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"Foreign policy by changing balances of power? South Africa as a middle power at the United Nations"

by

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## **Introduction**

At first sight after 1994, the image of South Africa in international politics is one of the “miracle state”, an innovative democracy with social-democratic policies encouraging peace, development, democratization and human rights. South Africa with its universalist foreign policy, human rights its lodestar, is recognized as an emergent middle power, seen as a reformer for democracy and bridge builder between a developing and democratising South and a developed and democratic North. Since then however, a heavy commitment to the idea of a Greater African Commonwealth and global multilateral reform favouring non-Western, mostly weaker states, had her put her commitments to universalism and human rights on a back burner.

Instead, a bold Africanist foreign policy has had her engage in efforts at African region building aimed at African integration and domesticating the external factor in Africa’s international relations. Investing heavily in African-led mediation on African security, she advocated the International Community (IC) fall in line with “African solutions to African conflicts”. This was complemented by promoting the building of South-South relations and engaging with other centres of power, such as China. Beyond being a regional power her clear wish is to find recognition as an emerging middle power at the global level. For this the United Nations has been key for South African diplomacy.

The paper looks at the period 2006-2008 during South Africa's first-time tenure as a member of the Security Council. This, in order to show up the degree to which South Africa as a middle-power had seemingly shifted ground from that of a pluralist-reformist position promoting democratisation towards a more conservative-reformist position, intent on advancing a democratic multilateral order while preserving the right to sovereign license by weak and developing states.

The contention is that with a changed international environment in which the West is under increasing challenge, South Africa's bridge building role premised on neo-liberalism, finds less scope. Given the uncertainties of her position as a regional economic power in Africa and her own domestic developmental preoccupations, her status as an emerging middle power would not seem fully assured. The effect of this ambivalence in her position of responding to changing balances of power however is evident in a degree of foreign policy ambiguity on her part.

### **Middlepower**

Middle power ship, in an economic and military sense presumes some resourcefulness. In the first instance it is to be seen as a material resourcefulness with a purpose. Given a particular structural position in the international political economy, middle powers are seen to exercise some leverage. They, often (in a military sense) play the role of a sub-regional hegemon – often on behalf or in alliance with a universal power - or, they are, in an economic or developmental sense, seen to be working at overcoming their status as small or semi-peripheral players in world affairs.

However, according to Cooper et al., middle powers do more: Working from within multilateral arrangements, they act as catalysts by advocating global issues; are facilitators forging coalitions or regional managers crafting norms and seeing to it they are implemented in a region (Cooper, 1993,23-4).

Middlepowership in a multilateral setting therefore is often associated with the pursuit of peace, security and development issues, usually within the parameters allowed by the hegemonic international order: Traditionally, it has involved smaller liberal or social democratic states engaged in areas of peacemaking or the advocacy of international reform where bigger powers chose not to tread. Canada and her decades long commitment to international peacekeeping and her leadership on the treaty to ban landmines or Norway and her own peacemaking efforts in areas of conflict like Sri Lanka are cases in point, with Sweden, Scandinavia, Australia or the Netherlands also form part of this club of traditional middle powers.

A constitutional democracy with social democratic inclinations, South Africa has the capacity - economic, military and political - to be recognized as an emerging middle power, able to play a responsible and influential role. Given her relative wealth (with a GDP roughly the size of Denmark's), South Africa has sufficient resources to act as a mediator, negotiator or peacekeeper in contributing towards regional and international resolutions and reform.

As a middle power of the South, South Africa has been confronted by the following options:

To act as a -

1. liberal democratic middle power of the South with a foreign policy projecting constitutionalism and human rights

2. consensus seeking regional power in Africa and the developing world subject to multilateral decision-making, where human rights concerns are subsumed under broad based developmental concerns.
3. responsible regional African power and emerging middle power, able to act unilaterally, balancing a broad multilaterally framed developmental and security agenda against her own national economic, political and military interests on the continent and in the wider world.
4. traditional regional power putting its national interests above multilateral interests, projecting power in order to obtain military, political and economic advantage wherever and whenever this is feasible.

In Africanising her foreign policy orientation, South Africa has invariably moved from scenario 1 to 2. If Africa's relations diversify further (notably with Asia), this may challenge existing Africa's own regional arrangements and with it, South Africa's neo-liberal economic and political position with its inbuilt relations with the North on the continent. In response to becoming more isolated in the region (Martin, 2009:2), this may well have her move towards scenario 3.

### **South African resourcefulness as a middle power at the UN: human rights and inclusive global governance**

South Africa on gaining its freedom in 1994 came to engage with an international society whose international balance of power had shifted towards the United States and its pursuit of a neo-liberal world order. South Africa in opening up to the world in turn responded with a policy of universalism, in part adapting her policies to the prevailing neo-liberal developmental order while also, however, engaging in a sort of international activism to demonstrate her credentials at good international citizenship. This, also with a view to contributing to the reform of international relations and obtaining a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council.

In line with the rest of Africa, South Africa's relationship with the United Nations has revolved issues to do with recognition and symbolism, conflict resolution and management and the reform of the institution itself (Bischoff, 2005:387). Wishing to provide leadership to Africa and the developing world, her growing ambivalence towards the West, her often fraught leadership position on the African continent, capacity constraints (Kagwanja, 2008: 10) and the challenge to her own leadership role stemming from China's growing African presence, have made South African foreign policy one of mixed signals and 'ambiguity' (Bischoff, 2003:234) while her approach to the United Nations is described as 'opportunistic' in orientation (Cornelissen, 2006:27).

At the United Nations, South Africa acted out two seemingly contradictory roles: those of a reformer and those of a conserver.

As a reformer she insisted on greater inclusiveness in international decision-making (rather than any radical change in the ordering principles informing international organization).

Accepting the conventions of neo-liberalism upheld by the International Community(IC), she accepted a Western-led society of states who made and supported international rules.

At the same time however, she also upheld conservative notions of sovereignty. This, in order to oppose the constraints and diminution of the independence of developing states held out by the encroachment of global forces (Nel, 2006:115, 111). As such, while she supported global governance, it was to have its limits.

Across the board, democratic South Africa, which in a sense embodied the United Nations' own principled stand against apartheid over many decades, initially found considerable recognition and support at the world body.

Admired as a democracy that came about after a worldwide struggle for human rights, the foreign policy of the new democracy initially put the concern for human rights at its centre.

Given her make-up as a constitutional state with a strong tradition of human rights, she was initially after 1994 able to do what other African states were ill equipped to do: make a point about human rights.

Initially South Africa therefore took a strong universal stand on human rights at the United Nations, in line with the concerns of all those inside and outside the community of states advocating human rights. She voted with Western states on human rights issues such as those on China. South Africa chaired the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations and its ambassador, Jackie Selebi, in 1997 received the International Human Rights Award for her activist role in which South Africa tried to help forge coalitions from amongst Southern states to take a stand on human rights (Bischoff,1997:25).

Overall, South Africa became an active member of the UN. She was elected to the Council of UNESCO and chaired the session of the preparatory commission for the implementation of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, was elected to the executive board of UNDP, the UN Population Fund and several other UN bodies (Cornelissen, 2006:29).

Similarly, she also adopted a high profile as host and chair of UN global policy conferences such as those by UNCTAD (1996-2000), on HIV/AIDS (2000), UN Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Discrimination (2001) and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2002).

As chair of these conferences, she played a prominent part as a bridge builder – re-orienting members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) away from contestation towards dialogue with the North while, together with G77 and China, she helped put Africa – long neglected by globalist social and political forces - (Morphet, 2006:96) back on the world agenda.

As an advocate of global reform at the United Nations and elsewhere, South Africa making universal claims as a 'norm entrepreneur', punched well above her weight. Poverty and underdevelopment, racism and xenophobia, gender discrimination and environmental protection she felt could only be meaningfully addressed in the context of one global human society. Global governance there had to be but it needed to accommodate those previously excluded from its design. For this the UN needed restructuring and the functions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund the other parts of a greater UN family - as well as the World Trade Organization and the G 7(8) – needed to be revisited (Mbeki,2000).

Attempting to put African concerns back on the world agenda after a lull in the 1990s, the idea of an African Renaissance, pushed by Mbeki, played a prominent role in invigorating

debate in and around the United Nations adopting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), having the UN Security Council concern itself with African security or in having the UN devolve peacekeeping resources to the African Union. Here the figure of Mbeki who invested a great deal of personal energy into the process, used South Africa's ability to gain political access to the G 7/G8 – a legacy left by Mandela - was key.

In order to avoid similar, future neglect of Africa, the call was made for developing states to be given a greater voice in international organizations. This included calls for reform at the level of the Security Council at the United Nations.

As such, South Africa emerged as an advocate of developing countries and of institutional reform. Her calls for the international reform of international organizations such as the United Nations and others was to make her more representative and inclusive of its majority membership of mainly developing states. The Strategic Plan of the Department of Foreign Affairs makes this very clear:

"multilateralism informs our interactions in the global sphere"

"With regard to the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation and the Bretton Woods Institutions (the IMF and the World Bank), South Africa strives for the fundamental reform of the governance and management of these institutions, with the view to enhancing equity, transparency and efficiency".(Strategic Plan, 2006:7,8)

Increasingly, over the years she also began to show her impatience and resorted to a rhetoric decrying the lack of progress:

The restructuring of the UN clearly has taken too long. It has dragged on for a very long time and we can see the consequences of the manner in which it is structured and the manner in which it works. These consequences are not necessarily positive for us, developing countries, and therefore practically what shall we say about this. What shall this conference do in order to move that restructuring process forward in our own interest? And that would also apply in terms of the Bretton Woods institutions. There seems to be a global consensus in this regard, to see what it is that we do to put consensus to the practical benefit for our own people.(Mbeki,2004).

All this was accompanied by other, more self-interested political objectives, such as the endeavour to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

### **2007-2008: South Africa at the General Assembly**

South Africa's aim is to create a rules based system where small and big nations will be treated as equal sovereign states, believing that such democratic reform is necessary for all international institutions, not just the United Nations. Generally, South Africa's contribution to international problem-solving was constructive though it was also accompanied by its a growing political rhetoric on North-South differences. South Africa also made it clear that in the end she would defend state sovereignty and African independence.

South Africa's voting record at the General Assembly in the period 2007-2008 is reflective of her role and status as a potential permanent member of the Security Council and emerging middle power of the South advocating democratic international institutional reform, a

developmental focus and the respect for sovereignty as a principle (regardless of the political complexion of a particular state).

Despite its liberal-democratic and constitutional character, South Africa consistently opted with the majority of developing states, as well as China and Russia. With reference to Myanmar, the Department of Foreign Affairs denied that there were strategic reasons behind this (Kagwanja, 2009: 293). But in her diplomats opposing a “world based on hegemony as domination”, this did pit them against the United States to the point where there were real tensions with the Bush Administration (Kagwanja, 2009:278).

But even where states which did not always follow the Bush line, Germany, or established social-democratically inclined middle powers such as Sweden (long an ally of the ANC as a national liberation movement struggling against apartheid) with whom South Africa shared much in terms of social-democratic political values and outlook, one found her voting more closely with Southern democracies like Brazil or India, non-democratic states such as China or semi-democratic states such as Nigeria or Russia. Ultimately, her voting record expresses her overriding concern as a developing state to strategically advantage the majority of developing states.

## UN General Assembly Resolutions

### **Degree of Correspondence in Voting: South Africa and Selected States (%)**

#### **2007 – GA Session 61**

Nigeria	Brazil	India	China	Russia	Sweden	Germany	USA
98.5	97.1	96.1	95.6	95.5	97.3	91.4	8.6

#### **2008 – GA Session 62**

Nigeria	Brazil	India	China	Russia	Sweden	Germany	USA
100	100	93.4	96.7	96.7	80.0	86.4	3.7

Compiled from: UN Documentation Research Guide  
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/scact.htm>

During the period in question on a number of General Assembly resolutions, South Africa voted against her own constitutional predisposition. This became the source of some contestation in her domestic politics (van Nieuwkerk, 2007:62).

The matter continued beyond 2008 into 2009: South Africa, alongside China and Russia refused to vote for a declaration which stated that no individual's rights should be violated because of sexual orientation. Sponsored by the Argentine and supported by EU and Latin American countries, sixty-six in total, it was opposed by a majority of one-hundred-and-twenty-six countries (Roussouw, 2009:1a). Clearly, South Africa, despite provisions in her own constitution which defend the right to sexual orientation, chose to side with the majority of developing countries on the issue.

Giving overriding prominence to the strategic goals of the majority of states at the United Nations, has had her at the core of an emerging bloc of counter-hegemonic states in world affairs. This on the premise that such recognition would ultimately secure her and Africa a place in an evolving multipolar world where 'other regions or civilisations' would form a part of global governance (Kagwanja,2009:278) and be an integral part of a reformed multilateral system.

### **South Africa as a middle power at the Security Council**

In recognition of her prominent role, South Africa had 186 states elect her to serve as a member of the Security Council for the period 2007-2008. South Africa saw this as further proof of her importance and ability to contribute to change in international affairs and to further promote South Africa's chances of obtaining a permanent seat on the Security Council. South Africa was determined to make an imprint and a senior government official prior to her assuming her seat put it succinctly "The UN should not change us. We should change the UN." (Kagwanja, 2009:275).

For states which join the five permanent members for two years stints, there is generally little room for manoeuvre. For the elected members of the Council 'the reality is that the permanent members control the agenda-setting' (van Nieuwkerk, 2007:62). Moreover, many issues are ongoing issues that come up for consideration, leaving little space for diplomatic initiative.

Nevertheless, South Africa as an emergent and reforming middle power was to use the opportunity to define its foreign policy more sharply. As such, she proceeded to do more than other elected members: she made the point that the Security Council was often trespassing on the prerogatives of the United Nations General Assembly and other UN bodies such as the Human Rights Commission.

In delivering his maiden speech, the South African representative, Ambassador Dumisani Khumalo, made it clear South Africa believed the UNSC (whose initiatives were shaped, defined and dominated by the self-interest of the permanent five – implicitly those of the West, USA, Britain and France) was taking an uneven and, as such, inherently political approach to dealing with conflict, conflict whose root cause for the most part lay in poverty that had to be generally addressed. One solution lay in the UNSC respecting the division of roles and functions of other UN bodies. This, for instance, with a view to devolving decision-making power to the larger, more democratic body of the General Assembly (Lauria, 2007) or to other, more open UN bodies such as the Human Rights Council.

Disregarding specific issues at hand, her emphasis was to argue legalistically or technically to stress a wider point: her objection to an elitist Security Council led by one small group of powers selecting and defining what constituted security issues. This all lay with her brief to pursue the agenda of democratising decision-making at the United Nations.

#### *Presidency of the Council*

When holding the presidency of the Council, there is some scope for an elected member to pursue issues of interest. In assuming the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council during two months of a two year period, a non-permanent member has the opportunity to

issue presidential statements. Requiring consensus, they nonetheless afford the elected member the opportunity to make an imprint on developing Security Council policy.

South Africa was President of the Council on two occasions, in March 2007 and April 2008.

Apart from presidential statements dealing with regional sites of African conflict, the first general presidential policy statement issued in 2007 was on Women, Peace and Security, the second on an item core to South Africa's foreign policy: the United Nations strengthening African regional organisation.

In detailing the evolution in the relationship between the United Nations and regional organisations, the document sought to build on previous commitments made to the African Union and insisted on common and coordinated efforts with the Security Council in building regional capacities in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council asked the Secretary-General to furnish a report on how to better support arrangements by the UN (Security Council, 2007).

Pursuing the same theme in her month long presidency the following year, South Africa used the opportunity to convene a high-level Security Council meeting presided by the South African President and attended by the Prime Minister of Britain and the President of Italy as well as Foreign Ministers to address the same issue leading to adoption of SC resolution 1809 which called for an effective partnership with the AU on enhancing the ability to respond early to emerging crises on the continent (Security Council, 2008b). In getting the Secretary-General to formulate the basis for a new UN-AU partnership on peacekeeping and make it financially sustainable by March 2009, South Africa had achieved one of the important goals she set herself as a member of the Security Council.

#### *Formal resolutions*

Not much of South Africa's principled stand is evident in her formal voting record at Security Council resolutions. In the resolutions put out by the Security Council in the said two year period in the overwhelming majority of cases – one-hundred-and-fifteen cases out of one-hundred-and-twenty-two resolutions - were passed unanimously by all fifteen members of the Council. And it is in only one of these seven instances where no unanimity was expressed, that South Africa was party to an abstention vote (United Nations, 2009).

She abstained on SC resolution 1757 (2007) on the establishment of a Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Alongside Qatar, China and Indonesia she abstained because she felt that a Special Tribunal, opposed by the Lebanese presidency but supported by the Lebanese parliament and cabinet would constitute interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

When South Africa threatened to abstain on a further vote on Iran and after a vituperative exchange with Britain (Sutterlin,2007:15) it took a visit by a US envoy to South Africa, for her to agree to vote for SC resolution 1747 but only after the USA accepted some amendments made by her (Xinhua,2008), including giving greater prominence to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)(Sutterlin,2007:15). If the intention was to affect decision-making, she had succeeded this one time in elevating herself and Africa at this the global level.

But generally, South Africa remained of the view that "Iran's nuclear programme was not a Security Council concern at all because it is not a threat to international security."(Fabricius, 2007:1b). South Africa's reservations about the measures taken against Iran were shared by

similarly placed states like the Argentine: both states felt that stopping Iran enriching uranium could have implications for non-Western states eventually wishing to enrich uranium themselves and that one Western intention on the Iran issue was to protect their lucrative, near monopoly as sole producers of enriching uranium. In the event, South Africa chose to be more outspoken on the issue than the Argentine (Fabricius, 2007:1a). The following year, on SC resolution 1803 (2008) on further measures against Iran in its development of nuclear and missile programmes (where, eventually only Indonesia came to abstain), however, South Africa went along with the vote proposed by the US.

South Africa opposed a resolution condemning rape as a weapon of war. This happened even though domestically South Africa is committed to combating a very high incidence of rape. Moreover, as a member of the Security Council in March 2007 she had previously affirmed her support for UNSC resolution 1325 of 2000 on eliminating grave sexual violence. South Africa's reasoning in November 2007 was that such a narrow interpretation of rape might make other forms of rape seem more acceptable (Caromba, 2008). But her position had more to do with the fact that the resolution was raised by the USA ostensibly in the context of Sudan. This was seen as politicizing rape for the purpose of further internationalizing the Darfur issue when the USA had not chosen to do the same in the Balkans some years previously (Nathan, 2008).

As such in her pursuit of an Africanist policy, South Africa wished to regionalize (African) issues such as Sudan and in doing so, attempt to minimise the US and West shaping political events on the continent. The issue of rape was therefore subordinated to this greater principle. This was her way of demonstrating leadership amongst African states and the developing world of states at large. The fact that a number of African states, including Burundi, Liberia and the DRC voted for the resolution was explained away by stating that this was a function of big powers intimidating 'little countries' (Nathan, 2008).

#### *Draft resolutions*

South Africa's role at the Security Council is more evident from the resolutions that did not materialise, the draft resolutions she helped block. Here her 'somewhat controversial' role was particularly evident when she chaired the Council in March 2007 (van Nieuwkerk, 2007:62).

#### Climate Change

On 17 April 2007 the UN Security Council discussed climate change as a security issue. This was the result of a British initiative to consider the likelihood of future wars occurring as a result of climate change. As such, the Security Council was to discuss contestations over water, food production and land use. The effect of this was to securitise climate change and to read it as a potential driver of conflict in world politics.

South Africa, alongside China, Russia, Indonesia and Qatar objected to the Security Council being the appropriate forum for this kind of discussion (Brauch, 2008:12). South Africa then sided with the opponents of the initiative, despite having endorsed fighting against climate change at the G8 summit at Heiligendamm the same year (Brauch, 2008:14).

#### Zimbabwe

While holding the presidency in 2007, in opposing SC deliberations on Zimbabwe, South Africa held that Zimbabwe did not constitute an international threat to peace and security.

This, despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans had been forced to mass migrate to South Africa and the rest of the region because of a repressive state and an economy in inflationary free-fall after the gross political and economic mismanagement of the country and its resources.

When the Security Council considered sending fact finding mission to Zimbabwe, South Africa opposed the suggestion (Lauria,2008:1b). This, in order to minimize internationalizing the issue as much as possible and keeping the issue within the region where, alongside a host of conservative states intent on preserving the sovereignty of the Zimbabwean state as well as their own, were more likely to be able to control events in favour of the status quo of an entrenched ZANU government and an elected MDC being kept from claiming outright executive power in Zimbabwe.

In the same vein, in 2008 South Africa alongside China, Libya, Russia and Viet Nam (with Indonesia abstaining), successfully opposed a draft resolution supported by ten Council members led by the USA (including another African state, Burkina Faso) to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe following the contested outcome of the presidential elections and a sharply deteriorating human rights situation in the country in July. Despite evidence to the contrary and South Africa's own strong constitutional commitment to democratic elections and human rights, South Africa insisted that "the Zimbabweans parties' commitment to dialogue was encouraging" (Security Council,2008) and chose to stand behind the multilateral positions taken by the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to allow South Africa in the interests of stability to work towards a political accommodation to suit the Mugabe regime and accommodate the opposition parties even though the latter had been the winner in the earlier parliamentary elections and been forced to witness the manipulation of the outcome of presidential elections. "For this reason, the South African delegation would vote against the draft. It would lead to the improvement of the humanitarian and economic situation, thereby contributing to a better life for all Zimbabweans. The Security Council must give space for implementation of the African Union Summit's decision" (Security Council,2008)

#### Myanmar 2007 and 2008

In 2007 a draft resolution that had called on Myanmar to release all political prisoners, begin widespread dialogue and end its military attacks and human rights abuses against ethnic minorities had South Africa alongside Russia and China exercise her veto helping to make this the first use of multiple vetoes since 1989 (UN News Centre,2007). It was China's first veto since 1999 and South Africa's first ever (Lauria,2007).

While noting her concern for the human rights situation in Myanmar, she did not find that Myanmar was a threat to international peace. South Africa felt it would have been better for the people of Myanmar if the greatest possible number of states had a say in the matter rather than that issues be hived off to become "the special preserve" of a few privileged nations. This weakened democracy at the international level and was a "dangerous formulae" to follow (Africa Monitoring, 2007).

Seemingly in line with South Africa's position that regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) on her own continent should be given the space for Africans to resolve their own

conflicts, she thought it important to remind the UN Security Council that the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN) had pronounced that Myanmar did not constitute a international threat to peace. As such, at a fundamental level, for her the resolution did not fit with the Charter's mandate. The matter would better be handled by the Human Rights Council but in the interim, South Africa would want to leave the matter with the good offices of the UN Secretary General (Security Council, 2007).

In the event, despite South Africa's concerns for the situation in Myanmar and her insistence the Human Rights Council deal with it, she never took the matter to the Human Rights Council. This was, perhaps, because this was a fruitless exercise since the Human Rights Council had virtually refused to discuss the Myanmar issue. Thus, unlike Argentina, who voted against the human rights abuses on the Security Council, South Africa demurred (Fabricius,2007:1a).It took Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu to remind the government that a democratic South Africa, in line with her own history was meant to have directly sided with the Burmese people (Kagwanja,2009:293).

In 2008 France's attempt to invoke the "responsibility to protect" concept to put pressure on the Myanmar government strengthened South African and other opposition to the Council invoking the R2P clause. The Council had informally been discussing the humanitarian situation in Myanmar since Cyclone Nargis and France was pushing for the Security Council to take action on the direct distribution of aid even though the consent of the Myanmar government on this was in doubt. Eventually, France did not table a formal resolution because of the divisions in the Council. The Council was divided between members who wanted to see the Council take a more active role and those, like South Africa, who defending the issue of sovereignty over the need for international humanitarian assistance, argued that this was not an appropriate issue for the Council to consider. South Africa indicated that she did not feel "a strongly worded Council resolution was an appropriate way of engaging with Myanmar". (Global Policy Forum, 2008)

## Sudan

On Sudan, South Africa and two other members of the Security Council, Libya and Burkina Faso with support from a number of other Council delegates, in July 2008 asked that the resolution to renew UNAMID, the hybrid UN-AU peacekeeping force for Sudan, include the call on the ICC to defer for 12 months any consideration of the ICC's request to prosecute al-Bashir. While their request was not accepted by all members of the Council, there was an agreement to include language which would take note of the AU request and that would state the desire to consider this issue in the Security Council at a later time (Hauben,2008:1).

## **South Africa and the UN: Present Outcomes**

South Africa stint on the SC brought out her foreign policy in sharper relief: it won her both more friends and alienated some old ones. What had previously seen as an ambiguous and woolly foreign policy – both for its attempt to straddle the North-South divide and in the strengths and weaknesses of its diplomacy (Bischoff, 2003), had now shifted to something more assertively counter-hegemonic and majoritarian, so much so that it could now be described as more clearly anti-imperialist in tenor (Nathan, 2008). It did this by for some, "...its tedious, unchanging message that the Council should not overreach itself"

(Fabricius,2007) and by using its seat on the Security Council as an “ideological prop” (Pottinger,2008: 308).

But while in some sense successful in projecting an assertive middle power, it also came at a price: a controversy about her surrendering her internationalism and principles on human rights for those to do with African unity and the parochial defence of traditional, at times reactionary notions of sovereignty. For commentators the “International Community confronted .. a destructive foreign policy that fails to live up to its potential moral weight.” (Mailer, 2008). This did damage her identity as a democratic state projecting constitutional values. But it was also seen as a rational foreign policy choice that marked the arrival of South Africa in the world of international realpolitik.

But South Africa was voting on technical and political rather than ethical grounds without also telling its people what the greater game being played out was all about. In the words of South Africa’s ambassador to the United Nations, Dumisani Khumalo, impersonating the harder edge of South African diplomacy, “Our biggest mistake was that we did not explain to the South African people what it meant to be in the Security Council.. these so-called controversies were ...people being confused about what the Security Council is all about.”(Roussouw, 2009).

In reading the international balance of forces as one of uni-multilateralism, with new centres of power clustered around China (and perhaps Russia) emerging, the ANC government had identified the gravitational pulls and counter-hegemonic logic inherent in this. In search, with others of a ‘stable, post-liberal social world’ (Martin, 2009:3), in response to the considerable growth in its economic relations with China and India and in not wanting to be left politically isolated by the rest of Africa’s own veritable lurch towards the East (Martin,2009:3), she seeks to reproduce herself as an emerging middle power in what are changing international political and economic circumstances.

Putting an emphasis on opposing global unilateralism is only to revert to a long standing foreign policy tradition of the ANC as a national liberation movement in the decades of the worldwide struggle against –apartheid before 1994. Here the ANC had sought and obtained support from the socialist countries allied to the Soviet Union and used this support as leverage to invite greater support from Western governments tending to support if not the apartheid regime, Western investments in the apartheid economy.

Opposing Western hierarchy at times (the new Zuma administration does though, as it feels it must, still talk of how relations with the West remain important), affords South Africa the recognition she seeks: It allows her to be courted by China and Russia, eager to either build or regain lost international influence and in response, by the USA. Chinese President Hu Jintao on a visit to South Africa for instance, reiterated South Africa “could learn from China as it had been playing a role on issues of global politics” while in turn, South Africa as a member of the Security Council intended to “consult” China, seeing its partnership with China as a “strategic asset” (Sakoana,2007). But all the same, political and ideological differences with China remain.

South Africa, intent on a rules based system sought to defer matters before the Security Council to other parts of the UN body, such as the Human Rights Commission, the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) or the General Assembly where the voice of the five permanent members would be diluted in favour of a more inclusive and assumedly more democratic majority. What she did not do was to see to it that some of these issues would, in effect, be addressed elsewhere. In consequence, South Africa, became

indistinguishable from the likes of China and Russia but with the difference that, unlike herself, these others had no human rights policy in the foreign policies plank to protect. In other words, South Africa acted out of character.

The general thrust of her foreign policy was no longer that of a democratic reformer but one whose reforms are conservative in that they simply empower all types of states.

An example here is the approach to peacekeeping. While peacekeeping has been broadened as an area of international activity (to include peacemaking, the right to protect, post-conflict reconstruction for instance) in recent years, South Africa's approach has become rather conservative (Sutterlin, 2007:16). While she upholds the responsibility to protect "it must be completely in the control of the Security Council" (Sutterlin, 2007:16) and South Africa would need to see to it that: "The fate of African countries must not be left in the hands of a few powerful countries"... "who were incapable of resolving Africa's problems." (Sutterlin, 2007:16). As such, South Africa was willing to risk "wide opprobrium" to make Africa safe from outside intervention (ibid:17).

What all this did for Western public opinion, was to put South Africa amongst the 'awkward squad' of anti-Western states (Sunday Telegraph, 25 May 2007). It is helping to change her international identity and for someone who in the past made good use of previous Western support for her democracy and for African issues, this image was new and imperiled her role as a bridge builder between North and South.

### **Conclusion: Towards Scenario 3?**

When making decisions at Security Council level, South Africa was guided by her endeavour as a reformer to make the United Nations more representative in its decision-making. Unable to mobilize a majority amongst the non-permanent members of the Security Council, she adopted a stance which insisted the Security Council follow its original, rather narrow mandate on upholding international peace and security. Thus, in forcefully promoting her stance on sovereignty, individual human rights issues were sacrificed at the altar of international reform and South Africa began to act in alliance with both conservative and authoritarian states whose political disposition was quite unlike her own.

There were costs and few palpable benefits from this. It brought her one instance of momentary leverage vis-à-vis the United States (on the one issue of sanctioning Iran, the US believing that South Africa's opinion was of importance to Iran (Katzenellenbogen, 2008)) and strengthened her ties with state such as China, Russia, India, Iran, Myanmar, Belarus (or the Palestinian Authority). Yet, in the long run, it may also have cost her support amongst those who originally promoted her membership as an eventual permanent member of the Security Council.

Not that South Africa necessarily succeeded in successfully positing herself as a leader of the developing world. At the United Nations her position as "diplomatic reformer" or bridge builder remains uncertain: As chair seeking a compromise between developing and developed states on sustainable development, the outcome of the World Conference on Sustainable Development was diluted to the point where no strong programme of action was produced while the Conference on Racism not only ended in a diplomatic debacle but also undermined the country's moral authority on racial matters (Cornelissen, 2006:32). Pretoria seemed to have miscalculated on how best to obtain support from developing countries at the UN.

Mirrored by her fraught position at the African Union (AU) and in Africa in general, where her soft power to impress as a model of development is fast eroding (Pottinger,2008:312), South Africa's attempts at playing a middle role between Africa and the rest of the developed world are not entirely assured. At the AU in 2005, she was opposed and blocked in her endeavour to obtain the African Union's support in identifying with the G4 proposal for an expanded and reformed Security Council. This has had her begin to reconsider her emphasis on multilateralism as an instrument of her foreign policy of gaining influence (Kagwanja, 2009:289). Moreover, against a background of where China since 2000 has become the most dynamic extra-continental source of trade, aid, investment as well as political support for those who fall foul of the West, African states have increasingly begun to 'Look East'. Against the background of threats to African unity and regional integration from mostly resource-based rivalries driven by the outside (Pottinger,2008:311), South Africa's economic standing in Africa and role as a go-between and bridge builder between the West and Africa (or for that matter the South) would seem to be diminishing.

Coupled with her inability to galvanise domestic support for her foreign policy, the seeming lack of a worldwide, regional or domestic constituency to promote her role as a global reformer is telling. A South Africa, unable to wield effective influence in her region calls into doubt the sustainability of her endeavour to remain a middle power (Alden,Vieira, 2005:1084).

This paper suggests that South Africa has adopted this, her most recent foreign policy stance at the United Nations and elsewhere in response to her own reading of changes in the international balance of power. It is suggested that where her privileging sovereignty over criticism on human rights happens South Africa sends mixed signals and is nonetheless acting out of character and. Here the countervailing forces in her foreign policy making – one tending towards the West, the other towards opposition towards the West and the reform of a Western-led international system – are diplomatically not well managed. This remains a source of ambiguity and inconsistency in her foreign policy.

Further, her foreign policy actions privileging sovereignty over human rights actions domestically underlines the disembodiment of her foreign policy from the human rights values espoused in her constitution. Moreover, in interpreting inclusivity with the inclusivity of states only, and in not promoting the inclusion of global civil society more widely, South Africa, along with most other states, ultimately contributes little towards a more 'decent global order' (Nel, Taylor, v.d.Westhuizen, 2001:21).

It is uncertain whether South Africa is likely to sustain its outward oriented policy under Zuma as much as under the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies. At the start of the Zuma presidency, there is already talk of consolidation rather than of any expansion (Johwa,2009), in other words, one of constraint. The sudden and unprecedented way in which President Mbeki as chief architect of South African foreign policy after 1994 because of wrangling within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and associated escalating social instability (there were xenophobic attacks across the country's poor urban settlements earlier in the year) was forced to step down 2008 before the expiry of his term as president was indicative of a deep split in the dominant ANC. Newly elected President Jacob Zuma who has indicated his intention to preoccupy himself with domestic matters and against the background of having also to deal with the effects of the current world financial and economic crisis, is unlikely to devote the same amount of time as Mbeki did to foreign policy. South Africa as an 'encumbered power' even in its African peacemaking efforts would seem to have overreached herself (Kagwanja, 2008:1).

As such, the country may move to a point where she is seen as a more responsible regional African power and emerging middle power, able to demonstrate she can also act unilaterally by more clearly balancing a broad multilaterally framed developmental and security agenda against her own national economic, political and military interests on the continent and in the wider world.

Perhaps South Africa's middle power role would be best served by acting in character with her history and democratic credentials. In pushing a hegemonic agenda of democratization in the region (by, for instance, insisting that regional organizations give effect to their values and mission statements supporting democracy or giving civil society a real stake in African multilateralism), South Africa could contribute to substantive democracy, elite cohesiveness and development at a time when a new scramble for Africa's resources threatens African unity and security. In doing so, this could be of benefit to her own economic development (Habib, 2008: 274) as well as strengthen general democratic African support for her leadership role as a middle power at the United Nations and beyond.

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