council dynamics and expectations for the country.

Key findings

- South Africa is perceived to have been less visible in recent years in terms of peace and security matters at the UN.
- South Africa's membership of the UNSC (2019–2020) will be an opportunity to enhance the visibility of South Africa's new government foreign policy.
- During the last few years, the UNSC has seen a renewed divide, particularly among its five permanent members (the P5).
- Although African conflicts make up the majority of the issues discussed in the UNSC, they have not historically been central in its key political developments.
- South Africa will replace Ethiopia and join Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea as the three African members of the Council (A3).
- South Africa, as an important regional power, does not have the luxury that some smaller countries may have on being absent in critical issues, including Syria and Ukraine.
- South Africa, as one of Africa's leading powers, is expected to play a role in seeking coherence and common positions among the A3.
- There is the opportunity for a country like South Africa to take the lead in bringing women, peace and security issues to the core of the Council's decisions.
- South Africa is expected to play a leadership role on specific African issues discussed in the Council, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan.
- Key tests in terms of South Africa's membership will be how it brings practical solutions for strengthening relations between the UN and the African Union (AU), peacekeeping, conflict prevention and mediation.

Recommendations for South Africa

- Preparation and prioritisation – an early preparation process that clearly identifies focus areas and goals is essential for a successful term in the UNSC for South Africa, especially regarding its African priorities.
- Staffing – while the mission in New York is expected to increase in size, it is important to ensure there are enough well-qualified diplomats to cover the intensive Security Council agenda, focusing particularly on an effective division of labour. It is important also to beef up the capacity of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) in Pretoria and in South African embassies in other Council members' capitals.
- Management of expectations and communication – considering the high expectations for South Africa, clarity of its strategy and proactive communication of positions are crucial, including clarity of engagement with a wider community in New York and South Africa.
- Dealing with thematic areas – South Africa should be cautious of pursuing topics merely for the sake of visibility, and should strategically identify those where can maximise its expected results.
- Building legitimacy among other Council members – South Africa will be perceived as a critical African voice in the Council, especially in its first year. To forge its relationship with other Council members, it may use its own history and critical self-reflection as an asset to build legitimacy.

Introduction

Since being readmitted as a member of the UN in 1994, South Africa has had two terms as a non-permanent member of the Security Council – in 2007 to 2008 and 2011 to 2012. Despite causing some controversies in the UNSC, especially regarding its position on the Libyan crisis in 2011, serving those two terms as a member was seen as a vehicle for Pretoria to project its foreign-policy priorities globally and regionally.

On 8 June 2018, South Africa was elected for the third time as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, for the period 2019 to 2020. South Africa was the only candidate for the position, which is currently held by Ethiopia until the end of 2018. Considering it was endorsed at the 2018 AU summit as the sole African candidate, it was expected that South Africa's bid would be successful.

For the second half of 2018, DIRCO will develop the strategic priorities that will guide South Africa's role in the UNSC. In a briefing to Parliament on 14 March 2018, it was stated that its third term in the Council should 'be focused on making real term gains, building on the basis that was established by its previous term'.[1] South Africa will co-host, together with Ireland, the Mandela Peace Summit in September 2018, which is seen as an opportunity for South Africa to showcase its priorities in the Council before joining in January 2019. South Africa will start observing Security Council meetings in the last quarter of 2018.

Meanwhile, however, it is important to continue reflecting on how South Africa can strengthen preparations for its term in the Council. This report examines what South Africa can realistically expect to achieve in the UNSC, based on current Council dynamics, expectations for South Africa and its capacity to implement its strategy.

Methodology

This report is based on an assessment of current trends, challenges and opportunities in the Council, as well as expectations that stakeholders in New York have for South Africa's results-orientated role.

The research is also based on analysis of primary and secondary data on key trends and opportunities for South Africa in the UNSC. This data was triangulated with the information gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted in New York and Pretoria, in April and May 2018. Interviews were conducted with 24 stakeholders, including officials from various permanent missions to the UN, UN staff, and representatives from think tanks and academia.

During the interviews, member states, UN staff, experts and employees of civil-society organisations (CSOs) were asked to share their views on three main questions:

- What are the current dynamics within the UNSC and what is their impact for a new elective member?
- What is expected of South Africa, and how can these expectations be managed to deliver results?
- What results can South Africa realistically expect to achieve, and what are some recommendations to help achieve them?

To encourage an open exchange of information in the interviews, it was agreed with the interviewees that no direct attribution would be included in this report.

The report responds to these questions, and is structured in five sections. The sections are based on the assumption that although South Africa has had two terms in the Council in recent years, it needs to reconsider its responses and approaches in line with current Council dynamics, which are vastly different from the situation in 2011–2012 and 2007–2008.

The first section of the report provides a brief overview of the nature of South Africa's foreign policy and how it links to the UNSC. The second section analyses current major trends in the Council. Thirdly, the report examines certain important opportunities and challenges that South Africa may encounter in the Council and its respective subsidiary bodies. The fourth section looks at what South Africa can realistically expect to achieve in the UNSC. Finally, the report provides recommendations for South African stakeholders, in particular DIRCO in its upcoming role in the UNSC.

South African foreign policy and the UN

South Africa rejoined the UN in 1994, 20 years after having its membership suspended owing to global condemnation of apartheid. Since then, the UN has played an important role in the construction and expansion of South Africa's foreign-policy priorities, moving away from the isolationism that characterised the previous regime. South Africa has widely prioritised multilateral approaches as a means to achieve its national objectives, and increase its global and regional influence.[2]

Such approaches are aligned to broader foreign-policy principles that have been developed over the past 25 years. Such principles concern in particular the prioritisation of a rules-based system, whereby multilateral organisations, and in particular the UN, are seen as key vehicles to promote and maintain international peace and security, and to promote economic development. Such views have shaped South Africa's position regarding reform of the UN, including the UNSC, which proposes creating a more accountable institution that more fairly reflects global dynamics and balance of power.

South Africa's approach to peace, security and development in Africa is rooted in several pillars, including the country's history and transition to democracy, its own perception of its global position and domestic socio-economic considerations. South Africa has historically placed emphasis on its peace and security approaches to enhance its global presence and influence.

Given that African issues are a central tenet of the country's foreign policy, it is unsurprising that South Africa has emphasised the need to seek solutions to African conflicts. South Africa has advocated, since its post-apartheid return to multilateral organisations, that peace and security are key to ensuring long-term development and stability in Africa.[3] Examples of this stance were particularly evident from the late 1990s to the middle of the following decade, a period when the country engaged in several peace processes in the continent, including in the DRC and Burundi. In both these countries, South Africa provided direct bilateral support to the peace processes and contributed soldiers to multilateral UN peacekeeping operations.

In prioritising multilateral responses, South Africa has aimed at streamlining cooperation between the UN and regional organisations, especially since the creation of the AU in 2002. During both its terms in the Council, South Africa actively sought to strengthen the relationship between the UN and the AU, focusing on how the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) could align their agendas and increase cooperation.

South Africa also played an important role in debates regarding rule of law, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and development, and issues related to women, peace and security. It chaired a number of UNSC subsidiary bodies, including ones concerned with conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, and on sanctions related to North Korea.

AFRICAN ISSUES ARE A CENTRAL TENET OF SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The African National Congress (ANC), and its ideological framework, has played an important role in formulating South Africa's views of the world and how the country develops its strategic partnerships. Karen Smith, a professor at the University of Cape Town, argues that although South Africa purportedly embodies liberal-democratic values, this ideology is offset by the ANC's anti-Western sentiment, an ideology that is rooted in the struggle against apartheid.[4]

Under President Zuma, the cornerstone of the country's foreign policy was its engagement with the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) group. While originally created with a strong focus on economic integration measures, BRICS became increasingly involved in peace and security discussions, including the decision in 2018 to establish a working group to discuss peacekeeping.

More broadly, there was growing criticism of the consistency and reach of South Africa's foreign-policy implementation during Zuma's administration.[5] Specific examples of the challenges in implementing its foreign policy principles in the past years can be seen in the public backlash following South Africa's problematic engagement in the Central African Republic; the controversial decision to not arrest the Sudanese President al-Bashir; the decision to withdraw from the International Criminal Court; its role in the conceptualisation and development of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC); and less visible support in the Burundian and DRC crises, once targeted countries for South Africa's foreign-policy initiatives.

> The Security Council will help bring South Africa back onto the global stage

The new non-permanent membership of the UNSC coincides with a period of political transition for South Africa. With Cyril Ramaphosa being appointed president in February 2018, there are indications that this membership term will be an important opportunity to profile the country in terms of how the president's foreign-policy priorities will be implemented.

During the 15 May 2018 budget vote in Parliament, the South African foreign minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, spoke of a 'new dawn' for South Africa.[6] The country was once 'a giant in the world and its reputation was well known, because of what the country represented'.[7] Sisulu also appointed a panel of experts and former senior officials to review the country's foreign policy, headed by former Deputy Minister of International Relations, Aziz Pahad.

In the context of such statements and approaches, it would be reasonable to expect that the Security Council will serve as part of a wider process of bringing South Africa back onto the global stage, including through its own visibility and leadership. Membership of the UNSC will not be the only vehicle for such visibility and leadership, however. There will also be other key forums, such as the AU, the Southern African Development Community, BRICS and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

In particular, the country's current political transition is seen by some interviewed as part of this research as an opportunity to further focus on issues related to good governance, including how it matters to broader sustainable development. If the country does focus on such issues, it could become more active in terms of emphasising the importance of ending impunity for serious crimes, including corruption.

The new term for South Africa also needs to be put in perspective regarding its past performance in the Council, especially as the country has received mixed reviews from analysts.[8] On the one hand, South Africa was an active member in supporting and enhancing UN–AU relations, and was able to lend increased prominence to the ad hoc working group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. On the other hand, the country was heavily criticised[9] for voting in favour of Resolution 1973, which authorised the no-fly zone in Libya, in March 2011.

South Africa's campaign for the Security Council seat (entitled 'Continuing the legacy: Working for a just and peaceful world') highlights the importance of renewing the country's once revered leadership in regional and global forums, particularly during the Mandela era. It provides an indication that the country will aim to build on Nelson Mandela's legacy and use the country's past moral authority to bring some values to the current rules-based system of multilateralism. The campaign focused on ensuring that the global governance system is fair, equitable and representative, focusing on rules-based approaches that can better respond to increasing global challenges.

South Africa's campaign emphasised:[10]

- Negotiated settlements as a key area for the UNSC.
- Increasing cooperation between the UN and the AU, particularly towards achieving the AU's Africa Agenda 2063 and its goals to silence the guns by 2020.
- The African Agenda,[11] including the continent's priorities in peace and security.
- Working in partnership to reform the UN system and improving working methods of the UNSC.

United Nations Security Council: Some key trends

The UNSC was created in 1945 as the main international organ mandated to maintain international peace and security. Almost 75 years later, the Council faces some of the biggest challenges in its history.

South Africa rejoins the Security Council at a time when the effectiveness of multilateralism, and in particular the role of the UNSC, is being questioned. On the one hand, UN Secretary General António Guterres is pushing for a wider review of critical UN tools for peace and security, including further calls for reform on peacekeeping, conflict prevention and sustaining peace approaches.

On the other hand, although important, such calls may stumble across the sharp divisions prevalent among Council members, particularly among its permanent members (the P5). This is particularly seen in the increasing lack of consensus between the so-called P3 – the United States, the United Kingdom and France – on the one hand, and Russia (and, to some extent, China) on the other. Security Council members, especially Russia and China, increasingly invoke the use of the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs as justification for the Council not to become involved in particular situations.

> There is an increasing lack of consensus among P5 members

An important aspect regards a shift in the approach of the United States in the last years. The current US administration, under President Trump and its permanent representative to the UN, Nikki Haley, has constantly criticised the UNSC for inefficiency and has pushed for reductions in its UN contributions to peace and security responses, including peacekeeping. In addition, the United States' withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council in June 2018 brings into question the role of the UNSC itself regarding protection of human rights.

Despite the existence of common areas and consensus among the P3 in many areas, divisions in the Council can also be seen between the three countries. This is evident, for instance, in the different positions they have adopted on the Iran nuclear deal. It also became clear in the negotiations for deployment of the G5 Sahel Force, a regional coalition aimed at conducting counterterrorism responses in the Sahel region. In these negotiations, France and the United States did not reach an agreement on the involvement of the UN in the force.[12] Although the G5 Sahel Force was approved, the UNSC did not approve funding from UN assessed contributions to its deployment.

Strategic and geopolitical negotiations have even deteriorated in areas that have historically enjoyed some form of consensus among Council members. Richard Gowan, a professor at Columbia University, explains that, 'trapped in a cycle of worsening distrust, […] recent negotiations over the small UN missions in Haiti and Western Sahara became unexpectedly heated, as China and Russia accused the United States and its allies of trying to "railroad" resolutions through the Council'.[13]

Figure 1: Make-up of the UNSC in 2019

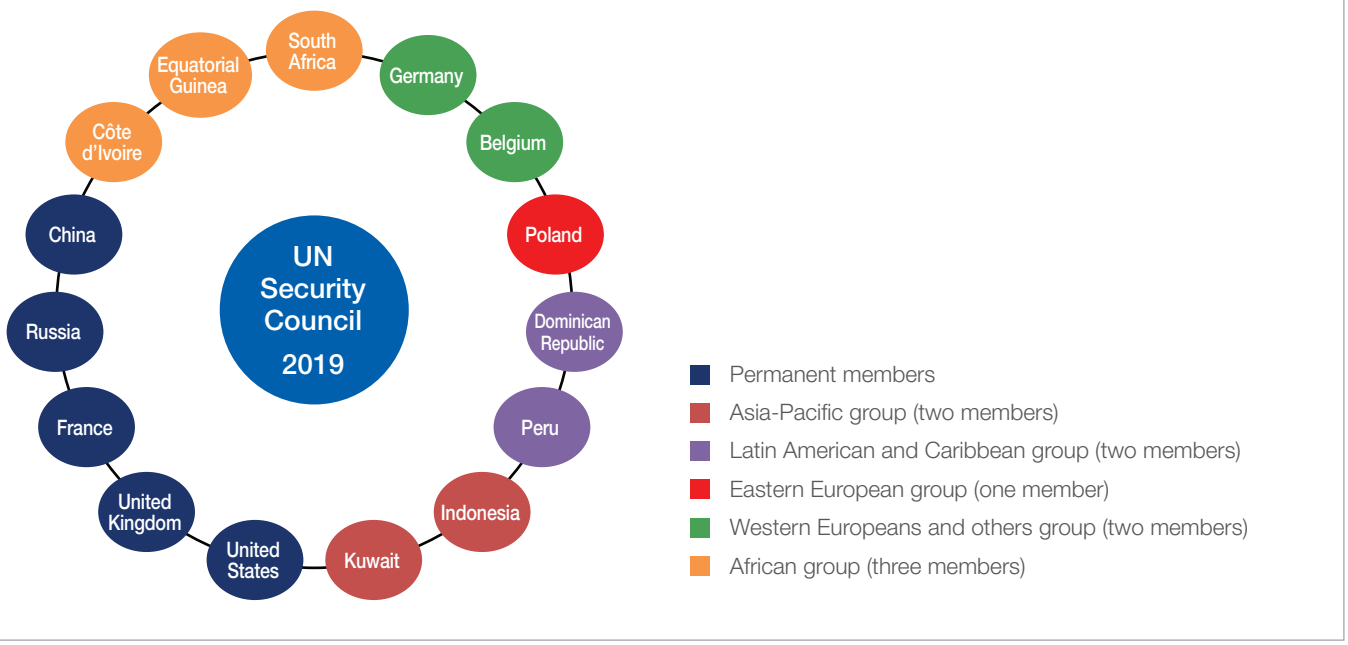


Figure 2: Country and regional issues related to Africa on the Council agenda

Source: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/country-regional-issues.php

Matters relating to Africa form the majority of the issues discussed in the Council, with 27 of the 53 country or regional issues on the Council agenda being in the continent.[14] Despite that, African issues have not been seen as central in the Council's key political decision making. Although P5 members are more interested in 'global strategic issues', such as the disputes over Iran and Syria, it is impossible to disassociate such issues from how Council members respond to issues in Africa. This is relevant for two reasons.

First, certain African conflicts are increasingly linked to issues that attract the attention of the P5, especially when these are related to terrorism and migration. Secondly, P5 members often use issues of less strategic importance as a way of gaining leverage on their priority areas.

One interviewee said that Council members, especially the P5, may see how a country positions itself in their spheres of interest, and contaminate outcomes in other areas.[15] For example, the United States has made it clear that it may punish countries that do not support its key positions in the UN, as was seen when it threatened to cut aid to countries over the Jerusalem vote.[16] Such views are seen to have potential spillover effects on other issues, including those that impinge on Africa. Moreover, China is also increasingly active in the UN, particularly as its position on human-rights issues is on the Council's agenda.

While the P5 dynamics are leading to increasing stagnation in the Council, the 10 non-permanent members of the Council (the elected 10 or E10) have opportunities for engagement. The P5 dynamics are leading to an impasse in the Council, but, at the same time, old alliances are fracturing, creating a space for the E10 to become more vocal and potentially bridge divides.

An example of this was seen with Sweden and Kuwait's lead on the issue of humanitarian access in Syria, a role that was previously played by Australia and Luxembourg.[17] In the case of resolutions on humanitarian access in Syria, one Council member who was interviewed said they were approved only because it was driven by a non-permanent member, and not one of the P5.

Sweden was often mentioned as an example of a country that is seeking to be more active in the Council, often aiming to bridge differences between the P5. However, such a bridging position often proves to be difficult. For instance, Gowan says that the P3 have complained that the Swedes are too keen to compromise with China and Russia for the sake of consensus.[18]

One permanent mission from an E10 member said that some resolutions are often seen as political statements that do not necessarily reflect the needed unity in the Council, as in the above-mentioned Jerusalem resolution. Such a view highlights the extent to which E10 members often need to adopt a pragmatic rather than a principles-based approach.

Although pragmatism and principles-based approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, Council members often need to make difficult decisions when voting on resolutions. South Africa is certainly not unaware of this dilemma, as was evident when it voted in favour of the no-fly zone resolution in Libya in 2011. The public backlash faced by South Africa following this[19] highlights the question of how decisions are taken and how they have an impact on South Africa's overall perceived role in the Council.

Divisions within the E10 regional groupings are also evident, and they cannot be said to be united. For instance, the three African countries in the Council (also referred to as the A3) are widely perceived as lacking common objectives, despite their attempts at coordinating their position.

As mentioned, the three African countries currently serving in the Council (in 2018) are Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea. In principle, there are several opportunities for further coordination among these member states. A diplomat at the Ethiopian Permanent Mission believes there is ample opportunity for the A3 member states: 'Every four months one of the three countries takes up a coordination role to make sure that, as far as possible, our positions in the Council are in line with previous agreements reached at AU level.'[20]

However, one interviewee noted that 'one can't take for granted that regional groups would push common objectives'.[21] There is also room for greater coherence between decisions arrived at by the AU (including its PSC) and those taken in the UNSC.

In July 2018, it was clear there were divisions when the three African members could not agree on a common position for the resolution that eventually imposed sanctions on South Sudan. Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour of sanctions; Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia abstained.

It was also evident that there were widespread differences in the performance of the A3 members. In 2018 Ethiopia played an important role and was seen as a very visible actor, particularly on issues related to peacekeeping operations and the Horn of Africa. Similar views were shared about the roles played previously in the Council by Senegal and Egypt.

South Africa replaces Ethiopia in 2019, joining the A3 group. It is expected that one West African and one North African country will replace the other two members in 2020, in accordance with the regional rotation of African member states in the Council. At the time of writing this report, the candidates for the two regions were still being considered, but there are indications that Ghana and Tunisia may bid to join South Africa in 2020.[22]

Expectations for South Africa

There is a great deal of expectation mounting over the role that South Africa will play in the UNSC. This section draws from information provided by stakeholders interviewed in New York and Pretoria during April and May 2018.

Visibility of South African efforts

The overriding impression is that South Africa has been less visible in the UN in recent years, including on matters relating to peace and security. One interviewee remarked that 'many African members are often willing, but unable to make a difference. We know South Africa is able; we now need to see whether it is willing to make a difference in the Council.'[23]

> There are many expectations for South Africa's future role in the UNSC

Many interviewees for this report had difficulty identifying specific areas where South Africa was still playing a leading or prominent role on peace and security issues, except for interactions regarding the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the DRC, the country's engagements with military advisers in New York and its role in steering discussions on security sector reform.

The Council provides an important platform for South Africa to project its positions in a coherent manner and increase its international visibility. In the UN General Assembly, for instance, decisions are often shadowed by large number of positions adopted by various regional groupings and alliances, such as the Non-Aligned Movement or the Group of 77 (a coalition of developing nations). It was said that its role in the Council affords South Africa an opportunity to voice more clearly and loudly its positions in a way that is often more difficult to achieve in the General Assembly.

South Africa and coherence among the A3

The expectation is that because South Africa is one of the continent's leading powers, it will play a leading role in seeking coherence within the A3. Leadership in the context of the UNSC would mean seeking coordinated responses, bringing parties together and identifying sustainable solutions among the A3 countries. Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea have limited experience and diplomatic clout in the Council. Hence, by replacing Ethiopia, South Africa is expected to become the most prominent African member in the Council.

Despite this anticipated leading role, it will require a concerted effort by South Africa. This could be pursued not only through consistent interaction among the A3 countries, but also by ensuring that, firstly, the wider African group in the UN is consulted more frequently and, secondly, that South Africa reflects the position of the AU in its own approaches and responses.

South Africa should work to reduce the inconsistencies of positions of countries in the AU and New York, including on country-specific issues. Although it will not be able to control how individual countries present their national positions, South Africa should have a strong voice when it comes to communicating decisions made in the PSC and AU summits.

Engaging with African crises

It is also evident that there is a strong desire to see South Africa taking a stronger leadership role in debates on the Great Lakes, the DRC and South Sudan. Here, South Africa has the advantage of having supported the peace process in the DRC and South Sudan, which enhances its political legitimacy in dealing with these conflicts in the Council.

Given the limited political progress made with the DRC conflict and uncertainty over whether presidential elections will be held in December 2018, South Africa will be the natural voice in the Council to urge engagement on the crisis. According to Stephanie Wolters of the ISS, developments in the DRC call for concrete and sustained action by African actors,[24] and this increases the burden of expectation facing South Africa to take visible steps to address the issue.

Although African issues weigh heavily on South Africa, as an important regional power the country does not have the luxury enjoyed by some smaller countries of being absent in the discussion of critical issues. Certain countries joining the Council focus on a very narrow agenda, mostly tied to their immediate regions or a small number of thematic issues. In interviews, however, it was said that South Africa, as an influential middle power, is expected to have a voice on global issues, even those outside of its realm of influence.

How South Africa develops its positions in the Council will, therefore, be followed very closely. Some of these, as in the case of the Jerusalem issue, are very clear to stakeholders in New York, as South Africa has historically presented consistent views on its position. In such cases, limited

changes are expected to be made to the stance taken by South Africa. However, in cases where South Africa has not actively engaged with, there is less clarity on what the country's position will be. It will therefore be important to get clarity on how South Africa will develop its own positions and sustain them in the case of strategic security issues, such as conflicts in Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

Thematic issues

It is evident that few thematic issues yield long-term, impactful results for the Security Council and that a common mistake made by E10 members has been to focus too much on thematic areas, as opposed to country-specific issues. Interviewees were divided on how they see the importance of thematic issues, and Gowan corroborates this, arguing that non-permanent members of the Council are generally judged on the impact they have on specific countries and specific crises, and not on thematic debates.[25] One interviewee said, however, that thematic debates nevertheless provide significant latitude to focus on a key issue, and shouldn't simply be dismissed as lacking influence.[26]

Case Study 1: UN–AU relations

Undoubtedly, the single thematic area that could benefit from South Africa's lead is the relationship between the UN and the AU – an issue that has assumed considerable importance in recent years, partially due to the leadership provided by South Africa in its previous terms in the Council. The role South Africa has already played in enhancing coordination between the two organisations increases the expectation for the role it will play on this matter during its 2019–2020 term.

It is evident that the relationship between the two has considerably improved in the past years, evidenced by the regular engagements between the UNSC and the AU PSC. However, there are further opportunities for the PSC and the UNSC to engage beyond their twice yearly meetings, which are often criticised for their failure to have decisions implemented and insufficient follow-up of communiqués.

Strategically, the relationship between the AU and the UN may have improved, but there is room for improvement in terms of operations. The contentious issue of financing AU operations remains unresolved, as there is no consensus on how to use UN contributions to African missions. Some expected that African members would be more active in showcasing current developments and opportunities for UNSC engagements regarding member state-led reforms at the AU. This was seen as an opportunity to put pressure on UN member states, particularly the P5 members, which have a shared responsibility to find solutions to African issues.

South Africa is considering joining the AU PSC in 2019. Therefore, it would be important for it to take a leading role in bridging the two security councils, and advocating for more regular meetings between them, with a clear focus on implementing decisions. This could help develop political processes and coordination of the two councils' day-to-day decisions. While achieving a common vision for both will remain a challenge, more regular interaction between them could help increase mutual understanding of opportunities and constraints for coordination.[27]

There is also a need to move away from deadlocks within the UN, particularly around the funding arrangements of AU peace support operations. The discussions around using UN assessed contribution funding has stalled in the last year, and there is little expectation that there will be increased funding from the UN for the AU's peace support operations. Therefore, considering there is increasing pressure to reduce the UN's peacekeeping budget, it will be imperative to identify how the UN and the AU can enhance their strategic and operational coordination.

One challenge here is the very limited role played by the AU liaison office in the UN. The office has a limited reach and impact in the UN. South Africa, as a powerful AU member state, could help by clarifying the mandate of the AU office to the UN. And the AU office must be empowered to provide linkage between the AU Commission and the UN Secretariat, as well as playing a far more dominant role in bringing African member states together in New York.

Women, peace and security

Women, peace and security is an area frequently mentioned as one where South Africa could make a strong contribution in the Council. Sweden, a country that is currently championing women, peace and security issues in the Council, is leaving at the end of 2018, so this may create a gap that could be filled as a key cross-cutting matter for discussion on the Council's agenda. It has been mooted that South Africa may well be in an ideal position to take the baton from Sweden here, not only because of the policy efforts it has made at gender mainstreaming, but also because of its historical engagement with the topic.

South Africa is seen worldwide as an important advocate for women, peace and security issues. For example, it has historically deployed a number of women peacekeepers to UN missions, including the current mission in the DRC. The country also has a high proportion of women in political positions, including in Parliament. And South Africans have been strategically placed in international organisations dealing with gender issues (the current executive director of UN Women is a South African national). These experiences will lend legitimacy to South Africa when discussing women, peace and security in the Council.

UN reforms

Broadly speaking, there is little expectation of progress on discussions regarding UNSC reform, but it is expected that South Africa will maintain its vocal role in advocating for and engaging on reforms of the UN Secretariat. South Africa is joining the Council in a year in which changes are expected to occur in the structure of the UN Secretariat, especially through the merger of departments, and with increasing focus on more effective implementation. It is not clear whether such changes will have the impact the organisation needs, but they will certainly affect the way in which the Council discusses its mandates and responds. Some are sceptical about the extent of the reforms that are currently being pushed by the UN secretary general.

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention

Conflict prevention has become more prominent within the UN System, but is still a challenging issue in the Security Council.[28] South Africa could help by bringing prevention initiatives to the fore, especially by applying its own experiences in mediation and peacebuilding. Mediation, in particular, has played an important role in South Africa's foreign-policy approach to securing peace and security in Africa, with South African mediators having been involved in countries such as Burundi, the DRC, Sudan and Madagascar. Highlighting the importance of giving strong support and assistance to mediators was seen as a key contribution by South Africa during Council discussions, especially sharing experiences of the challenges and opportunities it faces with its own mediators.

South Africa could help bring key peacebuilding issues onto the Council's agenda and highlight the interaction between the UNSC and the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Although South Africa has been commended for adding value on security-sector reform issues, it has been less active when it comes to broader issues of conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIATORS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN COUNTRIES SUCH AS BURUNDI, DRC, SUDAN AND MADAGASCAR

Case Study 2: Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping reform is an area where South Africa has the potential to provide meaningful inputs regarding practical ways of dealing with the challenges of implementing more effective peacekeeping operations.

Although South Africa remains generally active in peacekeeping operations, it is currently focused on its role in the FIB, in the DRC, a country where it has had a South African Force Commander for a number of years. South Africa was pivotal to making the FIB operational; the FIB is a first-ever 'offensive' UN combat force, which was approved within the realm of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (known as MONUSCO).

In recent years, the South African National Defence Force has been affected by a reduced budget, which poses a challenge to its ability to meet its mandate and sustain operations within South Africa, as well as its commitment to contributing personnel to peacekeeping missions. Although the defence force was allocated R46.8 billion in the 2017/18 national budget, representing an increase of just under R1.5 billion on the 2016/17 budget, in real terms.[29]

The funding deficit could also have affected the number of South African personnel deployed. In 2016, after the withdrawal of its troops from the UN mission in Darfur, South Africa reached its lowest levels of deployment since it started to participate in peacekeeping in the late 1990s. By April 2018, South Africa had a total of 1 213 uniformed personnel in peacekeeping missions, compared with the early and mid-2000s, when it had a contingent deployed in Burundi through the AU of around 1 600 troops.[30]

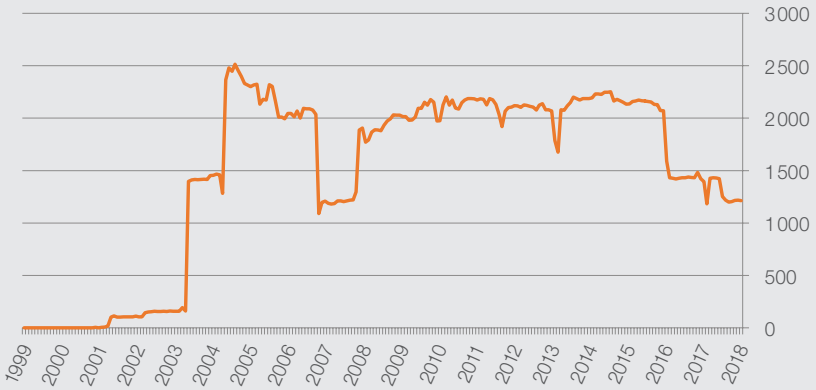
Figure 3 shows the numbers of South African peacekeepers deployed to UN missions since 1999.

One interviewee said that 'we tend to see African states discussing peacekeeping issues when it relates to their own roles as troop contributing countries (TCCs) or when it relates to UN–AU relations, but we see little African participation in broader conceptual and practical peacekeeping discussions'.[31]

South Africa is also perceived to be largely absent in critical peacekeeping debates at the UN, including in the C34.[32] Notable exceptions are South Africa's efforts towards the FIB, as well as facilitating coordinating interaction between UN member states' military advisers in New York, through the Military and Police Adviser Community.

It would be relevant to assess the role of both the UN and AU in emerging ad hoc security arrangements, which are coalition-based operations led by countries in a specific region. Examples of such arrangements are the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram and the above-mentioned G5 Sahel Force. In future deployments, both organisations should develop the appropriate policy guidelines, including issues related to funding, command and control, and doctrine, to clarify their roles and responsibilities, and their level of engagement and mutual support.[33]

Figure 3: Number of South African uniformed personnel deployed to UN missions



Source: UN Peacekeeping website, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data

Key considerations for South Africa

The following recommendations and scenarios for South Africa's upcoming role in the Security Council are drawn from points provided by stakeholders in New York.

South Africa's Security Council seat: Preparation and prioritisation

Countries often join the Council without a clear strategy, and lacking a set of goals that they want to achieve. Early preparation for its term and strategic clarity on goals that South Africa may want to achieve while in the Council are critical to help the country 'hit the ground running' by January 2019.

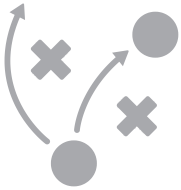
There is often the risk that countries spread themselves too thin, with too many issues pursued and insufficient capacity. Whereas countries like the United States and Russia may have a very large contingent of staff in their missions to the UN, dealing with every topic discussed, most countries don't have that luxury. The critical issue is that countries need to not only prioritise their issues, but also make their position known to other member states (and non-state actors), and consistently pursue it.

South Africa has recently been a member of the Council, so it would be valuable to able to draw from the expertise of those experienced South African diplomats who have previously worked in the Council. Countries joining the Council are now expected to observe the Security Council meetings four months before they formally take their seats. It is important therefore for South Africa to think carefully how it can make the most of its presence in the Council as an observer so as to prepare for its two-year membership.

Some countries use this time period as observers to train their diplomats, often in partnership with CSOs. One mission said that it used its observing period to train diplomats on the development of positions. They developed speaking notes for every meeting they attended to help diplomats become accustomed to the duties that would follow.

> E-10 countries often risk pursuing too many issues while having insufficient capacity

It will be important for South Africa to consider carefully what it intends to contribute in terms of particular country situations. Certainly, the key expectation for South Africa is that it will prioritise African issues, notably conflicts in the DRC, South Sudan and Somalia. In situations where South Africa has already established its foreign-policy position – such as in the cases of Palestine and Jerusalem – this should not be particularly challenging. On issues where it has not yet taken a stance, however, it may require further thinking, such as in the cases of Syria, Ukraine and North Korea.



COUNTRIES OFTEN JOIN THE SECURITY COUNCIL WITHOUT A CLEAR STRATEGY

In these discussions, South Africa will need to consider how it communicates its position clearly in the Council, and how it can ensure consistency between the positions it adopts on issues in the General Assembly and the UNSC. Some countries formulate their positions by designing a specific vision document for each of the countries and areas discussed in the Council before they join. Others develop standard operating procedures that help clarify their stance on particular issues, including internal decision-making and relationship with capital.

Staffing the permanent mission in New York

One interviewee observed that 'a smart and well-staffed E10 mission can really help a country to be successful in the Council'.[34] It is indeed clear that increasing the capacity of the mission will be critical to enabling South Africa to deal with the topics discussed in the Council.

Generally, countries that have joined the Council have tended to increase the number of diplomats at their missions in New York. South Africa currently has a delegation of around 22 staff in New York,[35] and this number is expected to increase to accommodate more staff dedicated exclusively to the UNSC. One delegation said that they increased their number of diplomats from four to 10, adding new staff who were almost exclusively dedicated to Security Council matters.[36]

Developing countries, however, tend to struggle to increase the personnel capacity of their missions, especially when constrained by modest budgets. In any case, some permanent missions have more leeway to select diplomats deployed to the UNSC, ensuring that despite capacity constraints, they are still able to bring the right expertise within their small missions.

Interviewees offered some recommendations. Missions frequently see their permanent and deputy representatives becoming extremely busy. This creates the need for a senior, capable diplomat playing the role of political coordinator to manage Council work. One E10 member said that countries need to be particularly careful of representation in Council subsidiary bodies, particularly ones related to sanctions regimes. This is because they often require substantive engagement and legal expertise across a dozen or so committees. Such work becomes even more demanding when the Country has a chairing role.

Capacity in Pretoria and capital cities of UNSC member states

South Africa has the advantage of an extensive diplomatic network. It will be able make use of this diplomatic presence in the capitals of countries on the Council's agenda as a means to provide inputs for its interventions and responses in the UNSC.

> A smart and well-staffed mission can help a successful Council term

Developing interventions is not just a bureaucratic exercise. Each intervention must reflect the official statement and position of South Africa, and this requires the appropriate approval processes not only within the mission, but also from Pretoria. And, beyond speech writing, diplomats will be required to follow issues on a daily basis, lobby delegates and provide substantive inputs when needed.

Although much attention goes to staffing the permanent mission in New York, many participants in this research said that South Africa should also consider how it enables its multilateral section in Pretoria to have increased capacity to support the demands created by its permanent mission in New York. Australia was cited as a good example of how to deal with such capacity issues – that country developed a UNSC task force in Canberra during its term on the Council. Approval processes often prove a challenge for many countries, especially when it comes to sensitive issues that need fast approval. Although not all countries are able to provide the mission with the freedom to make all decisions on its own, it is critical to have clear approval systems, and a strong team in the capital that can support the mission when needed.

It is also important that embassies understand the dynamics of the UNSC (and multilateral organs in general), so that they can provide timely and accurate information, and advocate for positions that are being pursued.

Division of labour within the mission

South Africa will need to staff the mission appropriately, in line with its national goals. And it is critical to establish a division of labour that enables individual diplomats to follow priority issues effectively.

Many interviewees spoke of their personal experience of a burdensome workload – the result of the intensive nature of Council activities. This burden, it was said, can create a feeling of being constantly overwhelmed and hamper engagement in certain discussions. Therefore, dividing work programmes among the mission's staff to ensure that diplomats are not overwhelmed by the sheer volume of tasks would be recommended. This is particularly important, as it helps ensure that diplomats are able to focus on key priority areas for the country.

Although countries like South Africa already participate in open debates in the Council, this level of participation involves just two to four interventions a month. When South Africa joins the Council, these will rise to around two interventions a day, equivalent to several hundred interventions in its two years in the Council. A former E10 diplomat explained that this burden increases significantly when a particular country has presidency of the Council, meaning good planning is critical (the presidency of the Council is held by each of the members for one month).

> It is important to find a human resources balance between New York and support in Pretoria

The division of labour in the mission therefore needs careful thought, and attempts should be made in particular to avoid diplomats trying to cover too many issues. While it may make sense to have individuals focusing on a limited number of issues, so that they can properly focus on priority areas for the country, at the same time it is important to not overload others with a burdensome number of topics.

Human resource capacity at the mission

Having large numbers of diplomats does not necessarily equate to effectiveness in the Council. However, the presence of highly qualified diplomats is seen as a great asset to countries in their discussions and negotiations, and this is particularly the case with the permanent representative. Generally, highly qualified, experienced diplomats, participants said, are able to successfully profile their countries and help them punch above their weight.

When asked which was more important, a system that supports the role of the permanent mission in New York or the capabilities of individual diplomats, one interviewee said: 'Having good diplomats will take you far in the UNSC. Having good diplomats who are not supported by a system is better than having a good system without good diplomats. … If you have good diplomats, you can be vocal and visible, even without a system.'[37]

Clearly, a key challenge with all Security Council missions is attaining the right balance of human resources between the mission in New York and diplomatic support back home in the capital city. It is often necessary to have strong human resources in New York, supported by good information and decision-making processes in place in the capital.

HAVING EXPERIENCED DIPLOMATS WILL TAKE A COUNTRY FAR IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Countries that were perceived as having been successful in the Council tended to have fielded a strong team composed of diplomats who have specific knowledge of the issues at hand and those who have multilateral experience. While some missions prioritised diplomats with multilateral experience, it was also seen to be important to have staff in New York with specialist knowledge and experience of specific countries discussed in the Council.

Managing expectations and communicating positions

There is much anticipation surrounding South Africa's term on the Council. Managing these expectations, while taking into account what the country aims to achieve, will be of critical importance. It will be particularly important to ensure that South Africa's position on issues is clear, and that there is no discrepancy between what the country expects to do and the external pressure for South Africa to engage in certain issues.

It will also have to maintain its visibility on the positions it adopts. Having a clear, coherent, well-communicated position on issues is a key way of managing expectations. As one interviewee said, 'South Africa needs to have a more targeted and faster communication approach, one that proactively gives out a coherent message on why the country takes certain positions.'[38] This can be achieved by using online forms of communication, like social media, and through civil-society engagement.

To cite one example, South Africa's vote in favour of the no-fly zone in Libya in 2011 put the country at odds with other African member states, particularly as the vote went against existing AU views. At the time, communicating the rationale for such a vote would have been helpful.

Capitalising on the visibility gained during a country's presence in the Council is also an important issue. Whereas some countries focus almost entirely on the period they are in the Council, other countries use their membership to enhance their ongoing influence in certain areas after they have left. Australia is a case in point. Together with Angola, Australia sponsored the 2016 resolution on sustaining peace, and since leaving the Council, Australia has continued to remain one of the most vocal advocates in this policy area.

Engaging with a wider community in New York is also seen as important. There is a vast community of think tanks, academia and CSOs based in New York, which directly and indirectly influence the dynamics of the UNSC. Engaging with such organisations is seen as important not only to provide vehicles and avenues for putting forward a particular country's message, but also to provide a space for advocating the country's positions.

Sweden, New Zealand and Uruguay were cited as good examples of countries that made good use of their term as members of the Council to make their policies more visible. This was achieved not only through their approaches and positions in the Council itself, but also by engaging with the broader New York community as a means to advance their views. Using the technical expertise of outside actors has often helped countries prepare and develop their substantive capacity to deal with specific topics.

A TARGETED COMMUNICATION APPROACH WILL ENSURE SOUTH AFRICA'S POSITION ON ISSUES IS CLEAR

Studies, like the one conducted for this report, have often been carried out on behalf of countries to help prepare national strategies.

Dealing with thematic areas

It will be critical for South Africa to not only pursue thematic topics for the sake of visibility, but also to ensure that it substantively deals with key matters on the Council. One interviewee said that 'thematic issues seem to be those that the P5 let the E10 focus on while they keep themselves busy with more important issues'.[39] Although such a claim may not be entirely accurate, it does reflect the fact the Council, and especially the E10, seems to spend too much time on thematic resolutions.

UN–AU relations and peacekeeping are two thematic areas where South Africa is expected to make a difference – but only if it pursues positions that seek to practically advance the discussions.

The role of subsidiary bodies was not seen by participants as a major contentious issue within the Council. Countries often use subsidiary bodies as an opportunity to pursue discussions that they are not able to raise within broader Council discussions. It is important to ensure that the mission has the capacity to follow all the issues in the bodies, as some require a great deal of administration.

One opportunity for South Africa lies in the Sub-Committee on Conflict Prevention in Africa. Ethiopia is chairing this subsidiary body in 2018 and is using the opportunity in the Council to discuss UN–AU relations, as well as some country issues. Engagements with subsidiary bodies are also complex, however. One former E10 diplomat said that decisions about which E10 members get to chair the subsidiary organs are largely made by the P5, although countries can express preferences. The same diplomat said that South Africa may have limited influence, and needs to be prepared for the reality that it may chair a subsidiary body (e.g. a particular sanctions regime) that it wasn't expecting.

It is seen as important to bring countries to the subsidiary bodies that are not necessarily on the agenda of the Council because it provides an important space for discussions on the nature of conflict prevention and when responses are required. It was said that bringing new countries to the agenda is a challenging issue, especially as it is often opposed by the countries in discussion themselves.

Such discussions are possible through strong lobbying and by maintaining clarity on goals. For instance, when the subsidiary body held discussions on Guinea-Bissau, they brought together not only the UNSC, but also the Peacebuilding Commission and the Economic Community of West African States.

Building legitimacy among other Council members

By highlighting African-led initiatives, South Africa may be able to bridge divides among the P5, especially by emphasising aspects of ownership of processes. The Council will be a strong medium for South Africa to showcase its own views and positions on Africa through its role as a critical voice of the A3 group.

South Africa's role in the continent and its own modern history (particularly the way in which it dealt with its transition to democracy) give the country a degree of legitimacy when proposing solutions in the Council. South Africa will co-host with Ireland the Mandela High Level Peace Summit in September 2018 in New York. This event will be a good opportunity for South Africa to provide a foretaste of what it has to offer in the Council, especially its legacy of a successful transition to democracy. At the time of writing this report, the approaches and outcomes for the summit were still being developed, but it is clear that South Africa could use the event to highlight its priorities before it joins the council the following year.

> UN–AU relations and peacekeeping are two areas where South Africa can influence debates

The low profile that South Africa has adopted in the UN in recent years has created some uncertainty over its relationship with more powerful countries, particularly the P5. And given that BRICS has been the priority area for South Africa's foreign-policy interests, its presence in the Council will mean that its alliances with Russia and China will come under scrutiny. One interviewee said that it will be important to see how South Africa shapes its relationship with the P5 members – whether it will play a bridging role, how it will deal with controversial issues and how it will manage the pressure that it will face.[40]

Using its presidency wisely

Countries tend to take advantage of their presidency month to showcase their key priorities and push for discussions that reflect their own areas of interest. South Africa also needs to use this opportunity to enhance its role on the Council.

The approach needs to be pragmatic, one that is aimed at securing support from the P5 to ensure political uptake for South Africa's interests. While taking a firm stance on important issues is critical, it is also important to avoid unnecessary deadlocks. Striking the right balance here is seen as one key aspect that can determine whether a country's mandate on the Council is a success.

Conclusion

The idea of a new dawn for South Africa, as envisioned by Minister Sisulu, will be a critical element in bringing South Africa back to the global stage during its next term in the Security Council. However, there will be enormous challenges for South Africa to achieve its goals of animating and revitalising its foreign policy. South Africa has many issues ahead to consider, including how it handles the broader dynamics of the Council, management of expectations, staffing of missions, and clarity on priorities and approaches.

The Security Council in 2019 and 2020 will serve as an important platform for South Africa to raise its international visibility and to show that its views on how multilateral and rules-based approaches can contribute effectively to its peace and security goals in the UN. Over the coming months, South Africa will have the opportunity to define a clear strategy that guides its engagement in the Security Council, ensuring that its approaches are practical and positive. To do so, the country will have to not only bring itself back into global discussions, but also to lead, with a capable team, a meaningful African contribution to the UNSC.

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