



South African Foreign Policy and the UN Security Council: Assessing its Impact on the African Peace and Security Architecture

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Africa's two terms – 2007–2008 and 2011–2012 – as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) has received limited scholarly attention.¹ And yet this is a period that saw South African foreign policy assume a truly global stature, weighing in on issues as significant as human rights in Myanmar and crises as challenging as humanitarian intervention in Libya and Syria. The controversy that accompanied the positions it adopted gave rise to a sharp critique of South African foreign policy as fundamentally hypocritical and even confused.² While the South African government's response to the issues that found their way onto the UNSC's agenda is one way of assessing South Africa's newly globalised foreign policy, the longer-term structural initiatives in peace and security put forward during that period are arguably a better source of understanding. In particular, South Africa's part

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in promoting an enhanced role for regional organisations in provisions for regional security management is not recognised sufficiently, for both its contribution to strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and, arguably, its longer-term impact on global approaches to regional security dilemmas.

This policy insights paper examines the globalisation of South African foreign policy through its two-term tenure on the UNSC, focusing on its agenda for the promotion of peace and security in Africa. This agenda, which strengthened formal ties between the UNSC and the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC), was centred upon a revision of the relationship between regional organisations and the UN, as outlined in Chapter VIII and its expansion into the arena of security issues. It concludes with an analysis of the wider implications of these developments for the evolving capacity of APSA and the promulgation of new norms within this changing global security context.

SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA FOR THE UNSC

Having been approached by the organisation numerous times since 1994, the South African government only agreed to put its name forward as a candidate for non-permanent membership of the UNSC in 2007.³ The essence of South Africa's approach to its tenure in office was captured by the comments of then-foreign minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in a report reviewing the country's activities after its term had expired:⁴

South Africa was particularly instrumental in helping revitalise the debate on the relationship between the United Nations and regional organisations in terms of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

The focus on African peace and security issues was derived from a growing recognition within government circles of the disjuncture between the AU's aspirations and its actual capacity to engage effectively with the international community to garner the political support and resources needed to address regional security crises. Coupled with this is the fact that approximately 70% of all issues put before the UNSC involve Africa.⁵ This was most vividly brought home to Pretoria with its longstanding engagement with the Burundi peace process and the failure of the UNSC to provide the expected support. Specifically, South African government expectations were that the Nelson Mandela-led mediation that had culminated in the Arusha Agreement in August 2000 would be followed by a UN-mandated and -supported peacekeeping operation. These proved to be misplaced.⁶ Subsequent events in Darfur, where the AU organised

its own underfinanced and logistically inadequate peacekeeping operation in 2004, further demonstrated the pressing need to galvanise international support and resources to carry out its missions.

All of these measures promoted by South Africa were framed within the context of a desire to build upon the relatively open-ended Chapter VIII provisions for regional organisations to participate in ‘the maintenance of international peace and security’ as long as it was consistent with the UN’s purposes and principles and, in cases of enforcement, authorised by the UNSC.⁷ Calls for closer collaboration between the AU and the UNSC were a key outcome of the 2005 UN Summit, whose overarching reformist ambitions for the UN system were largely thwarted but nonetheless able to introduce some innovations.⁸ Support for the strengthening of the AU’s newly established APSA was provided for by the UN and AU’s Ten-year Capacity-Building Programme for the AU, created in 2006. APSA consists of a five-pronged approach that includes the AU Commission, the African Standby Force, the Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise and the Peace Fund.

Despite these laudable efforts, there was a danger that these measures would stagnate without focused and concerted African leadership. No longer willing to remain on the margins of the debate, the South African government sounded out the possibility of a non-permanent seat on the UNSC in the next term and received overwhelming support from the UN General Assembly.⁹

IMPLEMENTING SOUTH AFRICAN INITIATIVES: THE UNSC, AFRICAN PEACE AND SECURITY AND CHAPTER VIII

South African initiatives in resituating the AU in relation to the UNSC were framed within the context of the problems facing the AU, as well as a broader attempt to address concerns regarding regional organisations within the global security architecture. Building on the foundation of the aforementioned 2005 UN Summit and the subsequent commitments to fund APSA, the South African mission sought to deepen and formalise institutional links between the UNSC and the PSC, as well as the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission.

In its first tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, the South African delegation used its two terms as president of the UNSC (in April 2007 and May 2008) to promote closer co-operation between the UNSC and the AU. A UNSC-sponsored summit was convened in mid-April that culminated in the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1809 (2008).¹⁰ The-then South African president, Thabo Mbeki, in an address at the summit highlighted the fact that predictable resources remained the biggest constraint on Africa’s capacity to resolve its own conflicts.¹¹ The resolution called for the establishment of an AU/UN panel of distinguished persons to consider how to better support AU peace support operations. It called for specific steps to improve co-ordination and the financing of start-up funds, equipment and logistics for peacekeeping

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Thabo Mbeki, in an address at the summit highlighted the fact that predictable resources remained the biggest constraint on Africa's capacity to resolve its own conflicts

operations. Furthermore, the panel recommended strengthening strategic co-operation on a regularised basis between the UNSC and the PSC, as well as the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission. In May the following year, during South Africa's second term as president of the UNSC, the decision was taken to formalise annual visits by UNSC members to the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa.

A second tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC (2011–2012) offered another opportunity for the South African government to promote the expansion of UN co-operation with regional organisations, in line with its 'African Agenda'.¹² In this case, the inclusion of South Africa on the UNSC so soon after its first tenure was part of a wider initiative to involve all the major Southern powers on the body to assess how an informal redistribution of power at the UNSC might be operationalised and the extent to which they would work together (or not) on particular issues.¹³ The South African delegation used this opportunity to advance the previous initiative on UN–AU co-operation by formalising and expanding its ambit. The passage of UNSC Resolution 2033 (2012), which built upon its predecessor UNSC Resolution 1809 (2008), reiterated the need for a 'predictable, sustainable and flexible' source of financial and logistical support and endorsed closer co-operation between the UN and the AU to improve its co-operation with the AU Commission.¹⁴ This consistency of purpose behind the South African position was confirmed by the outgoing South African representative, Ambassador Baso Sangqu, in his final remarks in January 2013.¹⁵

AFRICA AND THE EMERGING PEACE AND SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The impact of these initiatives on operational approaches to African peace and security was significant and immediate. The institutional strengthening was reflected in the regular consultations and closer co-ordination between the UNSC and the PSC.¹⁶ In September 2010 the AU–UN joint taskforce on peace and security was launched with a mandate to meet twice a year at senior levels.¹⁷ This was complemented with the opening of the UN Office to the AU in Addis Ababa and the AU's Permanent Observer Mission to the UN in New York. Running in parallel with the first set of initiatives in 2007–2008, and as an outgrowth of this closer interaction, was a decision to move from the multilateral organisation's support for a hybrid UN–AU mission in Darfur to a fully-fledged UN peace support operation (UNAMID) on 31 December 2007. Another outcome was the joint AU–UN efforts to support ECOWAS in Guinea's ongoing crisis.¹⁸ Subsequent UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations in Somalia and Mali benefited from the improvements in co-ordination, although actions by individual members of the Permanent Five such as France did sometimes rankle officials in the PSC.¹⁹

At the same time, South Africa's departure from the UNSC non-permanent seat did not diminish the African drive for enhancing co-operation with concrete

and sustained forms of financial support, rather than the ad hoc measures still in use. Rwanda, during its tenure as a non-permanent member in 2013–2014, took up this issue in July 2014 and led the passage of UNSC Resolution 2167 (2014), which called for more frequent consultations on operational matters for authorised peace support missions as well as firmer commitments to funding.²⁰ South Africa's deepening and direct involvement in the AU, captured in the bruising campaign to take the chairmanship of the AU Commission that culminated in the election of Dlamini-Zuma in July 2012, provided additional direction. This was enhanced by the South African government's taking up the top position in the PSC in 2014. By presiding over the entity formally charged with managing the five dimensions of the APSA and the AU Commission, the South African government was assured of a prominent role in translating foreign policy initiatives into concrete policies and actions.

Furthermore, the continuing co-ordination within the UNSC on African peace and security issues may have encouraged historically reluctant permanent members such as China, whose longstanding involvement in Sudan exposed it to reputational risks, to move away from strict interpretations of non-intervention to a more flexible approach. Certainly in the context of the South African-led summit in April 2008, China endorsed the Chapter VIII arrangements and recognised the need for closer co-operation with regional organisations such as the AU.²¹ This kind of regularised collaboration within the UNSC on African issues may arguably even provide some additional insight into the UNSC's decision to intervene in Libya in terms of UNSC Resolution 1973 (2011). The decision by permanent and non-permanent members of the UNSC to support a Western-led intervention was framed and justified with direct reference to the positions adopted by regional organisations such as the Arab League and the AU.²²

Finally, the longer-term impact of the South African initiatives may be as significant for global governance as it is for Africa's peace and security arrangements in the UN system. It could be argued that the South African decision to pursue the enhancement of regional security initiatives through the elaboration of specific measures and formal arrangements provides a glimpse of daylight in the context of the paralysis of UNSC reform. Rather than cut the Gordian knot of reworking the issue of UNSC permanent members and the veto, the gradual empowerment of regional organisations as security managers de facto devolves aspects of the decision-making authority – albeit under the formal auspices of the UNSC – to regional organisations and the respective power relations that define those bodies. The implied 'hub and spoke' model gives a more significant voice to regional organisations, distributing responsibility for international peace and security more readily than the stillborn efforts to date.

At the same time, such an approach offers greater opportunities for regional and sub-regional actors to redefine the terms of concepts such as the responsibility to protect in ways that conform more closely to local norms and

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interests. Under this formula, regional organisations have an enhanced role in affirming and legitimising humanitarian intervention by the international community. This is reinforced by the manner in which regional organisations implement peace support operations in a given situation. This process of 'norm localisation' is ongoing in the African context and one that is likely to shape how the international community views the application in other regions of the subsidiarity principle implied in Chapter VIII.

CONCLUSION

South Africa's role in moving from the abstractions of a discussion on Chapter VIII at the 2005 UN Summit to a substantive set of recommendations, policy initiatives and formal engagements between the UNSC and the AU is a major achievement. However, as Kornegay points out, '[m]uch of what passes for cooperation and coordination between the UNSC and such continental and regional bodies is improvisational and ad hoc in nature, based on a "coalition of the willing" format'.²³ This resistance to meeting some of the key requirements of the African bloc with respect to supporting the AU's efforts in the area of peace and security, largely expressed by the Western members of the Permanent Five (although one wonders about the silence of the other two permanent members), remains an obstacle.

Furthermore, South Africa's activist foreign policy has enabled it to take up a role as a 'norm entrepreneur', reshaping the orientation of international and regional institutions to align more readily with its African Agenda. While the Libyan debacle casts a shadow over this effort to institutionalise new approaches to addressing conflicts, the partnership between the UNSC and the AU still holds firm. Within the context of a transforming global setting and rising multipolarity, this emerging approach towards realising the principle of subsidiarity in the global management of international peace and security is likely to continue with African efforts leading the way.

ENDNOTES

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- 4 Dlamini-Zuma N, 'Foreword', in South Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, *South Africa in the United Nations Security Council (2007–2008)*, February 2009, pp. 2, 11–12, http://www.dfa.gov.za/images/gallery2/sa_un.pdf, accessed 19 May 2015.
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- 8 See UN Secretary General, 'Implementation of Decisions from the 2005 World Summit Outcome for Action by the Secretary General', especially section 16, 'African Union–United Nations Cooperation', 12 October 2005. For the story of the failed efforts to reform the UN Security Council, see Kennedy P, *The Parliament of Man: the United Nations and the Quest for World Government*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- 9 In the 2006 UN General Assembly vote, 181 out of a possible 191 representatives voted in support of South Africa's application. See Dlamini-Zuma N, *op. cit.*, p. 2. In the 2010 UN General Assembly vote, 182 out of a possible 191 representatives voted to support South Africa's application, cited by Fransman M, *op. cit.*
- 10 South Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Also see UN Department of Public Information and Media, UNSC Resolution 1809 (2008), S/RES/1809 (2008).
- 11 UN Department of Public Information and Media, 'Security Council expresses determination to strengthen peace and security', press release on 5868th meeting, 16 April 2008.
- 12 See Landsberg C & K Kondlo, 'South Africa and the Africa Agenda', *Policy: Issues and Actors*, 20, 13, April 2007.
- 13 Kornegay F, 'South Africa's second tenure in the UN Security Council: A discussion paper', in Kornegay F & F Nganje, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12; Van Nieukerk A, 'A review of South Africa's peace diplomacy since 1994', in Landsberg C & J-A van Wyk (eds), *South African Foreign Policy Review*, vol. 1. Pretoria: Institute for Global Dialogue & Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012, p. 96.
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- 15 Cited in UN, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Press conference on ending of South Africa two-year Security Council tenure', http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/130103_South_Africa.doc.htm, accessed 18 May 2015.
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- 22 For discussions of the decision-making process in the Libya crisis by South African policymakers, see interviews conducted by Anthoni van Nieuwerkerk, in Van Nieuwerkerk A, 'South Africa and the African Peace and Security Architecture'. Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, March 2014.
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