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Roger Pfister
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH, Zurich

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South Africa’s Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy Towards Africa

Roger Pfister, Centre for International Studies, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH, Zurich

Preface

1. Introduction

Two principal factors have shaped South Africa’s post-apartheid foreign policy towards Africa. First, the termination of apartheid in 1994 allowed South Africa, for the first time in the country’s history, to establish and maintain contacts with African states on equal terms. Second, the end of the Cold War at the end of the 1980s led to a retreat of the West from Africa, particularly in the economic sphere. Consequently, closer cooperation among all African states has become more pertinent to finding African solutions to African problems. Given South Africa’s status as the leading African country in terms of economic prosperity, political stability, and military strength, other African states have placed considerable hope on South Africa’s contribution to socioeconomic and political betterment of the continent. South Africa has consequently become a more attractive partner for African states than ever before.

2. Aim and Scope

South Africa has always held a predominant position in the Southern African region. Under Prime Minister and State President Pieter Willem Botha (1978-89), the country even pursued a policy of dominance and coercive hegemony. Further north, there were contacts with a few African countries outside the region. But the existing literature gives the impression that South Africa had no such relations anymore once the policies of dialogue and détente had failed in the mid-1970s. Those two initiatives were launched under Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes Vorster (1966-78) to break through South Africa’s international isolation in Africa and internationally. They came to nothing for two reasons: South Africa’s indecisive role in resolving the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe issue, and its military engagement in Angola after that country’s independence in 1975. However, recent research at various South African archives Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Defence and National
Archives shows that South Africa had contacts with many African states far beyond the region, even after the mid-1970s.1

The 1994 democratic elections in South Africa changed South African politics tremendously. Since its inception, the new government declared as main aim the creation of new domestic political and socioeconomic structures, but it also initiated changes in the area of foreign policy. Regarding Pretoria’s Africa policy, confrontation could finally be replaced by cooperation. Such cooperation became possible once South Africa had abolished its apartheid policy. It was further enhanced once the Cold War had ended.

This contribution has two parts. Part I contains an essay focusing on South Africa’s post-apartheid foreign policy in general, the impact of the ANC’s foreign policy as a liberation movement on Pretoria’s current foreign policy, and the issues that have dominated South African-African relations since 1994. Part II contains the bibliography that is organized around the issues identified in Part I.

3. South Africa’s Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy

The end of apartheid allowed Pretoria to normalize its relations with the international community. It has returned to international organizations such as the United Nations and its various bodies, as well as the Commonwealth. For the first time ever, it has become a member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement. Together with President Nelson Mandela’s charismatic personality, this led to a “honeymoon period” in South Africa’s foreign policy. However, many cautious voices could be heard over the extent to which South Africa’s post-apartheid foreign policy could really be altered (entries 59, 75, 76, 83, 84, 111, 143, 165, 166, 167, 169, 170, 256).

After decades of white minority rule, domestic as well as foreign policy could not change overnight. The new government had to be careful not to try to effect change in one arena to the detriment of the other. South Africa was rightly described as a “middle power” with limited capacities (entries 137, 144, 145, 172). Despite these reservations, several authors suggest that South Africa could take a leading role in the promotion of democracy and human rights (entries 92, 139, 140, 152, 153, 161, 163, 253, 285, 296, 300).

With regard to foreign policy making, the State President and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) have the most influence (entries 15-18, 122). On the part of Parliament, a Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs was established. Its relevance is discussed in several articles (entries 133, 155, 156, 159, 177, 178, 180). Compared to the apartheid period, the media and the public now take a more active part in the foreign policy formulation debate (entries 128, 129, 130, 175, 403). The role of the provinces is another issue debated in the literature (entries 69, 81, 179).

1 See my Ph.D. project “South Africa’s Continental Strategy Beyond the Region, 1961-1992” at the Center for International Studies, Zurich http://www.cis.ethz.ch/gabriel. Research in South Africa during 1999 was made possible with financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation’s “Young Researchers” program http://www.kfpe.unibe.ch/chrespro.html. My thanks also go to Prof. Marie Muller, Head of the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria http://www.up.ac.za/academic/libarts/polsci/home.html, where I could spend time as a Visiting Fellow.
4. ANC Foreign Policy as a Liberation Movement and Its Implications

When the ANC was banned in 1960, it took the struggle against apartheid to the international arena and the international dimension of its struggle has subsequently become very important. At the United Nations, for instance, it enjoyed an observer status between 1974 and 1994. It was allowed to participate at meetings on apartheid convened by the Special Committee against Apartheid and by the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly. Since 1976, it was even allowed to participate in General Assembly meetings when apartheid was considered.

The ANC’s relations with African states during the exile period are of particular interest here. Out of its 28 exile missions existent in 1985, 10 were in Africa and 12 in Europe. When assuming power in 1994, the ANC government increased the number of embassies on the African continent from 4 to 21, while retaining the 16 in Europe. Of the 67 South African embassies and high commissions in 1999, 24 were in Africa and 22 in Europe (entry 5, pp.817-844). This is an indication that the ANC’s diplomatic priority continues to be on the African continent. However, it is also an expression of the ANC’s dilemma to choose “between old loyalties and new responsibilities” (entry 63): on the one hand the loyalty towards the African countries that supported the ANC as a liberation movement, on the other hand the responsibility to run a country and therefore promote different priorities, such as closer contact with economically important Western nations that previously supported apartheid.

Early post-apartheid pronouncements by former President Nelson Mandela (1994-99) and Thabo Mbeki – Head of the ANC’s Department of International Affairs (1989-93), First Deputy President (1994-99), and President since 1999 –, reflect the government’s loyalty towards the African continent and towards Southern Africa in particular (entries 23, pp.89f.; 27, pp.234; 28, pp.1). Publications by the ANC Department of International Affairs point in the same direction (entries 8, pp.10-15, and 9, pp.10-15). The concept of an “African Renaissance”, developed by Thabo Mbeki, has been an outflow thereof (entries 30-34).

Relatively little has been written on the ANC’s foreign policy while in exile (entries 187-194). An informed debate has been difficult given the lack of primary sources on the ANC’s international activities in exile. Regarding the documents from its exile missions, the situation is unclear. The ANC Archives at Fort Hare University in Alice, Eastern Cape, were opened in 1996 and they now house the documents of 22 ANC exile missions http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/anc.html. But its collections are not complete. The Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape http://www.museums.org.za/mayibuye also houses some documents from the London and Lusaka Missions[2] and a lot of material is still held at Luthuli House, the ANC Headquarters in Johannesburg http://www.anc-archives.org where it is mostly unprocessed and inaccessible to researchers.

5. Issues in the Foreign Policy Towards Africa

Like the various apartheid governments before it, the current ANC government must distinguish between Southern Africa and the rest of the continent. Given the geographic proximity to and the economic dependence on South Africa, countries in the region are more exposed to the consequences of

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their powerful neighbor’s foreign policy. The further north on the continent one gets, the less the impact of South Africa’s foreign policy is felt.

Because of South Africa’s past foreign policy, the ANC first had to reassure African states, particularly its neighbors, of the government’s non-hegemonic intentions (e.g. entry 9, pp.11). In practice, Pretoria sought trade and security cooperation with the countries in the region.

**Trade.** Cooperation takes place in three multilateral bodies: the Southern African Development Community (SADC) [http://www.sadc.int](http://www.sadc.int); the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and Common Monetary Area (CMA); and the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) [http://www.comesa.int](http://www.comesa.int). The literature on economic cooperation is compiled in the section entitled “South Africa in the Region” (entries 195-266).

**Security.** Compared to economic cooperation, the intentions in the area of security are more ambitious, since it means bringing together former enemies. It is therefore not surprising that progress here is lagging behind. Plans for the establishment of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in Southern Africa (CSCSA) have not materialized. The SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security is the only progress worth mentioning.

Socioeconomic development and military stability are two sides of the same coin. It is therefore important that the security aspect no further be neglected in comparison to the economic dimension. In December 1994, the ANC itself argued that “Security is not only limited to military matters; it has important political, economic, social and environmental dimensions. Additionally, the security of the state is dependent on meeting the social, cultural, political, economic and human rights needs of its people” (entry 9, pp.23). However, in 1998 South African troops made their way into Lesotho after a political crisis there. This brought back memories of South Africa’s apartheid regional foreign policy. It made international headlines and provoked a debate among scholars. The entries 333-385 compile the literature on security cooperation in Southern Africa in general, while the entries 408, 409, 413, 415, 416, 418 list the works on South Africa’s role in Lesotho.

Two issues did and still do dominate South Africa’s post-apartheid relations with African states outside the Southern African region: (1) cooperation in the economic sphere (entries 267-317), and (2) South Africa’s military capacity as a peacekeeper on the African continent (entries 386-407). A number of contributions have been published on South Africa’s position vis-à-vis the military conflict in Central Africa, comprising the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region (entries 409-412, 414, 417). Relatively little attention has been given to its place within the OAU (entries 318-320).

A separate section contains the works on South Africa’s bilateral relations with African states inside and outside Southern Africa (entries 321-332). It is striking to note that eight of the twelve contributions focus on South African-Nigerian relations. This reflects the significance that closer contacts between these two heavyweight nations have for the future of the African continent (entries 321, 323-325, 328, 329, 330, 332).
Bibliography

1. Introduction

This bibliography is organized around the issues that have been presented above. With two exceptions, all sections consist only of publications produced after 1994. The first exception concerns the secondary literature covering South Africa’s overall foreign policy. The reason for including pre-1994 publications is that a dramatic change in South Africa’s political future was already foreseeable at that time. It is therefore justifiable to include those contributions that drew up future scenarios regarding South Africa’s foreign policy. The same applies to publications included in the section entitled “Sources”, produced by officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and by government members.

The following list contains some biographical information on the probably less-known people whose contributions are listed in that section:

- Alfred Nzo has been Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1994 and 1998, succeeded by Nkosazana Zuma. Aziz Pahad has been the Department’s Deputy Minister since 1994.
- Rusty Evans was the DFA’s Director-General between 1992 and 1997, followed by Jackie Selebi (1997-1999).
- At the time of writing their contributions, the following people were working at the DFA: Welile Nhlapo was Deputy Director-General for Africa, Tom Wheeler was a Director within the Africa section, and Johan Marx was Head of the West Africa Section.

The following library catalogues and databases were consulted to compile the bibliography:

Library catalogues

National Library of South Africa¹, Cape Town
University of the Witwatersrand², Johannesburg
University of Pretoria³
School of Oriental and African Studies⁴, London

Databases

NISC⁵ CD-ROM African Studies

The following academic journals have been consulted on a regular basis for articles and book reviews:

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L’Afrique politique, 1994-2000
Comparative Politics, Vols. 23 (1990/91) – 33/2 (2000/01)
A Current Bibliography on African Affairs, Vols. 22 (1990/91) – 33/1 (2000/2001)
International Relations, Vols. 10 (1990/91) – 13 (1996/97)
Finally, I consulted the Homepages of several specialized South African research institutes:

- Africa Institute, Pretoria
- African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes ACCORD, Durban
- Centre for Policy Studies CPS, Johannesburg
- Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western Cape
- Institute (previously Foundation) for Global Dialogue IGD/FGD, Johannesburg
- Institute for Security Studies ISS, Pretoria
- South African Institute of International Affairs SAIIA, Johannesburg
2. South African Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy

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2.3 Secondary Literature


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South Africa’s Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy Towards Africa


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3. ANC Foreign Policy in Exile


4. South Africa in the Region


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South Africa’s Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy Towards Africa


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Institute. 60pp. (COPRI Working Papers, 13)

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the Security of Southern Africa*. Cambridge, MA: Commonwealth Institute. (Project on Defense
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6.2 Peacekeeping in Africa


6.3 Case Studies


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15. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/carfax/10357718.html
18. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/tf/01495933.html