Effective Multilateralism in Difficult Times? Evaluating Germany's and South Africa's Term at the UN Security Council, 2019–2020
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For the second time since 2011 and 2012, Germany and South Africa served together as elected members of the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020. In 2020, both countries also held regional leadership positions in the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) respectively. With rising geopolitical tensions among the great powers, regional powers are attributed an important but difficult role: facilitating effective multilateralism in a time of increasing tensions and further fragmentation of global governance institutions. As liberal democracies, regionally leading countries and economically dominant powers, they are theoretically predestined to leave a constructive imprint on global politics. However, the role and influence of the elected members (E10) also depends on their ability to seek and craft consent on controversial issues, not only in relation to veto-holding powers but also among themselves. This paper evaluates how Germany and South Africa have managed their term in the Security Council. Have both countries been able to craft a stronger E10 partnership, or have persisting great power rivalries and disparate national interests and values distanced the two countries from one another? What opportunities for enhanced cooperation have emerged and in which areas do fundamental differences remain?

Introduction: Geopolitics and the Security Council

The current debate on global order changes tends to concentrate on the return of great power rivalry and its negative consequences on global governance institutions. Relations among China, Russia and the US have reached a low point in recent years and are responsible for the increased use of the veto and the tendency to politicize even seemingly less political issues. The reasons for this increased confrontation are manifold. With regard to the Security Council, they started becoming visible during the Arab Spring in 2011. After the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi, China and Russia increasingly used their veto to prevent the repetition of the 'Libyan model' in Syria. Since then, geopolitical considerations and interests of veto-holding powers, such as Russia, have dominated the Council's discussions regarding Syria for more than a decade.

Relations between Russia and Western countries are riddled with tensions. The greatest stumbling blocks remain the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Eastern Ukraine. Europe's largest armed conflict has mostly been absent from Security Council deliberations. Over the years, a chain of assassinations in Western countries by Russian intelligence and political disinformation campaigns have exacerbated the political climate, with sanctions remaining in place.

Recent years have also seen a substantial worsening of China-US relations. With the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and an increasingly self-confident China, economic and political tensions between the two countries are high. Protective trade tariffs and the cancellation of regional trade agreements, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, by the US led to the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in the Pacific by China. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened relations further. Trump's dismal crisis management and his fear of losing the next election resulted in aggressive verbal attacks against China and the World Health Organization. A Council resolution referring to the pandemic was blocked for months.

Tensions not only emerged between Western countries and Russia or the US and China but also within the Western camp. Agreement among the P3 (Permanent 3) members of the

Council and the group of European members is not automatic. Issues of Women, Peace and Security (WPS), climate change, conflict and the financing and mandating of counter-terrorism missions by the UN emerged as controversial topics in which the US used its veto or threatened to use it even when resolutions were drafted by a Western country. While the Council is not in critical decay or fully paralyzed, decision-making is certainly more politicized, more geopolitically oriented and consensus is harder to reach (ICG 2019a).

The increased polarization of the Council has expanded beyond the historically contentious Israeli-Palestinian question to also affect African conflicts. In Libya, the ongoing confrontation between the UN-backed government and General Khalifa Haftar, who enjoys the support of Security Council members, has split the Council. Various members ended up supporting different sides, while the role of the AU remains minimal. In Sudan, the transition from the government of Omar Al-Bashir toward a civilian government and the phasing out of the UN mission in Darfur reveals geopolitical interests of Council members in the region.

Middle power attraction: Why look at Germany and South Africa?
Germany and South Africa were once again serving the same term in the Security Council in 2019–2020 after their bout together in 2011–2012. Both countries also assumed regional leadership roles: President Cyril Ramaphosa was Chairperson of the AU during 2020 and Chancellor Angela Merkel headed the European Council. The Chancellor also undertook a state visit to South Africa in February 2020.

Both countries share a number of similar characteristics. As regional powers, both are in a similar position in the global order. They are recognized and influential powers within their own region and concentrate much attention of their foreign policy ambition within multilateral governance structures. While the importance of their regional positions are recognized but also mediated through the EU and AU respectively, global ambitions are becoming more difficult to formulate and to follow. At a global level, Germany and South Africa are too large to be ignored, but too small to play a dominant role. As constitutional democracies, their political cultures are shaped by historic wrongs that still frame their foreign policy orientation. In the case of Germany, it was the Second World War; for South Africa, it was the experience of inner-colonialism and suppression through the apartheid government. In both instances, former regimes aggressively dominated their regions, waging wars and militarizing foreign relations. After 1945 and 1994 respectively, radical change in foreign policy required a turning away from hegemonic dominance and endorsement of regional organizations as central venues for foreign policy. The EU and the AU, in their current constitutions, are practically unthinkable without the contribution of both countries. Foreign policy thinking and strategizing is intimately connected to multilateralism. The application of the use of force in unilateral action is generally viewed with skepticism. Needless to say, both countries have occasionally acted as regional hegemons too. Still, the dominant thread both countries are following is one of multilateral action and non-use of force and diplomacy during armed conflicts.

In recent years, Germany expanded its foreign and security policy to the African continent when it was actively involved in conflict mediation in Libya and provided troops to the UN mission in Mali. South Africa uplifted its international standing as the only African member to the G20 and within the BRICS configuration, while remaining a pivotal power on the continent. The potential overlap and interaction opportunities for both sides are increasing over time. Given the similar structural and macro-orientations, one would assume that there is a robust basis for more cooperation.

Power dynamics in the Security Council remain focused on the veto-holding countries that draft most of the resolutions (P3), account for large parts of the UN budget and shield their interests against outside interferences. While at a structural disadvantage over permanent members, P5 countries need E10 members to adopt resolutions and avoid the impression of being isolated on contested issues. As nine affirmative votes and no veto are required to adopt

a resolution, E10 members are critical for the effective working of the Security Council. However, they are often sidelined in the drafting process. The penholder position for country-specific issues, which holds the geopolitically greatest influence, is mostly reserved for the P5 members, with the US, UK and France being the most active drafters. Elected members often focus on thematic fields such as conflict prevention, Women, Peace and Security or cooperation with regional organizations. Elected members are also more active in the so-called Arria-Formula meetings, which allow the Council to publically discuss issues that are of general interest but might lack wider support for adopting a resolution.

What expectations can be realistically formulated with regard to Germany's and South Africa's membership in the Security Council? Both countries officially display a strong alignment to their continental peers; whenever possible voting is likely to take place along continental lines. As the European group is split into elected and permanent members, the chances of aligning to two veto-holding partners, France and the UK, are significantly higher and amplify the political weight of Germany. Under the Trump administration, German-US relations possibly reached their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. For South Africa, strategic coalition-building outside its continental group and beyond African issues is more difficult, although the country can align to the more heterogeneous G77. Coalition-building on contested issues seems to appear more sporadically and on a case-by-case basis than as a principled decision. From the outside, German voting often appears as static in terms of coalition partners, while South African voting might appear as occasionally unpredictable.

These trajectories can at times complicate closer cooperation, but they do not present an insurmountable hurdle. However, during the Jacob Zuma presidency (2009–2018), bilateral political relations had cooled off. This has been linked to the concentration of German interest in North Africa and the Sahel, with a focus on countering terrorism and curbing migration. Domestic scandals around Zuma's nepotism have not helped either. In the eyes of many Western countries, South Africa invested more into its BRICS alignment than into reviving relations with Europe. When they joined the Security Council, both countries were not operating from a well-cultivated basis of mutual understanding but joined the Council with their individual preferences.

Despite this, the topics that both countries put forward for their term at the Security Council are largely compatible with one another and theoretically provide ample room for cooperation. Both placed particular emphasis on the WPS agenda. With Nelson Mandela in mind, South Africa's motto for its time at the Council was "Continuing the Legacy: Working for Peace". The country's agenda for its third term was rather conservative, but maybe it was realistic and pragmatic. The main emphasis was placed on continuity, presenting the country as a champion of African interests, concentrating on thematic issues that are of relevance to African conflicts, such as Prevention, Women and Youth, and solidifying inter-institutional relations between the UN and the AU. South Africa promoted the AU's landmark Agenda 2063, with its policy framework "Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020". Generally, the country aims to support effective multilateralism in the current difficult political climate. To that end, South Africa, together with Sweden, organized an E10 workshop in Pretoria in 2018, which including incumbent and newly elected members discussing the role of working group chairs, which is usually assigned to elected members of the Council.

Germany was elected for the sixth time to the Council in 2018. It identified a number of priorities: WPS with an emphasis on sexual violence and victim protection; linking climate change and security; strengthening international humanitarian law; and emphasizing disarmament and arms control. Beyond these thematic issues, Germany equally placed importance on effective multilateralism and initiated the Alliance for Multilateralism in close coordination with France. South Africa joined the initiative, together with 67 other countries. Already in 2018, Germany and South Africa were involved in the business of the Security Council. Most importantly, the group of elected members agreed to better coordinate their

positions in the Council and adopted a document entitled "Ten Elements for Enhanced E10 Coordination and Joint Action". It foresaw bi-monthly coordination meetings and the establishment of a rotating E10 coordinator (Sievers 2019). Both Germany and South Africa organized Arria-Formula meetings before they joined the Council (SCR 2020a). It is evident that there is a fair share of thematic overlap between the two countries. The following sections explore voting patterns in the Council, before surveying a number of country-specific and thematic issues.

Voting in the Security Council
In 2019 and 2020, 108 resolutions were adopted. On 12 occasions vetos have been used. China, Russia and the US have each used their veto six times, and the UK and France five times (see table1). One resolution failed because it lacked the minimum number of nine affirmative votes. Contentious issues remain with regard to the war in Syria, elections in Venezuela, issues of nuclear non-proliferation and to some extent WPS. Most vetoes have been cast around the Syrian conflict. Often veto-holding powers neutralize each other, with block voting occurring between China and Russia on the one side and the US, France and the UK on the other. Of the 121 votes on resolutions, the veto has been used in 10% of cases, but 88 resolutions have been adopted by consensus, making up for 72% of all votes. In 21 instances or 17%, resolutions have been adopted without consensus. These include resolutions on the following countries and topics: the Democractic Republic of Congo (DRC), the arms embargo in Somalia, Western Sahara, Haiti, Libya, Syria, Yemen, sanctions in the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, WPS and criminal justice. Twenty of the 108 resolutions are thematic in orientation and 53 (or 44%) are exclusively focused on Africa. In addition to the adoption of resolutions, the Security Council also issued 38 presidential statements and held 44 Arria-Formula meetings, which are often thematic in orientation and reflect on topics and issues on which there is no consensus in the Council.

Table1 Voting on failed resolutions

	South Africa	Germany	Russia	China	USA
Against	1	3	5	5	6
Affirmative	10	6	6	6	5
Abstention	1	3	0	0	0

In 34 cases, the Security Council could not reach consensus. For elected members who are seldom able to organize a blocking minority, their decision to vote or abstain is not only an expression of particular policy preferences but also bears geopolitical meaning. Even large powers aim to avoid the impression of being isolated and thus the votes of elected members for either side carry some political meaning. Elected members, more than permanent ones, are forced to seek alignment as they lack the ability to veto decisions and are often not involved in authoring resolutions because of the existing penholder system.

Table 2 provides an overview of how Germany and South Africa have voted on contested resolutions. In situations in which a resolution failed, both countries only voted similarly in 54% of cases. On highly contested issues, South Africa displays no clear alignment to either the Western block or China and Russia. It voted similarly in 54% of cases, not only with Germany but also with China and Russia. In 31% of cases, it voted with the US. The divisions in the Council become most obvious when exploring similar voting of the US, and China and Russia. There is not a single case in which they voted similarly. Germany displays a clearer alignment towards the Western group. In 77% of cases, it voted with the US and only 8% with China and Russia. The latter two always voted together.

Table 2 Similar patterns of voting for Germany, South Africa, Russia, China and the US

	Failed resolutions (13)		Non-consensus resolutions (21)	
	South Africa	Germany	South Africa	Germany
China	54%	8%	43%	43%
Russia	54%	8%	24%	5%
US	31%	77%	71%	90%
GER/SA	54%		81%	
CN/RUS	100%		52%	
US/CN/RUS	0%		5%	

On less contested issues, such as technical rollovers of peacekeeping mandates or periodic reporting, the voting patterns of Germany and South Africa start to change. South Africa now voted more often with the US (71%) and Germany (81%) than China (43%) and Russia (24%). Germany voted with the US in 90% of the cases, with China 43% and Russia 5%. Although China and Russia voted similarly only in 52% of cases, the division between the US, China and Russia remains. The three countries only voted together in 5% of the cases.

Germany and South Africa attach great value to their regional alignments. As larger countries in their respective regions, they are both expected to support common positions and respect regional unity, but they also serve the Council in their individual capacities. In the case of Germany, the regional group consists of three elected European members, plus France and the UK. Alongside Germany's term, Belgium, Estonia and Poland joined the Council. In the case of Africa, the group consists of three elected countries in a single year. During South Africa's two year term it was joined by Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Tunisia and Niger. As five elected members need to leave the Council each year, the composition of regional groups changes annually. Between the European and Africa group, voting behavior is significantly different. Germany voted only with its regional group in all of the 121 votes on resolutions. The group reached 95%–100% consistency of voting (see box 1).

Box 1 Regional block voting

Block same voting European members: Failed resolutions: 100% Non-consensus resolutions: 95% (voting outside 1xUK) **Block same voting African members:** Failed resolutions: 46% (voting outside group 4xSA, 1xCOV, 1x TUN, 1xGNQ) Non-consensus resolutions: 76% (voting outside group 1x GNQ, 4xSA)

The Africa group appears more divided. Divisions become most visible when the veto is used. In situations in which the Council failed to adopt a resolution, the A3 only voted together in 46% of the cases. In situations in which a resolution was adopted without consensus, the group displayed more unity as they voted together in 76% of the cases. Within the A3, outside group voting is widespread and was practised by four countries. South Africa voted most often outside its own group on eight occasions. This included failed resolutions on Syria (two), WPS, Venezuela, as well as four adopted resolutions regarding Western Sahara (three times) and one resolution regarding Sudan and South Sudan. When South Africa deviated from

the A3 group, it often voted alongside China and Russia. Varying national preferences, different sub-regional alignments in Africa and varying degrees of commitment to the AU might explain these trends. Additionally, the divisions among the P5 members also increased outside group voting. Veto use and incoherent group voting seemed to be linked.

To some extent, these different regional voting patterns also inform Germany's and South Africa's positions in the Council and their prospects for coordination. When voting with Germany, South Africa automatically votes with the European group. When Germany votes with South Africa, it does not always vote with the A3. As a non-Western country, South Africa might not feel automatically comfortable with being 'forced' to vote with a particular group. It also limits the ability to form coalitions or consensus around its own positions. For Germany, voting with South Africa does not automatically guarantee African votes, but voting with its European peers nearly always enhances its position. Presenting a coherent EU position is seen as having a value in itself.

When it comes to drafting resolutions, Germany and South Africa displayed significantly different outputs (see table 3). While Germany authored a total of 29 resolutions, South Africa drafted 8. South Africa only drafted thematic resolutions, which have multiple authorships, and all of South Africa's resolutions were adopted by the Security Council.

Table 3 Authored resolutions, 2019–2020

	South Africa	**Germany**
Sole author	0	3
Co-author	0	22
Multiple authors	8	4
Thematic resolutions	8	8
Country resolutions	0	21
Joint SA/GER authorship	5	
Adopted	8	25
Failed	0	4
Total	**8**	**29**

By contrast, Germany was the sole author of three resolutions, and co-authored 22 resolutions and four resolutions with multiple authorship. Eight resolutions were thematic and 21 were country-specific. Four of the authored resolutions failed – these were linked to Syria. In five instances, Germany and South Africa authored the same resolution, which were thematic issues with multiple drafters. This significantly different performance output mostly relates to Germany being the co-penholder for a number of countries and its close relations with European veto powers. For example, Germany shared the penholdership with the UK on Sudan (Darfur), it was the co-penholder for Libya (sanctions) and it was the co-penholder for humanitarian issues (Syria). Additionally, Germany was the sole penholder for Afghanistan. The joint Council presidency with France in March and April 2019 also provided space for better policy coordination. However, France did not want to share its penholdership position with Germany on Mali. A list of authored resolutions and their topics is provided in box 2.

Box 2 Authored resolutions topics

South Africa: Security Sector Reform, Ending Conflict in Africa by 2020, Women in Armed Conflict, Safety and Security of Peacekeepers, Youth Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict, Women in Peacekeeping Operations, Missing Persons in Armed Conflict

Germany: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, Ending Conflict in Africa by 2020, Youth Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Terrorism, Financing Terrorism, Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict, Women in Peacekeeping Operations, Missing Persons in Conflict

Lastly, both countries have also been active in organizing Arria-Formula meetings. Germany has organized 18 and South Africa 8. In two instances Germany and South Africa co-authored a meeting (WPS, Access to Education). Arria-Formula meetings are more frequently used by elected members than permanent ones. They are used to deepen thematic debates, bring to the agenda topics for which no consensus exists and they are also used as a promotion vehicle for individual priorities. For example, South Africa co-organized a meeting on Israeli settlements, while Germany did so on Crimea. On average, Germany often tended to author meetings with a human and women's rights perspective, while South Africa focused on vulnerable groups in conflict, such as the youth, refugees and women.

Thematic issues and differences
The vast majority of Security Council resolutions are adopted by unanimity, a small minority without consensus and a few are vetoed. By and large, the Council continues to work effectively. Deadlock on a particular issue does not necessarily affect another country or thematic issues severely. P5 and E10 members often display a high degree of pragmatism and routine in managing the Council's affairs. Despite this, most long-term observers connote an increase in polarization and a diminution of broad-based consensus, which is dissipating from areas of geopolitical competition into the mainstream and routine business of the Council (Gowan 2020; ICG 2019a). For example, thematic issues that Germany and South Africa prioritized during their terms, such as climate change and WPS, faced significant resistance from either the US or China and Russia. With regard to the US, this has changed with Joe Biden's election. The following section examines a number of country-specific and thematic issues to trace Germany's and South Africa's positions. These include Venezuela, Sudan, Syria, Libya and WPS.

Venezuela
Issues in and around elections and democratic transition turned out to be contentious in the Security Council, including for elected members. This covered countries such as Venezuela, the DRC and Sudan. Germany and South Africa at times found themselves in different camps. In early 2019, the crisis in Venezuela reached the Security Council. After years of mismanagement, the oil-rich country was facing a humanitarian and political crisis. Hyperinflation, high crime rates, poor food and medical supplies, mass protests and mass migration into neighboring Colombia built up significant pressure on President Nicolás Maduro. He responded by rigging elections and channeling oil income to the security apparatus in order to secure their loyalty.

At the Security Council, two resolutions were voted on, drafted by the US and Russia respectively. None was adopted as the Council was divided. Germany and South Africa voted either with the Western group or with China and Russia. The US draft resolution described the elections as "neither free nor fair" as well as "expressing deep concern about the actions of a regime…" and "excessive use of force by Venezuelan security forces" (UNSC 28 February 2019). South Africa described the resolution as "unbalanced and prescriptive" (UNSC 28 February 2019).

The Russian draft read differently, "expressing concern over the threats to use force against the territorial integrity and political independence" as well as "expressing further

concern over the attempts to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction". For the German delegation, the Russian draft "presented no solution to the crisis, but rather favoured a regime that lacks the support of the Venezuelan population" (UNSC 28 February 2019). The South African representative praised the draft for its impartiality.

The two countries could not be further apart from each, displaying different priorities. While South Africa was mostly worried about international interferences in an ideologically close country, Germany highlighted the importance of adhering to constitutional rule as an instrument to avoid a further deterioration of the crisis in Venezuela. At the same time, it was clear that European members in the Council, in addition to the US, came out strongly in support of the presidential candidate Juan Guaidó, recognizing him as the legitimate president instead of Maduro. European Council members voted in unity against the Russian draft and in favor of the US. African members were split. Côte d'Ivoire abstained in both cases, and Equatorial Guinea supported the Russian draft, while abstaining in the other. South Africa decided to position itself clearly against the US and in favor of the Russian proposal.

Sudan and Darfur
Germany and South Africa also became diplomatically involved in the case of Sudan. Together with the UK, Germany was a co-penholder for Sudan, and South Africa aimed at linking Security Council resolutions with decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC). At the center of attention in 2019 and 2020 were the deposition of Al-Bashir and the drawdown of the hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Al-Bashir's fall on 11 April 2019 came after years of internal protests and resulted from popular uprisings as well as a military coup. Before the Security Council could adopt a resolution, South Africa and the A3 insisted that the AU-PSC should first take a position, on which the Security Council was expected to at least recognize regional leadership (Gaedtke 2021: 11). On 15 April, the AU-PSC adopted a communiqué, in which it "strongly condemns and totally rejects the seizure of power by the Sudanese military" and "reaffirms the imperative of a civilian-led and consensual transition in Sudan" (AU-PSC 2019, para. 5 a, b). Later, in June, the AU suspended Sudan's membership until a civilian government was established. The Security Council did not follow the course of the A3. China and Russia resisted any explicit wording that would directly support democratic transition or reference to the AU-PSC (ICG 2019b).

Sharing the penholdership with the UK, Germany concentrated mostly on the drawdown of operation UNAMID (United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur). There was an increasing agreement that the mission was to be phased out. The AU-UN hybrid mission was first set up in 2007 and emerged as a compromise between Al-Bashir, the AU and the UN. At its peak, more than 20,000 soldiers were part of the mission. Its troop size was gradually reduced over the last years and in 2018 the UN Secretary-General and AU Chairperson recommended a phasing out of the mission in June 2020. South Africa had deployed around 1,100 troops in the past. With Al-Bashir's fall in 2019 and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it was agreed that the mission should not exit too early. The mandate was extended several times for a few months. While the UK and Germany wanted a later exit in 2021 and a single resolution, the AU-PSC favored an earlier date and the adoption of two separate resolutions addressing the UNAMID exit and the establishment of a new political mission (AU-PSC 2020, para. 16, 18). Both were accepted.

With the liquidation of UNAMID, the question emerged whether a political follow-up mission should be established, especially as political instability was likely to persist. In the end, the Security Council agreed on resolution 2594, which established the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). The content of the resolution establishing the new mission appeared less progressive than the two penholders had wished for. References to the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as phrases that could have been interpreted as being allowed to sanction peace spoilers, were removed from the text following Russian concerns

(SCR 2020e). Although the mission mandate was drafted to support the political transition of the country, more progressive language was not agreeable. For example, phrases such as "progress towards democratic governance, in the protection and promotion of human rights" were resisted by China and Russia (SCR 2020e). South Africa's involvement in Sudan supported a sequenced approached of decision-making, in which the PSC would be first to take a position, with the expectation that the Security Council would follow. South Africa was also instrumental in facilitating a field visit of the Security Council to Sudan.

Syria
The Syrian conflict remains the single most contested area over the last decade. Geopolitical considerations are prevalent in every aspect. Russia and China worked primarily as guardians for Bashar Assad and vetoed any resolution that would criticize or sanction the regime. Although the US and Russia demonstrated pragmatic coordination in the fight against the Islamic State and the Assad regime had basically won the war in Syria, this did not trigger a more relaxed position of veto powers in the Security Council. As permanent members tend to either vote affirmatively or reject a resolution on high-profile matters, E10 members are often forced to take sides and little space is left for middle-ground positions (see table 4). Germany was a co-penholder, together with Belgium and Kuwait, on humanitarian affairs in Syria. At the same time, Russia drafted three resolutions. A total of eight resolutions on Syria were vetoed during 2019 and 2020. The US, China and Russia each vetoed and supported rival drafts, which resulted in a deadlock. South Africa voted in favor of seven drafts, while abstaining once. Germany drafted four resolutions for which it voted in favor, while rejecting three and abstaining on one draft; it basically voted synchronistically with the European block and the US. The Africa group voted coherently on five resolutions.

Table 4 Voting on Syria, 2019–2020 (vetoed resolutions)

	South Africa	Germany		Russia	China	USA
Against	0	3		4	4	4
Affirmative	7	4		4	4	4
Abstention	1	1		0	0	0

Germany and South Africa voted similarly in five cases, and in three cases they found themselves in opposing camps. South Africa avoided clear alignments. It supported both camps, the Russian-Chinese as well as the US-Western camps, almost equally. As De Carvalho and Singh (2020: 19) aptly summarize, "In the case of humanitarian access to Syria, South Africa implicitly followed the principle that it would support any resolution that might advance the political dialogue and humanitarian access, irrespective of whom had tabled the resolution (whether Russia/China, or the P3)." By selecting this strategy it avoided being drawn into great power rivalries and could assume the role of 'swing state' (De Carvalho and Singh 2020: 14–15).

Germany followed a different approach. The central topic was humanitarian access to the remaining rebel enclaves in the north of Syria. Previous resolutions granted such access through two corridors but would expire at some point. At the end of 2019, two rival drafts from Germany and Belgium, as well as a Russian one, were vetoed. Provisional agreement on the extension of access until 10 July 2020 was reached in January. However, the US, the UK, China and Russia abstained (SCR 2020c).

The diplomatic showdown started in July 2020. Within days, five draft resolutions were rejected. At the center of negotiations were the number of humanitarian supply corridors and the length of authorization. While Russia argued for a single point of access and a six-month

expiry date, the German/Belgium position proposed two access points over a 12-month duration. Several UN agencies made clear how precarious the humanitarian supply was for millions of people. Russia's calculation was primarily to weaken rebel groups by thinning down external food and medical supplies, irrespective of the humanitarian consequences. After the first two rounds of draft resolutions authored by Germany and Belgium, as well as by Russia, were vetoed, the former tabled another resolution, in which they kept on proposing two access points but recommended a six-month expiry date. Russia responded by drafting a resolution that would expire after 12 months but opened only one border post. Again both resolutions were vetoed. While South Africa kept its undifferentiated position and simply voted for all four drafts, Germany aimed at keeping two humanitarian access points, but it failed in the end. Two days after the January extension expired and no authorized access was agreed upon, Germany and Belgium tabled resolution 2533, which mostly accommodated Russia's concerns and left only one border post open with a 12-month expiry date. The resolution was adopted with three countries abstaining (China, the Dominican Republic and Russia) and the remaining countries voting in favor.

In the case of Syria, Germany and South Africa set different but not antagonistic priorities. As co-penholders on humanitarian issues, Germany and Belgium tried to avoid a near total shutdown of humanitarian access – the original 2014 resolution 2165 opened four border posts and keeping two was already a concession to Russia. The South African position might be criticized for being undifferentiated but in the end the resolution adopted resembled those drafts made by Russia. Finally, veto powers dominated the adoption or rejection of resolutions, an experience both Germany and South Africa had to recognize.

Libya

The Libyan conflict represents both potential for more cooperation between Germany and South Africa as well as alienation. The legacy from the previous term in 2011 and 2012 is a difficult one. With the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, long-standing autocrat Gaddafi was confronted with a popular uprising. With the adoption of resolution 1973, the Security Council authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. In the end, this led to a military air campaign and the arming of rebels to topple Gaddafi. The voting behavior of both Germany and South Africa caused some controversy at home and among the respective regional peer groups. While Germany abstained but later argued it was largely supportive of the intervention, South Africa voted in favor but soon argued that it did not mean to support regime change and voiced harsh criticism against the intervening coalition.

The Libyan case had far-reaching consequences. It triggered stark opposition from a group of rising powers that was informing positions in other conflicts like Syria. In 2011, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, also known as BRICS, were serving at the Security Council. The Libyan events brought this group closer together in their rejection of the 'Libyan model', according to which the Security Council would be used to sanction recalcitrant leaders and armed rebels, and later remove the leadership with military force (Brosig 2019).

Germany and South Africa came to fundamentally different conclusions when evaluating the situation. South Africa prioritized a neo-colonial perspective, rejecting external interventions and highlighting the need to integrate the AU into future international peace plans. Germany was first preoccupied with justifying its abstention and disengagement from the military campaign and aimed at restoring relations with its Western allies. Later, Germany's military disengagement provided the opportunity to operate as a peace broker, without direct geostrategic stakes. With Libya being a key country through which refugees were transiting to Europe, Germany assumed a more active position. At the beginning of 2020, it organized a major peace conference in Berlin, with the aim to broker a ceasefire and stop the proxy war that emerged after Gaddafi's fall. When re-joining the Security Council in 2019, the UK asked Germany to preside over the sanctions committee.

In the years after 2011, the AU and South Africa had little political influence on post-Gaddafi Libya. Instead, Libya converted into a playground for regional geopolitics. Turkey, Russia, France and the Arab countries remained the most vital players, supporting different sides in a protracted proxy war. The UN established a Support Mission to Libya (UNSMIL) and has been involved in peace negotiations, as well as setting up an arms embargo. However, the conflict is far from being solved.

After the Berlin conference, Germany aimed to start a peace process, in which key external countries would commit to the UN's arms embargo, and fighting parties on the ground would realize their military stalemate and start meaningful mediation. The Security Council resolution 2510 was adopted, endorsing the Berlin conference, and "recalls the commitments made at Berlin to abide by the arms embargo and demands full compliance including by all Member States with the arms embargo…" The resolution also makes explicit referencing to the AU's mediation efforts following South Africa's insistence. South Africa also asked for the adoption of the resolution to wait until after the AU summit had been concluded and could be referenced in the text (SCR 2020d). This war was regarded as important following accusations of insufficient African representation at the Berlin conference, which was focusing mostly on external actors.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
In their run-up to the Security Council elections, Germany and South Africa set similar priorities. One such area was the thematic field of Women, Peace and Security. Since the first adoption of a WPS resolution (1325) in 2000, a number of follow-up resolutions have been adopted, with an emphasis on progressive norm evolution in this field. The focus was mostly placed on protection, participation, prevention and relief (SCR 2020b). In 2019, during their respective Council presidency in April and October, Germany and South Africa drafted resolutions 2467 and 2493. While Germany placed an emphasis on a victim-centered approach around sexual violence in conflict, South Africa highlighted the importance of effective implementation. The German draft was highly contested.

The US, Russia and China at various points threatened to use their veto should the text not be adjusted. Reference to reproductive health, as well as reference to the ICC, was weakened following US complaints. China and Russia objected to the establishment of a formal subsidiary body on WPS in the form of a working group and the extension of formalized reporting. Both countries circulated an alternative draft to exert pressure on Germany as a penholder to accommodate their positions and argued that the WPS agenda did not fall within the mandate of the Security Council and should be dealt with by other organs.

In the end, the US received the most criticism. The majority of Council members clearly considered reference to reproductive health essential for an effective victim-centered approach and expressed their dissatisfaction after the resolution was adopted. The South African delegation framed its concerns straightforwardly: "On the one hand, the text calls for a survivor-centred approach, while on the other hand it is denying survivors essential sexual and reproductive health services when they need them most. The Council is therefore telling survivors of sexual violence in conflict that consensus is more important than their needs" (UNSC 23 April 2019). The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favor and China and Russia abstaining. Following resolution 2467, Germany organized a donor conference in support of its implementation (Wisotzki 2019: 22). Despite the compromises that had to be made, the resolution still progressively advances the WPS agenda.

As the prospects for a further expansion of the normative WPS agenda were limited and the foundations of the issue are firmly rooted in the UN system, South Africa placed emphasis on the implementation of existing standards. Although resolution 2493 was adopted by unanimity, it was followed by contestation from the US, China and Russia and the rest of the Council, similar to resolution 2467. The US made clear that "full implementation" would not

include reproductive health. China and Russia took issue with the protection of human rights defenders and the role of civil society. It was argued by Russia that the Security Council is overburdened with human rights issues, while China was worried that civil society activism could undermine state authority. Despite these concerns by two veto powers, the majority of Council members were not willing to renounce reference to human rights defenders but were ready to abstain (SCR 2019). In the end, the resolution makes indirect reference by referring to the creation of a "safe and enabling environment for civil society including […] those who protect and promote human rights […]."

Given the circumstances, Germany and South Africa used their Council presidencies effectively to broker compromise solutions that accommodated concerns of dissenting veto powers, while, at the same time, advancing the substance of the WPS agenda and preventing its erosion. This can largely be seen as a success. It was facilitated because both countries followed a similar approach to WPS; they have complemented and supported each other and could rely on widespread endorsement from the E10, as well as France and the UK. Despite this, some irritations emerged toward the end of 2020, which also marked the 20th anniversary of the landmark resolution 1325. In late October, Russia tabled a WPS resolution. It was not adopted because it failed to gather the required nine affirmative votes as ten members abstained. While Germany abstained, South Africa endorsed the resolution.

Critique from those countries that abstained was mostly concentrated on the content of the resolution, which would not advance the existing WPS agenda but was seen as falling behind previously agreed content. This view was not shared by South Africa, which insisted that the resolution "reaffirmed the entire normative framework", although it did not (DIRCO 2020).

Some loose ends
As elected members to the Security Council, not all ambitions could be realized. For Germany, its focus on climate change and conflict was blocked by the US. Being in denial of human-made climate change, the Trump administration signaled that it would veto a resolution on the topic. Likewise, Russia's position on the Ukraine prevented the Security Council from adopting a resolution or getting involved in conflict resolution. Additionally, the issue of nuclear non-proliferation did not take center stage.

For South Africa, the ambition to be a continental leader was complicated. While the A3 displayed unity on many Africa-related issues and the number of joint statements was increasing, this unity was on shaky grounds at times. The long-standing AU demand for access to UN funding for African peacekeeping missions was dropped by South Africa as the AU-PSC could not agree on a particular position. This followed a draft resolution in December 2018, in which the A3 finished a text but later renounced to vote on it after the US indicated it would veto it. The A3 referred the matter back to the AU-PSC, which was not able to provide the necessary strategic guidance. Without a clear mandate from the AU, South Africa dropped the issue.

In Conclusion: Not too close but also not too far from each other
When Germany and South Africa rejoined the Security Council, they did it under more difficult circumstances than at any time after the end of the Cold War. As great power rivalry threatens to undermine effective multilateralism and the Trump administration weakened transatlantic relations considerably, regional powers are in demand for global leadership. While their position as elected members is at a structural disadvantage, prospects for policy coordination among key elected members is central for effective multilateralism. How close or far are Germany and South Africa from each other?

Although the majority of resolutions are adopted by unanimity (many are technical rollover resolutions), the contested and failed resolutions are the best indicators for political

divisions. When exploring all votes on resolutions, a trend becomes visible: the more controversial an issue, the less likely Germany and South Africa are to vote in similar groups. The two countries voted similarly in slightly more than half the vetoed resolutions. This mostly refers to the cases of Venezuela in 2019 and Syria in 2020. On Venezuela, the two countries were the furthest apart from each other. While South Africa worried about external intervention into the internal affairs of the country, Germany emphasized the illegitimate election and excessive use of force against protesters. Both countries had backing from P5 members and thus no bridging attempt was made and no resolution adopted.

In the case of Syria, the policy space for formulating positions beyond the P5 remains small, and geopolitics about the country cannot be avoided. As a consequence, E10 cooperation is limited to facilitate resolutions that are agreeable among the P5. In this context, Germany and South Africa took different but not mutually exclusive positions. As co-penholder for humanitarian issues, Germany aimed at keeping as many humanitarian corridors open as possible. It finally had to bow to Russian geostrategic interests, which meant either adopting no resolution and no humanitarian access or reducing the number of access points. This led to several resolutions being vetoed. From the beginning, South Africa followed a different, rather unprincipled approach. It simply voted for any proposal that was tabled as long as some access was granted, knowing that its voice might not substantially alter majorities or influence the position of permanent members. While German diplomats might have felt a sense of frustration over South Africa voting with Russia and China, what ultimately counted was a resolution that Russia would not veto. Later on, the adopted resolution looked similar to the one that South Africa voted for but Germany did not.

More visible potential for coordination can be found in the area of WPS. As both countries placed WPS on their campaign agenda for the Security Council elections, they were eager to pass resolutions during their Council presidencies. While it can be debated why both countries opted for the adoption of two resolutions within a few months, in the end they addressed different issues and there was no duplication of effort. Lastly, both countries promoted progressive agendas and faced similar opposition from the US, China and Russia. Despite this, most of the envisioned substance could be saved but compromises had to be made. If the initiative had only been left to P5 members, the content and direction of WPS resolutions would likely look substantially weaker.

Considerable overlap of interest can be found not only on the WPS agenda but also on continental security issues such as in Sudan (Darfur) or Libya. In opposition to South Africa, Germany was a co-penholder for the two conflicts and could amplify its activities through close cooperation with France and the UK. While Germany shared its penholder position with Belgium, Kuwait, Indonesia and the UK, no African country was included. Especially with regard to the WPS agenda, co-penholdership could have been shared with South Africa. African countries remain systematically under-represented regarding country-specific penholder positions.

Finally, regional alignments might also play a role in explaining voting patterns. As the European block voted coherently throughout, the A3 members were less integrated, especially on contested resolutions. While this limits predictability when cooperating with the A3, it also provides South Africa with more flexibility in voting. Disparate voting is not necessarily an expression of fundamentally different judgments of a particular issue, but it also emerges from the structural context in which both countries operate. In the end, they seem to keep a rather friendly equidistance to one another.

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