



RECOMMENDATIONS

- South Africa's noble intentions set out in the African Agenda can only be championed by other states when it seeks greater co-operation through solid partnerships across the continent and beyond.
- Pretoria should work closely with countries that share its vision around issues it seeks to champion (democracy, human rights and good governance). This may imply better knowledge about the intentions and strategic objectives of both African states and Western powers.
- South Africa's search for the consolidation of its continental role should be accompanied by robust engagements within the SADC region. Institutional adaptation within DIRCO with a clear upgrade of the SADC Chief Directorate to the level of Deputy Director General would signal strategic intent.
- If Africa is the centre of Pretoria's global affairs, Zuma should appoint a minister of African affairs as one of the deputies to the minister of DIRCO. This would signal to other African states that the country has elevated African issues to a higher institutional rank in its diplomacy.

South Africa's Diplomacy 20 Years On: Implementing the African Agenda around Core Values, Principles and Issues

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After 20 years of democracy, post-apartheid South Africa has been successfully reintegrated into international affairs. By virtue of the country's domestic order, specifically its democracy, human rights and globally integrated economy, South Africa has assumed leadership roles in various international platforms – the UN, African Union (AU) and the G-20. South Africa has used these avenues to advance Africa's voice and issues. However, lacunae exist in the manner in which it has sought to advance issues populated in the African Agenda. Although South Africa's domestic political rhetoric on human rights and democracy is lauded, its diplomatic actions have become less and less consistent with the core values that underwrite its foreign policy and constitution. Moreover, South Africa's 'lone-wolf' attitude is at odds with regional anchor states. Dealing with this twin deficit requires that Pretoria foster solid, issue-based partnerships with key African states in order to gain more legitimacy when it speaks on African concerns in global forums.

INTRODUCTION

On 24 May 2014, President Jacob Zuma delivered the acceptance speech for his second term. As is customary with speeches of that nature, national/local priorities triumphed, with the National Development Plan serving as a blueprint for the next five years. The scant nine lines that the speech dedicated to foreign policy captured the thrust of the country's external action in the coming years. With issues seemingly cast in order of priority, Zuma referred to a shared vision of 'a South Africa

that is a key promoter and contributor to sustainable development, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and peace within the continent'.² Marking obvious continuities with the African Agenda³ as the anchor of South Africa's international action, Zuma referred to policy that would continue to 'champion African growth, development and prosperity through supporting regional integration, intra-Africa trade and the development of infrastructure'.⁴ What could be inferred from Pretoria's Africa-centred policy is that even if participation in various multilateral institutions, including the UN, the G-20 and other special initiatives, are aimed at 'a fairer and more just world',⁵ Africa will remain the key preoccupation for South African diplomacy for the next five years.

This policy briefing argues that after 20 years of post-apartheid foreign policy, the transformational dimension, which has been the cornerstone of the country's multiple international diplomacies, has been modestly achieved. South Africa is a notable player in regional and multilateral platforms. When the country's voice was called upon, Pretoria did not shy away from its responsibilities. In some instances, the country availed itself to lead, notably in Africa by pushing its former Foreign Minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, to head the AU Commission in 2012. In other instances, South Africa has been requested by virtue of its domestic order, including its robust democracy and sizeable economy, to join crucial global forums such as the G-20 and BRICS. However, South Africa could lead more effectively in Africa by taking a firmer and more principled stance on the core values of human rights, democracy and good governance driving its foreign policy.

SOUTH AFRICA'S 'AFRICAN RESPONSIBILITY'

In fulfilling the African Agenda, South Africa's diplomacy does not begin on a blank page: a number of initiatives have gathered pace after 20 years of engagement and practice, including the past five years under Zuma's presidency. A few recent landmarks are helpful in setting the scene.

First, in January 2014, Zuma accepted an invitation from Angolan President Eduardo dos Santos, the new Chair of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to attend its summit as a

special guest, possibly signalling that South Africa had a role to play in shaping the destiny of the Great Lakes Region. This was particularly welcome in light of South Africa's less than honourable exit from the Central African Republic in April 2014.

Second, at the January 2014 22nd session of the Assembly of the AU, South Africa's presence was not merely routine: Zuma presented South Africa's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) report to the African Peer Review Forum, giving the APRM a new lease of life, which can only augur well in addressing the chronic governance challenges facing the continent. The South African delegation also succeeded in defending the proposal mooted by the country in May 2013 for the setting up of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). Despite initial scepticism, the multilateralisation of the ACIRC, including its acceptance by France at the December 2013 Elysée Summit on Peace and Security, places South African diplomats and military planners at the core of the debate about the best fit for an intermediate rapid response security infrastructure for the continent.

Third, South Africa's election to the AU Peace and Security Council for a two-year term – this after South Africa had served in 2010–2012 on the same body – clearly signals Pretoria's intention to appropriate peace and security issues on the continent.

Fourth, as Chair of the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative under the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the continent's key infrastructure development programme, Zuma presented, in January 2014, a progress report on the north-south corridor, which is crucial in connecting the continent and facilitating trade integration.

These diplomatic efforts are complemented by other initiatives, including the country's leading participation with 1 345 soldiers as part of the UN Force Intervention Brigade in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2013. Moreover, in January 2014 South Africa also participated in the High-Level International Meeting on the Conflict in Syria in Geneva at the invitation of the UN Secretary General. The development community is also watching with interest the growing role the country could play, as an emerging donor, in helping shape the development discourse through its participation in the UN Economic and Social Council, including South

Africa's multilateral initiatives such as co-hosting a special event on the post-Millennium Development Goals in New York in September 2013.

South Africa's diplomacy is also enhanced on the economic front, with the country being the continent's most sophisticated economy. Investments in Africa have increased from \$500 million in 2002 to \$2.9 billion in 2013.⁶ The Ernst and Young 'Africa by Numbers 2013/2014 Report' indicates that South Africa received 16.4% of Africa's total foreign direct investment (FDI) for new projects and 8% of capital invested since 2007.⁷ As Africa's leading investment destination by project activity, South Africa has seen robust compound growth of 22% in projects since 2007, with the resource sector attracting 40% of all capital investments and 11% of projects. South African banks are also playing an ever-increasing role in infrastructure roll-out on the continent.

The above is merely a fraction of Pretoria's diplomatic activity, with business activities acting as formal and informal conduits for advancing South Africa's image on the continent. These diplomacies attest to the country's increasingly confident role in continental and international affairs. Arguably, it was perhaps not the 'silly season' of the May 2014 elections that led the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, to proclaim in an article in *The New Age* that: 'Twenty years on, South Africa is no longer a skunk of the world, a pariah state, but is now at the centre stage as a valuable and respected global player.'⁸ Still, the litmus test for South Africa remains whether its 103 embassies/high commissions, 15 consulates and nine representative offices to international organisations can cope with an increasingly congested agenda and the expectations flowing from South Africa's appropriation of the African voice.

THE LIMITS OF THE 'HIPPOCRATIC OATH' APPROACH

As the lead foreign policy adviser and implementing agency, DIRCO's Strategic Plan 2013–2018 lists as its strategic goal '[to] protect, promote and consolidate South Africa's national interests and constitutionally entrenched values through targeted bilateral and multilateral engagements'.⁹ In its situational analysis, the Strategic Plan rightly takes cognisance of the

rapidly changing global context in which diplomacy operates.

The Strategic Plan attests to a country that has positioned its diplomatic engagements in the mould of an emerging middle power, and as the leading continental power and 'spokesperson' for Africa. The country's membership of the G-20 and BRICS, its continental and global initiatives, its search for a permanent seat on a potentially expanded UN Security Council and its active pursuit of a leadership role in institutions of global governance, have positioned its diplomacy as indispensable to the future of global governance. Behind this self-definition and search for a role is not only the force of ideas and norms the country purports to defend and put forward, but also its substantive contributions. These contributions include making available its good offices for mediation in African conflicts, participating in peace operations, and acting as Africa's leading contributor to the activities of the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) respectively.

The country has not always been effective in its diplomacy, with three issues coming to mind. First, it has not always been a trusted and effective interlocutor in African conflicts. A 2013 expert perceptions survey of South African foreign policy, undertaken by the South African Institute of International Affairs and conducted through in-depth interviews with 50 expert respondents in South Africa and Ethiopia, illustrates the declining stock of the country as a negotiator in conflicts.¹⁰ The majority of respondents listed South Africa's excessively solo ideological position on the 2010 elections in Côte d'Ivoire as having undermined its credibility as an interlocutor in conflicts.

Second, the country has flip-flopped when it comes to a consistent message that speaks to the values and norms that underpin its constitution and the White Paper on foreign policy, namely democracy, human rights and good governance. South Africa's voting record to date in the Human Rights Council has been obstructionist on questions of fundamental freedoms as opposed to progressive ones. Third, while South Africa lists the SADC region as a key policy priority, its diplomacy has not been geared toward strengthening the political and institutional mechanisms there.

Part of the reason why South Africa's voice on

democracy and human rights has been crowded out in recent years may be the congested nature of its diplomatic agenda. Taking a 'Hippocratic oath' approach, ie, pursuing a 'do no harm' rule with regard to the externalisation of its core foreign policy norms and values, has not been helpful. South Africa's foreign policy has over the years assumed a firefighting, problem-solving approach. Accompanying this part of the solution doctrine has been the attendant dominance of pragmatic solutions to issues at the expense of the moral suasion and normative textures that undergird the country's foreign policy.

Even when South Africa has been able to raise its voice and prestige in continental and international affairs through innovative proposals, its diplomacy struggles when it pursues an omni-balling foreign policy. As the country is entering the first year of the third decade of an independent foreign policy, it might be opportune to re-emphasise its essence and re-focus the implementation agenda around two or three core issues, with the programmatic activities reinforcing the domestic, the regional and the continental. As South Africa is growing in stature, the country should also engage confidently and transparently around core issues in order to build more acceptance of its place as *primus inter pares* on the African continent.

CONCLUSION

South Africa's exceptionalism in Africa does not necessarily lie in the size of its economy as the second largest on the continent and its being the most sophisticated and largest investor in Africa. Certainly, these material aspects do in part explain why the country is the African power with the most expansive diplomatic footprint on the continent and globally. However, South Africa is also attractive because of the core values that underpin its entry into international affairs. The main conundrum for South African policymakers is not whether the country should lead – this debate already seems to be closed. South Africa is expected to provide leadership on African issues.

Crucially, going forward (and with some

introspection), policymakers should think how the country should lead in Africa and on African issues globally. This would imply thinking about requisite partnerships, institutions, capacities and issues where South Africa's leadership is urgent. Rethinking foreign policy leadership is crucial if South Africa is to regain its place as a respected, trusted and influential activist for human rights, good governance and democracy in Africa.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari is a Senior Fellow in SAIIA's Foreign Policy Programme, and lectures part-time in international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- 2 The Presidency: Republic of South Africa, Address by His Excellency President Jacob Zuma on the occasion of his Inauguration as fifth President of the Republic of South Africa, Pretoria, 24 May 2014, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=17449>, accessed 25 May 2014.
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- 4 The Presidency, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Cape Times*, 'Full text of President Zuma's SONA 2014', <http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/full-text-of-president-zuma-s-sona-1.1704798#.U9JLbSgwLww>, accessed 18 June 2014.
- 7 EY (Ernst and Young), *Africa by Numbers Report 2013/2014: Assessing Risk and Opportunity in Africa*, EY, 2013.
- 8 Nkoana-Mashabane M, 'SA is now a respected global player – SA moves in the big leagues – because it can', *The New Age*, 21 February 2014.
- 9 DIRCO, Vote 5: Annual Report 2012–2013.
- 10 Hengari AT & A Lalbahadur, 'Expert perceptions of South Africa's foreign policy: Views from Pretoria and Addis Ababa', presentation delivered at the DIRCO Policy Research Analysis Unit, 14 November 2014.

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