

SOUTH AFRICA 'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-MBEKI - ERA

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The day in September 2008 on which South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, proclaimed his resignation marked the beginning of an era that might be called post-post-apartheid. The transition from a pariah state to a mature democracy had been completed and a new transformation was beginning to emerge. South Africa's domestic policy had always been distinguished by continuity since 1994, particularly as Mr Mbeki had been Mr Mandela's prime minister and deputy president and had been involved in the development of his domestic-policy strategies. Many of the leading personages of the last 15 years will be leaving the stage. There will be new problems to tackle for the incoming government, particularly in view of the inclemencies of the present global economic environment. Not least among them is the task of strengthening the faltering institutions of the state.

The country's new leadership will no longer be the darling of the international community. While South Africa was the apple of the world's eye in the years after 1994, the Mbeki era and even more so the post-Mbeki era face fundamental challenges to which the ANC will have to respond. After the end of apartheid, the ruling party was able to strike a balance between the identity of a widespread popular movement and the requirements of government work. In recent years, however, this tightrope act has been growing increasingly difficult, as indicated by the foundation of the COPE, an ANC spin-off. Although the ANC is still surrounded by the aura of the party that liberated the country, cracks are beginning to appear, and fragmentation threatens. Whenever the COPE should develop into a party with values and leaders of its own, the ANC will have no option but to acknowledge its internal contradictions.

The phase that follows the years of transition is also important for the country's constitutional democracy. The strain on South Africa's constitution and its values has been growing since 2005. Fifteen years after the end of apartheid, the political system is at a cross-roads; it needs reviewing with an eye on consolidating democracy. In 1994, everyone was talking about the triumph of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. In 2009, the rules associated with the post-post-cold war era, multipolarity, the rise of the Asian and Eurasian nations, and the development of new political and economic models reign supreme. What is more, the geopolitical framework has changed as well.

Under Mr Mandela and Mr Mbeki, South Africa became one of Africa's mouth-pieces on the global stage. The country was respected, especially because of

the way in which it engaged in international affairs. Fully aware of the importance of political and economic stability, the Mbeki government appreciated the essential role played by the private sector in the continent's development. After 1994, South African businesses needed no encouragement to invest in other African countries. Needless to say, criticism arose, and in the course of time, South African companies even acquired an image of arrogance. Founded in 2000, the African Renaissance Fund symbolizes technical and financial support on the continent, although it was only recently given a proper framework.

One thing that deserves highlighting is the Mbeki government's commitment to peace in Africa, without which Congo and Burundi would probably still be ravaged by war. Particularly after 2004, the country became increasingly prominent as a builder of bridges between North and South. However, there is one great flaw in Mr Mbeki's engagement abroad: Zimbabwe. The failure of his 'quiet diplomacy' and the exploitation of Zimbabwean refugees in South Africa still await analysis. At the same time, South Africa was hampered in its role in Zimbabwe by various factors, including not only Robert Mugabe's trickery but also the charge of a breach of solidarity with one of the heroes of the struggle for freedom which might have been levelled against Mr Mbeki if he had been more resolute. Lastly, there is the fact that the Zimbabwean opposition party MDC was generally perceived in South Africa as a vehicle of Western interests with which only traitors would cooperate.

A particularly important event was the ANC's 52nd National Conference in Polokwane late in 2007, although its resolutions are couched in terms reflecting the ideological disputes of the 20th century. Thus, the USA is pilloried as a 'hyper-power' within which imperialism had developed into a 'refined system' which aimed at 'exploiting resources by aggression and violence'. Having gained the upper hand at Polokwane with the support of the trade union movement COSATU, the communists (SACP), and the populist ANC Youth League, the new president, Jacob Zuma, may be expected to continue Mr Mbeki's policies in principle. The concerns that were enumerated as being at the core of South Africa's foreign policy include peace, peaceful conflict resolution, peacekeeping, partnerships, the development of African organizations, and safeguarding local influence in global matters.

In international relations, engagement on the continent itself takes pride of place. Consolidating the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was said to be important because it would also serve to set up a government for the African Union. The Pan-African Infrastructural Development Fund plays an essential role in promoting Africa's self-sufficiency because it not only serves as an agency for development partnership but also helps to achieve the millennium development goals. Economic diplomacy is seen by the ANC as a catalyst in changing 'colonial patterns' in economic relations. As

it created opportunities for equitable and balanced north-south relations, the economic capabilities of the country's embassies would have to be strengthened, which would also serve corporate interests in Africa and beyond.

According to the resolutions adopted by the ANC at Polokwane, the struggle against xenophobia should be supported by a new policy for refugees and migrants. It was thought equally indispensable to develop strategic partnerships with India, Brazil, and China, and to cultivate contacts with other former liberation movements. Next to African movements such as SWAPO, MPLA, FRELIMO, and ZANU-PF, the list expressly names the west-Saharan Polisario Front and the Palestinian PLO/Fatah. On the other hand, any cooperation with the newly-established US Africa Command (AFRICOM) was rejected out of hand.

However, this foreign-policy strategy will probably encounter its limitations when it is implemented. Thus, not every African will be happy to see South Africa perceiving itself as the continent's spokesman, although its concentration on the home region is quite in line with the ANC's approach of defining itself in contrast with the apartheid system, whose proponents saw it as an outpost of European civilization. Another limitation results from the country's 'political ballast', the confrontation with the apartheid policy which destabilized the region and emphasized South Africa's economic dominance in an extremely hegemonial fashion. Hegemony is a difficult element in the ANC's heritage, and it is questionable whether its negative consequences can be compensated by 'gentle diplomacy', particularly as demands are growing more vociferous that the country's engagement for peace on the continent should benefit South Africa directly and not only indirectly.

Further factors that limit South Africa's freedom of action in foreign policy include socio-economic problems, the increasingly rough global climate, and the growing global financial crisis. The new president will have to take all these factors into account. Very likely, the country will not abandon its proactive African foreign policy. The ANC's Polokwane resolutions are of particular importance in this context. Yet they do not run counter to the principles of South Africa's foreign policy; rather, they build upon them.

However, one foreign-policy vision has already been formulated together with concrete targets. The goal is for the country to expand its investments and its trade to create jobs, reemphasize the moral superiority of democracy and human rights, and contribute to peace, security, and development in Africa. The foreign-policy agenda should focus on several aspects. *Southern Africa* in the near future, most of the energy available should be invested in 'Africa's backyard', with Zimbabwe requiring particular attention in political and economic terms. Regional integration was another important aspect. Neither the SADC nor the SACU have lost any of their importance. *Conflict*

resolutions: the conflicts in Congo and in Burundi should not be allowed to wander out of sight. Especially Congo forms a key element in regional integration. *Organization-building*: during the set-up phase of the African continent's new architecture, South Africa should not diminish its hitherto prominent commitment to peace, security, and the promotion of a pan-African parliament. *Trade alternatives*: being export-oriented, South Africa's economy will go on depending largely on trade. However, the country should steer clear of protectionist measures. *Key countries in Africa*: South Africa should enhance its political and economic relations with African key countries like Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, and Egypt. *Emerging key powers*: emerging players include not only political friends but also competitors. South Africa should safeguard its market shares and its influence. *The country as a builder of bridges*: in the global debate on governance, South Africa should go on building bridges and cultivating its relations with the USA, the EU, and the developing countries. *Organizational matters*: seconding important functionaries to regional, continental, and international organizations and missions will be putting a strain on South Africa's foreign ministry. A new generation of foreign-policy professionals should be groomed.

It can be said with certainty that no substantial shifts in South Africa's foreign policy are to be expected in the short run. The only question is whether there will be any gradual changes, i.e. whether the country's position vis-à-vis Africa will be less ambivalent and hegemonial under Jacob Zuma. Nor is it clear what course South Africa will take in foreign policy in the long run. However, it is and always will be of essential importance for the country to stand by its complex identity and its unique profile among Africa's nations.

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