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# South Africa in Southern Africa: A Perspective

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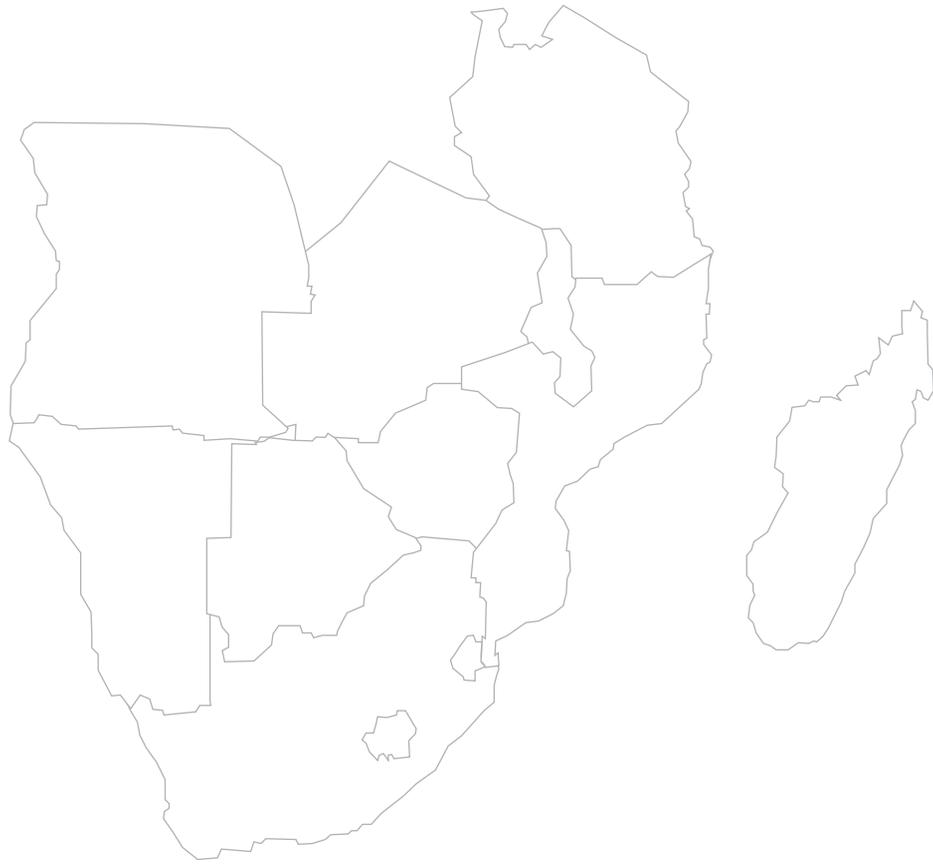
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## Introduction

The focus on Southern Africa and the consolidation of continental African unity and progress constitute key pillars of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy. The declared interest with regard to both Africa and Southern Africa is to work towards better conditions for regional and continental integration. Key amongst such conditions has been to ensure an end to all conflicts and to strengthen political stability. In this regard, it is important to point to the co-incidence between global transformations following the fall of the Soviet Union and the democratic wave on the continent, within which also South Africa's defeat of apartheid found its expression. Afterwards the country was modelled as an active agent of transformation in Africa as well as in world affairs, which has also been the basis of its ambition to become a responsible African citizen (Lewis 2001:2) and a norm entrepreneur (Geldenhuys in Carlsnaes and Nel, 2006). Hence, the young democracy was thrust into the role of a catalyst for the birth of a new Africa by championing peace diplomacy and peacekeeping, by rebuilding continental and regional institutions, and by catalyzing its development agenda.

However, although South Africa plays a leading role in strengthening regional stability, this does not always translate into a sufficiently robust leadership which is mainly due to two reasons: first, the country refuses every temptation to openly become a regional hegemon; and secondly, its past experiences with military incursions and trade blockages made it eternally vigilant against temptations to throw its weight around. This paper argues that contestations amongst analysts about whether South Africa exercises its regional power robustly or timidly has to do with divergent interpretations of its power dynamics. For South Africa to effectively lead the region it needs more than political will and capability; it needs acceptance of its leadership by its neighbours

and legitimacy in the eyes of regional citizens. Yet, not all of these four ingredients of regional leadership are present in South Africa's role in the region. While its commitment to lead stabilization and development in the region is evident, its acceptability and legitimacy is in question in some quarters. This imposes limitations to its relatively superior hard and soft power currency and hence, to its active role as a leader.

## South Africa in Africa: Context and Contours

It is common for writings on this subject to lay out a context whose main message is that South Africa's foreign policy began in 1994 and according to which the country is new in international affairs. Therefore, a dominant view describes South Africa's leadership ambitions in Africa as either 'too weak' or 'hegemonic'. However, this view is incorrect for two main reasons: The first is that the analysis of South Africa's role in Africa and foreign policy in general fails to recognize that the governing African National Congress (ANC) has been an active player in international relations since the beginning of the 20th century. It is common knowledge that at the turn of the last century, educated African nationalists sought to find institutional platforms through which to express their aspirations for rights and voice in South Africa while also formulating ideas about the international environment. One of the first foreign policy statements by this elite would be about South Africa as part of an Africa that was to rediscover its self-worth, potential, and future glory. In an article published in the *African Abroad* periodical on 5 April 1906, Pixley ka Seme, one of the future founders of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) before it became the ANC, linked the struggle for freedom in South Africa to the awakening of Africa. Thus, the ANC's paradigm of international relations was particularly formed pan-Africanist and Afrocentric in nature.<sup>1</sup>

The placing of Africa in South African foreign policy first as well as the deep belief in the capacity of Africa to redeem itself, consequently have their roots in the turn of the last century and colours foreign policy thinking until today. Hence, the African Renaissance mantra under President Mbeki was an implementation of the longstanding ANC

ideology on foreign policy, which was elaborated in great detail in discussion documents for the movement's 1997 national conference.

The second reason is that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, colonial and apartheid states recognized that South Africa needed to play an active role in Africa. Literature shows that under Jan Smuts, South Africa played an active role in shaping post-war dispensation including the creation of the League of Nations. Both liberal governments and coalitions between conservatives and liberals (Afrikaner nationalists and English liberals) would continue to play an active role in global affairs, though neglecting Africa in general. However, when the struggle for democracy and liberation of blacks (Africans, Indians and Coloureds) intensified, the conservative apartheid state would re-enter the African political geography in pursuit of countering the successful mobilization by movements in exile. The apartheid state's engagement with Africa and especially with Southern Africa was not limited to military incursions and economic blockades. It would also include 'dialogue' with some states in order to win them over as well as secret slush funds in order to buy the support of some African states. According to Sifiso Ndlovu (2006), African countries that warmed up to the apartheid state's diplomacy of dialogue during the 1970s included Ghana, Lesotho, Gabon, Central African Republic, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Upper Volta, Senegal, Togo, and Uganda. Certainly, a group of countries including Cameroon, Liberia, Nigeria and Tanzania stood opposed to dialogue with the apartheid regime.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pixley ka Isaka Seme, 1906. "The Regeneration of Africa" in *The African Abroad*, 5 April.

<sup>2</sup> For useful material on this subject, see C. Legum, 1975. *Southern Africa: The Secret Diplomacy of Détente*, London: Rex Collings; C. Legum, 1976. *Vorster's Gamble for Africa: How the Search for Peace Failed*, London: Rex Collings; B. Geldenhuys, 1984. *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, Braamfontein: Macmillan; R. Pfister, 2003. 'Apartheid South Africa's Foreign Relations with African States, 1961–1994', PhD thesis, Rhodes University; and S. Nolutshungu, 1975. *South Africa in Africa: A Study of Ideology and Foreign Policy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hence, South Africa's foreign policy engagements within Africa are not new: whether as part of the apartheid state's efforts to manipulate African countries' belief in the efficacy of political dialogue and non-violence or as part of the mobilization of African countries and peoples in support of the liberation struggle. Accordingly, Africa plays an important role in the DNA of the country's foreign policy. Mainstream scholarship of post-apartheid foreign policy and South Africa's complex relationship with Africa would benefit from a greater use of the literature shedding light on the evolution of the ANC's diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

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3 See, for instance, .M. Ndlovu, 2004. ' The ANC and the World', in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: 1960-1970*, Vol. 1, Cape Town: Zebra Press. *The author is working on a publication reviewing precisely this question of continuities between the ANC's brand of internationalism, which is generally progressive and pragmatic, and South Africa's foreign policy.*

## South Africa's Leadership and Regional Power Dynamics

An important factor in the aforementioned debate is the contested understanding of the relationship between South Africa's power currency and the nature of its (potential) leadership. Accordingly, there is no debate on the significance of the country's hard and soft power.<sup>4</sup>

Following up on this, the country possesses a much larger and diversified economy than its neighbours. Its modern infrastructure, natural resources base, industrialization, and integration into the world economy are significant. South Africa's superior economic competitiveness offers an economic clout and in fact bequeaths significant amounts of diplomatic capital to South Africa's leadership potential (Chauvin and Gaulier, 2002:8). Economists argue that the higher the economic growth for South Africa, the more influence it has and the more it wants to participate, so to maintain a healthy environment that allows it to prosper. South Africa produces around \$160 billion of economic output, while the rest of the combined Southern African Development Community (SADC) produces around \$33 billion. South Africa is also the largest spender of FDI in SADC states. (Alden & Soko 2005: 374). Therefore, Landsberg and Kondlo (2007: 8) suggest that "(i)t can easily be asserted that the Republic seeks to push this agenda in order to maintain this advantage. Indeed, there have already been accusations that South Africa uses its political role in the continent to advance its business interests."

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4 Adam Habib contends that South Africa's hegemonic ambitions may not be actively pursued but they are naturally an outcome of its possession of political, military, economic and cultural attributes of hard power unparalleled in Africa. See Habib, A. 2010. 'South African Foreign Policy: Context and Contours,' in Zondi, S. and Masters, L. (Eds). *The Future of South Africa's Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change?* Pretoria: Institute for Global Dialogue.

Moreover, it has advantages in various areas that constitute ingredients of its power currency in regard to the region. For instance, it has a large and sophisticated security establishment lavished with relatively better resources. With a military expenditure of \$4,040 million in 2007, it is ranked the largest one in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Besides, it has diplomatic missions with all its neighbours and many more other countries on global scale, which helps to promote its interests on the African continent and globally.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, its development assistance equips the country with immense soft power in so far as by supporting capacity building programmes in post-conflict countries, it builds a case for its recognition as a responsible regional enforcer. Additionally, it is the epicentre of scientific and educational establishments in the region. It possesses advanced technology in the areas of communication and energy as well as a superior infrastructure.

This superior power currency has been used to some extent to help end conflicts, consolidate democracy and governance, accelerate job-creating and diversify industrialization, boost intra-regional trade, and attract more inward investment. Furthermore, it would help to strengthen the region's role in a changing global environment and enable it to negotiate its relations with others better than is the current case. Besides, South Africa's power currency has the potential to assist Africa in managing the major scramble for its resources driven by competition between the BRICS countries and the old western powers.

While this relatively superior power generates expectations of a more robust and active leadership

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5 'The Military Balance for 2009.' Available at [www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org) (accessed on 3 July 2011).

6 Henwood, R. 1997. 'South Africa's Foreign Policy: Principles and Problems,' in Solomon, H. (ed.) *Fairy-Godmother, Hegemon or Partner? In search of a South African Foreign Policy*, Midrand: ISS.

for the good of the region, it also generates concerns and insecurities amongst some of South Africa's neighbours and continental rivals. Thus, there is a tendency of its large business sector to aggressively expand into the region and to replicate the ills of global capitalism regarding a blatant exploitation of labourers and small suppliers of goods as well as an expropriation of profit back to South Africa. All of this has generated a lot of concerns within the region about what Patrick Bond calls 'sub-imperialism' on the part of South Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the limitations of its capability, the question is whether South Africa has done what it should have done in order to ensure stronger regional stability and security. This is subject to a major debate amongst observers and practitioners alike. On the one hand, there are those who argue that while the country has contributed significantly to the stabilization and strengthening of Africa and Southern Africa, there has been a lack in leadership ambitions both in economic<sup>8</sup> and political terms.<sup>9</sup> However, they note the positive impact of the African Renaissance Agenda in ending conflicts in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, and Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> They also recognize the active leadership by South Africa in the reform of SADC including the creation of a stronger Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation

with the regional programme called the Strategic Indicative Programme of the Organ (SIPO) as well as the stabilization of the African Union, and the championing of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Maloka, 2001).

Consequently, the country's superior hard and soft power currencies are seen as a major asset in South Africa's ability to shape the course of regional economic or political affairs. However, some scholars decry what they see as inadequate leadership, which they ascribe to the negative ramifications of its leadership role during the military intervention in Lesotho in the mid-1990s and the negative feedback to the country's push for suspension of Nigeria over the assassination of Niger Delta activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, during Mandela's presidency. It is said that these experiences forced South Africa to work with key African countries<sup>11</sup> through partnership, or to take the lead cautiously or quietly such as in Zimbabwe and the DRC.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, critics lambast South Africa for playing the role of a mercantilist, fair-godmother, big brother, and a hegemon.<sup>13</sup> While there are different shades of this argument, the common refrain is that South Africa excessively pursues its

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7 See Bond, P. 2004. "The George Bush of Africa: Pretoria chooses Subimperialism," Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, 13 July.

8 Games, D. 2004. "The experience of South African firms doing business in Africa: A preliminary survey and analysis", Business in Africa Report, 1, Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.

9 Solomon, H. "South African Foreign Policy and Middle Power Leadership,' in Solomon, H. (ed.), Fairy-Godmother, Hegemon or Partner? In search of a South African Foreign Policy, Midrand: ISS.

10 Landsberg, C. and Kondlo, K. 2007. 'South Africa and the 'African Agenda,' Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.

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11 Le Pere, G. and Alden, C. 2009. "South Africa in Africa: bound to lead?" *Politikon: South African journal of political studies*, 36 (1). pp. 145-169.

12 Sadie, Y. and Schoeman, M. 2000. "Zimbabwe: Lessons for and response from South Africa and the region", In *South African Yearbook of International Affairs*, 2000/01, SAIIA, pp. 261-262.

13 See Solomon, H. (ed.) *Fairy-Godmother, Hegemon or Partner? In search of a South African Foreign Policy*, Midrand: ISS; Habib, A. "Hegemon or Pivot? Debating South Africa's role in Africa," a paper presented at a Centre for Policy Studies Seminar, August 2003;

economic interests.<sup>14</sup> The country's motivations are seen negatively and some critics even see an obsession with fighting imperialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. Thus, critics worry that South Africa's diplomatic responses like the ones to the Zimbabwean crisis, the crises in Cote d'Ivoire or Libya in 2011, and its votes against some western sponsored draft resolutions in the UN Security Council in 2007-8 have been designed to fight 'imagined' imperial designs at the expense of the human rights agenda in these countries.<sup>15</sup> Leftists worry that the country's hegemonic ambitions actually would turn the country into a stooge of the west and would further the agenda of perpetuating crude capitalism over narrowly defined democratization.<sup>16</sup>

The recent controversy over the fielding of South Africa's home affairs minister and former foreign affairs minister, Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, in the elections for the African Union Commission chairperson in January 2012 has triggered similar concerns in some African public platforms,

especially in the social media.<sup>17</sup> Some have decried the country's bolder leadership ambition, while others have warned that this will divide the continent. Some believe that the move is timely because the AU's central organs are so weak that it needs the direct influence of powerful states. In contrast, others suggest that such a move would only delay the development of independent institutional capacities at the AU's centre. As the debate continues, there is no homogeneous take on South Africa's regional leadership amongst opinion makers and activists alike. Moreover, there are divergent opinions on the very principles of regional powers playing custodians to the common good in Africa, even as the weakness of the AU's centre is broadly acknowledged.

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14 See Bond, "The George Bush of Africa." and Lennie Gentle, "NEPAD and South African Imperialism", in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 27 (3), June 2003. pp. 20-22;

15 This view pervades analysis by scholars in the public domain, especially in the print media and it is a view that the media has taken to be the only way of seeing South Africa's position on major African conflicts where western powers are involved. For an example of this view, see Sadie and Schoeman. "Zimbabwe: Lessons for and response from South Africa and the region," pp. 261-262.

16 This concern has been expressed frequently in African civil society circles, especially those worried about the western neo-colonial agenda. Views along these lines can be found in blogs and internet sights like African Monitor, Pambazuka news and so forth.

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17 See, for instance, the views of the ISS in the Voice of America, "South African AU Chair Nomination Raises Eyebrows," [www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Southern/South-Africa-AU-Vhair-Nomination-Raises-Eyebrows-138122343.html](http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Southern/South-Africa-AU-Vhair-Nomination-Raises-Eyebrows-138122343.html) (accessed on 26 January 2012).

## South Africa and the Commitment to Regional Stability

South Africa's willingness to play an active role in ending conflicts and political crises as well as in rebuilding post-conflict societies is beyond question, but it is not without constraints. From the onset, the Mandela government thought that helping to stabilize the region was a noble principle in its own right, and it was also in South Africa's self-interest in so far as a stable and developing region was less likely to flood massive waves of refugees into the country. The commitment was also about atoning for the sins of apartheid South Africa that sought to divide and destabilize Africa in order to defeat the liberation movements' solidarity with independent Africa.

Generally, three major developments in the 1990s influenced South Africa's leadership role within the region and the continent. First, the end of the Cold War and the concomitant global transformations resulted in a shift of power, namely from a bipolar system marked by competition towards a more multipolar system dominated by a single superpower. These shifts in global power created a space for middle and regional powers that could now play a significant role in international affairs. South Africa under Nelson Mandela then occupied this space by increasing its diplomatic representation throughout the world and by participating in major international forums and conferences. All of this contributed immensely to South Africa's international stature and raised expectations on the continent. Hence, South Africa was expected to be a responsible African power using its advantages for the benefit of all Africa. For instance, Mandela would take this advantage with some success to push for peace in Burundi and the DRC.<sup>18</sup> Thabo Mbeki's government would then consolidate this

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18 See Devon Curtis, "The Peace Process in Burundi: Successful African Intervention?", *Global Insight*, No. 24, September 2003.

international expansion by championing the idea of partnership amongst key African states around the idea of African Renaissance. In consequence, whereas the Mandela government campaigned for the isolation of Nigeria over the killing of Niger Delta civil rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Mbeki administration sought to influence the situation by building a strategic relationship with Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> The same can be said about the attempts to bring stability and democracy to Zimbabwe.

Second, the transformation of the African political geography regarding the collapse of dictatorial regimes in Africa influenced South Africa's leadership role greatly. While almost three quarters of African countries were forced to adopt pluralist electoral democracy, albeit with limited depth, the South African government used these 'winds of change' to champion self-propelled political and economic reforms in Africa. This included the building of strong and efficient regional and continental organisations and a strong push for peace diplomacy. It would seek to strengthen South Africa's regional power attributes through close partnership with Nigeria under Olusegun Obasanjo in West Africa, Algeria under Abdelazziz Bouteflika in North Africa, Tanzania under Benjamin Mkapa in East Africa, and Mozambique under Joaquim Chissano in Southern Africa. In consequence, this helped expedite progress towards NEPAD as a common economic vision and guiding paradigm for Africa's global engagements.

Third, the dramatic birth of South Africa itself represented a sort of convergence of the two aforementioned vectors of change. Its democratic transition fed into the wave of democratization on the continent and informed its pragmatic response to global affairs in order to take advantage of a world in which multilateralism, interdependence, and alliances had assumed greater importance than in the pre-1990 period. This would give the

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19 Adebayo, A. The Piped Paper of Pretoria, undated paper. No Reference.

new country political credibility to lead further democratization in Africa and to represent Africa's newly found self-confidence in international affairs.

These changes happened against the backdrop of the accelerating globalization, which helped defining the trajectory that the new South Africa would take in international economic relations and which is called a mixed economy perspective.<sup>20</sup> The strengthening of regional integration then became the focus on the African Agenda and a common norm. Hence, a belief that the best response to challenges presented by globalization was to consolidate intra-regional trade, economic cooperation, and common security was adopted. This gave impetus to the transformation of both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the SADC after 1995 - two processes in which South Africa played an important role.

The combination of these changes helped transform South Africa into a metaphorical bridge between the global north and global south: while it is firmly and consciously rooted in the developing world, it maintains strong bilateral relations with the global north. In this sense, South Africa has some capacity to be a bridge like other middle powers (Australia, Canada and Japan) that are geographically located in the developing world but at the same time are almost fully integrated into the global north in geo-political terms. Like Brazil and India, South Africa, on the other hand, seeks to balance its relations with major powers of the global north, while it is fully embedded in the growing global south multilateralism through NAM, NAASP, IBSA and now BRICS. This is what has been called bridge-building tendencies in South Africa's foreign policy; tendencies that co-habit with sometimes reformist impulses most

apparent during the Mbeki presidency.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the exact role of South Africa in changing world affairs and African diplomacy is a subject of dispute. This is partly because scholars generally disagree on the nature of the correlation between South Africa's capability and regional dynamics that would either constrain or enable its leadership. There are those for whom South Africa's reluctance to optimally use its power is a major shortcoming. As Adam Habib put it, South Africa's leadership "has also demonstrated trepidation at performing its hegemonic obligations."<sup>22</sup> On this basis, South Africa is described as a reluctant hegemon. Others depict exactly the opposite, warning that South Africa is exhibiting hegemonic and even sub-imperialist tendencies vis-à-vis the Southern African region.<sup>23</sup> This article seeks to show that South Africa's conduct and role is much more complex than this debate suggests. Fundamentally, the country has focused on a multilateralist collective leadership as its paradigm in African diplomacy which enables to lead from the front and from behind, depending on the issue at hand.

Under Nelson Mandela's presidency, South Africa's regional stabilization agenda focused on peacemaking, mainly in Burundi. But it also promoted a bold push for democratization, progressive governance and respect for human rights. Mandela told the SADC Summit in Blantyre, Malawi, in 1997 that while "amongst SADC's basic principles are respect for the sovereignty of member states and non-interference in one another's internal affairs (...) these considerations cannot blunt or totally override our common concern for

20 See Hirsch, A. 2005. *Season of Hope: Economic Reform under Mandela and Mbeki*, Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.

21 Habib, 'South African Foreign Policy: Context and Contours'.

22 Habib, "Hegemon or Pivot?"

23 Bond P. and Kapuya T. 2006. 'Arrogant, disrespectful, aloof and careless – South African companies in Africa'. *OSISA Openspace*, 1 (4), 16 July.

democracy, human rights and good governance in all our constituent states.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, South Africa sought for getting a paradigm shift in Southern Africa regarding the quality of democracy, respect of human rights, and good governance within states, while promoting respect for the sovereignty of states as a basis for peaceful state-to-state relations. It rejected to use non-interference principles in order to hide internal undemocratic tendencies. This would set up Mandela’s government for tensions with Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia as those countries apparently feared that South Africa would become an outpost of western agendas in Africa.

While the balance between peacemaking and democracy promotion would remain key pillars of South Africa’s foreign policy under President Thabo Mbeki, this government would place a greater emphasis on building resilient institutions and policy frameworks to give effect to the African Renaissance. South Africa had realized that its agenda would not be sustained if it relied on its own leadership, but that it would need the establishment of effective institutions and robust policy frameworks to guide collective action. For this reason, in the first decade, South Africa focused strongly on building special relations with capable states in order to shift the leadership from South Africa as an individual state to a collective of five to six states. In this process, it also sought to re-assure fellow African states that it was truly committed to the process of repositioning Africa and that it was not an extension of the subversive western colonial agenda.

The anti-imperialism flavour in South Africa’s African Agenda would be associated with the Mbeki administration because he articulated and drove the implementation of some key ingredients

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24 Quoted in Civicus Submission to the International Consultative Seminar of South African Legislatures 2011. Available at [www.parliament.gov.za](http://www.parliament.gov.za).

of an African renewal. It was Nelson Mandela that had constantly reminded the world of a need to give Africa space to redeem itself from the shackles of slavery and colonialism as well as from poverty and underdevelopment. He proclaimed on one occasion that “(t)he people of resurgent Africa are perfectly capable of deciding upon their own future form of government and discovering themselves dealing with any dangers which might arise.”<sup>25</sup> For him, one of the disadvantages that Africa had suffered for a long time was “the denial that its people had the capacity to bring about change and progress.” He also once said “We need to exert ourselves that much more, and break out of the vicious cycle of dependence imposed on us by the financially powerful: those in command of immense market power and those who dare to fashion the world in their own image.” He decried the “new scramble for Africa, which like that of the nineteenth century, plundered the continent’s wealth and left it once more the poorer.”<sup>26</sup> In this sense, independence of Africa from all external involvement was a critical part of South Africa’s stabilization agenda for Africa. Although both Mandela and Mbeki were no lone rangers, they implemented their common organisation’s strong commitment to this African Renaissance as expressed by their policy documents of 1997 and 2002.

In the mid-1990s, Mandela’s government championed the rapprochement between the West and Libya in the belief that this would enable this key African country to play its role alongside South Africa in strengthening African integration. Mandela pursued this against the approval of the US to which he said, “(h)e (Qadaffi) helped us at a time when we were all alone, when those who are now saying we should not come here were helping

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25 Crywys-Williams, J.1997. In the Words of Mandela, Johannesburg: Penguin Books, pp. 1-2.

26 Crywys-Williams, J.1997. In the Words of Mandela, Johannesburg: Penguin Books, pp. 1-2.

our enemies.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, freed up from its tensions with the West, Libya led the transformation of the OAU into the AU, an organization that had added responsibilities for strengthening continental security architecture, economic integration and social liberation. Libya would go on to become one of the major contributors to the AU budget and to major projects like the AU Audit in 2005 and Union Government idea in 2007. But it would also fuel conflict and division on the continent as Muammar Qaddafi pushed to have his Pan-Africanist ideals adopted, thus causing friction between Libya and other bigger states in Africa.

Lacking the means to sustain solo power projects, regional powers like South Africa cannot exercise their relatively superior ability successfully without the legitimation of the affected countries. In this sense, regional powers face greater constraints in exercising their relative power than global powers do. So far we have sought to demonstrate that while South Africa possesses an immense capability to lead regional stabilization and transformation, this power is not without limits. Chief amongst constraints is the country's unwillingness to impose its will on its weaker neighbours as well as to face consequences of hegemonic tendencies for the region and the country's future role in it. A tradition of leadership through a collective within the ANC alliance and experiences of collective leadership in African solidarity politics during the struggle helped to frame the conduct of post-apartheid South Africa in Africa. The ANC's aversion to the politics of bullying and the use of violence to solve political problems is a major factor in South Africa's reluctance to lead from the front where the crude use of its relative power would be necessary.

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27 Crwys-Williams, *In the Words*, p. 56.

## Southern Africa and South African Foreign Policy in Practice

A key priority of the South African government since 1994 is the consolidation of regional integration in Southern Africa through the strengthening of SADC institutions, the improvement of SADC's financial position and the development of a common policy agenda that goes beyond mere declarations of principles. This commitment to stronger multilateralism within Africa is in part an outcome of lessons that the governing party learned from the support it enjoyed in the OAU and the Frontline States platform in Southern Africa.<sup>28</sup> The focus on strengthening the SADC is based on the belief that regional stability and economic development can only happen through the harmonization and integration of the SADC's member security and political policies, so to create an interdependent region.

A pre-1994 ANC discussion document on international relations suggested that it was in post-apartheid South Africa's interest to ensure a stable and prosperous region because it would provide a market for its business and stem the flow of economic migrants southwards. With regard to the role of South Africa in regional stabilization, the document said that "(t)he construction of a new regional order will be a collective endeavour of all the free peoples of Southern Africa and cannot be imposed either by extra-regional forces or any self-appointed 'regional power' (...) a democratic South Africa should therefore explicitly renounce all hegemonic ambitions in the region. It should resist all pressure to become the 'regional power' at the expense of the rest of the sub-continent; instead it should seek to create a new

form of economic interaction in Southern Africa based on the principles of mutual benefit and interdependence."<sup>29</sup>

In its Strategic Plan for 2010-2013, South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), suggests that the SADC strategy rests on three pillars, namely restoring, strengthening, and maintaining the political unity and cohesion within SADC; deepening regional economic integration; and intensifying regional infrastructure development. South Africa's task is depicted as building conditions for a collective leadership. As a result it would focus merely on building political cohesion, promoting the idea of deeper economic integration, encouraging intensive infrastructure development, and working with other states to ensure political stability in the region. The country would see its role as one of implementing a collective agenda and thus, acting on behalf of the region. From the establishment of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation and decisions on the regional brigade, to the early warning system and mediation efforts in countries like Comoros, Zimbabwe, and more recently in Madagascar, it would see its role as strengthening the regional security agenda. Thus, South Africa would feel comfortable to use its power to implement a SADC mandate in Zimbabwe and Madagascar, but, on the contrary, would not initiate any campaigns in problematic areas such as Swaziland.

After several years of institutional reviews and audits, the extraordinary SADC Summit of 2002 approved the proposed recommendations for far-reaching changes in SADC's institutional framework and the structure for executing its 1992 mandate. Once the decision was taken, South Africa would second senior government officials

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28 Zondi, Siphamandla. The African National Congress's International Solidarity and South African Foreign Policy,' a paper presented at Centre for African Studies, University of Free State, 27 July 2011.

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29 ANC Working Group on International Affairs, Foreign Policy in a New Democratic South Africa, in Mills, p. 227.

to ensure the energetic implementation of those changes. Thus, it worked through its officials to strengthen the capacity of the SADC Secretariat to coordinate the implementation of SADC's policy positions quicker than was the case through the abolition of the 21 sector co-coordinating units and commissions located in twelve of its member countries, replacing them with four clusters in the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone, Botswana. The idea of a troika of leaders taking a lead in pushing for accelerated implementation of SADC's agenda was the country's answer to calls for stronger regional role and it saw this as being about strengthening cooperative leadership. On this basis, significant countries could share the responsibility for leading the SADC agenda - the first troika was composed of Mozambique, the new chair; Zimbabwe, the outgoing chair; and Tanzania, the incoming chair, while South Africa managed the implementation of the reform agenda inside the SADC secretariat.

The push for the security protocol and the promotion of collective defence pacts were also meant to create an environment for shared leadership responsibilities. Mutual defence pacts are a tricky business as they build confidence between members, while they also potentially threaten neighbouring outsiders, and thus, can be potentially destabilizing in so far as this contributes to bloc-building and arms-racing. A push to have the SADC defence pact translate into effective 'immediate collective action' in the face of an external attack on a member state with one that says that, 'each state party shall participate in such collective action in any manner it deems appropriate'<sup>30</sup>.

The move towards collective security enabled the region to successfully resolve its own conflicts and disputes, although this is still work in progress. The region's security architecture is still unable to take full responsibility for open conflict; it still requires significant assistance from continental and international agencies. Part of the problem is that the nature of conflict in the region has transformed from inter-state to intra-state violence, requiring adjustments to the regional security architecture. This was to be achieved through the implementation of SADC's Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO) from 2001. On close examination, the region's Security Protocol, in particular Article 1c, 3c and 11, suggests a strong shift towards a common security policy paradigm, which is demonstrated by the following quote: "The Organ shall seek to manage and resolve inter- and intra-state conflict by peaceful means' and 'where peaceful means of resolving a conflict are unsuccessful, the chairperson acting on the advice of the ministerial committee may recommend to the summit that enforcement action be taken against one or more of the disputant parties."

The SIPO seeks to identify strategies and activities to achieve these objectives to concretize security cooperation. It is particularly useful in that it recognizes the importance of non-traditional security threats like political crises and undemocratic tendencies in the region, poverty and environmental degradation alongside factors like armed conflict, proliferation of small arms, weak intelligence architecture, and inadequate policing in security thinking.

The energy that South Africa showed during the drafting of the plan suggests an intention to embed collective security as a practice in Southern Africa. No wonder that it covers areas like the clearing of landmines, stemming the proliferation of small arms, fighting the trafficking of humans

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30 Cawthra, G. and Van Nieuwkerk, Anthoni. 2004. 'Regional Renaissance? Security in a Globalized World: The Southern African Development Community. Available at :<http://mocambique.fes-international.de/downloads/Security%20Southern%20Africa.pdf>

and drugs, and boosting public policing. In sum, South Africa played a critical role in SADC's security agenda. It is no coincidence that the country's own Defence Review of 1996 made exactly the same points about regional security.

The security plan is conscious of the potential of conflict that arises from environment changes and a lack of development. This is the reason why SADC introduced a development programme called the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) at the same time. The plan gives expression to the fight poverty by boosting human and social development. It mirrors the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and contains time-bound targets to guide the implementation of a common development agenda in each member state. Additionally, it provides space for civil society to participate in shaping this development.<sup>31</sup> Thus, RISDP is seen as a crucial impetus for successful post-conflict reconstruction and development in countries that excite instability in the region such as Angola, Comoros, DRC, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe.

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31 Zondi, S. 'The SADC development plan and how it interfaces with the citizens of the region,' *Critical Dialogue*, 3 (1), 2007, pp. 47-52.

## Peacekeeping, Mediation and Reconstruction: South Africa's Regional Leadership in Practice

South Africa's stabilization agenda has three key pillars: mediation, post-conflict development and peacekeeping. The country has invested a lot of resources, energy and time in providing assistance to countries of the region in all three areas. It has followed the ANC document's warning that the country should resist the temptation to become a regional hegemon. In this regard, it has not worked jointly with other states, but has been careful to receive its mandate from the collective leadership of SADC through Summit resolutions or SADC Organ decisions. It has also ensured that it coordinates with the SADC secretariat as an official executing agency in order to be understood as acting on the instructions of the region rather than on its own volition.

Peace diplomacy can be defined as the facilitation or promotion of political dialogue between belligerents that leads to a comprehensive political settlement. Commonly, it includes elements like power-sharing, transitional justice mechanisms and national dialogue on economic issues. This is the doctrine that South Africa has championed with some success in various parts of Africa and Southern Africa during the past decade and a half.<sup>32</sup> South Africa has led the painstaking processes of mediation of conflicts in Burundi, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, and Zimbabwe, while it has also been indirectly involved in Madagascar and Sudan.

Since 1994 the overriding concern has been to affirm Africa's capacity to solve its own problems

<sup>32</sup> This is the key message of the Africa section of The Presidency, Towards a Fifteen Year Review: a Synthesis Report, October 2008.

and which is the central message of the African Renaissance vision and South Africa's Africa strategy. This commitment is born out of the concern that in the post-Cold War period former colonial powers have been involved in perpetuating conflict and instability and that they often mediated conflicts in a manner that benefited them, thus creating conditions for incomplete peace. As the governing ANC's discussion document entitled *Developing a Strategic Perspective on South African Foreign Policy* of 1995 put it: "At the core of this African Agenda should be the entrenchment of stable democracies, dislocating neo-colonialism, sustainable development and an end to superpower scramble for Africa."<sup>33</sup>

### South Africa and Peacekeeping

For South Africa, peacekeeping in Southern and Central Africa is directly linked with its national security and economic interests.<sup>34</sup> In 1995, President Mbeki noted that there are expectations from Africa that South Africa should make a significant contribution towards peace and development on the continent. In 2009, President Zuma elaborated at the 10th anniversary of South African peacekeeping in Africa that "South Africa cannot survive in isolation, as its economic development and security is linked to the continent's stability. South Africa brings about peace in the continent and creates an environment that is conducive to reconstruction and development resulting in faster economic development."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> ANC, *Developing a Strategic Perspective on South African Foreign Policy*, undated, at [www.anc.org.za/docs](http://www.anc.org.za/docs) (accessed on 3 August 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Cilliers, J and Malan, M. 1996. 'A Regional Peacekeeping Role for South Africa : Pressures, Problems and Prognosis', *African Security Review*, 5 (3), pp. 1-11.

<sup>35</sup> 'South Africa's Peacekeeping Role in Africa,' at [www.rosalux.co.za/wp.../1297156628\\_21\\_1\\_1\\_9\\_pub\\_upload.pdf](http://www.rosalux.co.za/wp.../1297156628_21_1_1_9_pub_upload.pdf) (accessed on 12 November 2009).

Following years of destabilization by the apartheid state, the new South Africa has heavily involved itself on this basis in initiatives aimed at political stabilization of the region. There is only one case of pro-active military intervention, and that was on 22 September 1998 when 600 South African troops entered the Lesotho territory as part of the SADC-mandated Operation Boleas to stop an imminent coup in that country. They were later joined by 200 troops from Botswana. Although the anti-war instinct in South African society raised alarm about the "invasion" of Lesotho, the operation helped avert a complete breakdown of law and order in the country, which would possibly hurt regional stability and South Africa's economic interests, especially concerning Lesotho's water resources.

After this operation, South Africa has avoided exercising a military option in resolving political crises in the region. It rather preferred finding negotiated political settlements and only dispatched troops when there is peace to be secured.<sup>36</sup> For instance, when the AU decided to impose sanctions, travel freeze and a naval blockade on the Comoran island of Anjuouan in June-November 2007, South Africa pushed for avoidance of a full military intervention. It led the mediation process until in March 2008 when the AU forces intervened militarily in what was called 'Operation Democracy' backing the Comoran government forces to reverse the secession of the island from the archipelago. However, South Africa argued for a political solution right to the end.<sup>37</sup> Following the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi in August 2000, South Africa was then among the first countries to deploy peacekeeping forces in 2003. Nevertheless, it was amongst the first countries to

send peacekeepers to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2001.

On top of ensuring internal stability, South African peacekeepers have been involved in reconstruction and development of infrastructure and security sector reform initiatives. In this regard, its technological expertise, especially in the fields of fixed wing and helicopter air transport, medical evacuation and treatment of operations casualties, field engineering, and the bridging of obstacles have been used in peacekeeping operations. Since 2000, the country has been a major contributor of troops to United Nations (UN) and AU peacekeeping missions with troops, police and military observers in Burundi, DRC, Sudan, and Nepal. South Africa has been active in support of the 5000-strong African missions, thus helping to protect fragile peace transitions on the continent.<sup>38</sup>

Over the years, South Africa's defence policy has evolved around a doctrine that supports peace missions as a key responsibility of the country's military. South Africa's leadership status in the AU and SADC is linked with its contribution to relative regional stability because of Pretoria's increasing engagement in African peacekeeping and peaceful conflict resolution (Landsberg and Kondlo 2007).

## Mediation and Peace Negotiations: Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate the complexities of South Africa's peace diplomacy in Africa and its outcomes. The idea is not to describe in full detail interventions undertaken, but to highlight some of the key features of the strategy employed and how this impacted on the evolution of stability in each case. This is not to suggest that

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36 Le Pere, G. and Alden, C. 2009. South Africa in Africa: bound to lead? *Politikon: South African journal of political studies*, 36 (1). pp. 145-169.

37 Tom Nevin, "The Strangest invasion in history?" in May 2008 issue of *African Business* magazine

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38 The Department of Foreign Affairs Annual Reports show that South Africa's troop contribution rose from 123 in 1999 to 4860 in 2008. The countries that benefitted most were Burundi, the DRC, Eritrea-Ethiopia border, Liberia and Sudan.

countries in which this strategy was employed were passive participants in a chiefly South African intervention, but to point out to how South Africa contributed to multifarious peace processes. These case studies should be understood against the particular geo-strategic context in which they took place. In summary, this is a period in which the UN had taken a strong interest in supporting regional solutions to conflicts in the world. Furthermore, it is a period in which multipolarity had reduced the capacity of superpowers to force their way on others, and in which Africa had gained confidence in its ability to solve its own problems. These conditions were propitious for the kind of strategy South Africa employed.

## The DRC

The ousting of Mobutu Sese Seko by the Allied Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) led by Laurent Kabila in 1997 was a culmination of decades of war launched by rebels based in neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda. Their success in 1997 was made possible by the fact that the government of Zaire under Mobutu had been severely weakened by the post-Cold War strategic environment where superpowers could no longer support African governments just because they shared ideological orientation or to check-mate each other. The regime got more and more isolated in an Africa that had become particularly opposed to dictatorships. The government itself failed to redeem its time by adjusting to changed conditions including the fact that rebels were receiving support.

The end of the Mobutu government led to a new cycle of violence by various rebels based in the east of the country, ostensibly with the backing of the same neighbouring countries that had supported Kabila's march to power. The Kabila-led forces had split into two opposing camps with the Banyamulenge fighting an ethnic battle against

nationalists under Kabila who was now the head of state. The conflict deepened with the invasion of the DRC by Uganda and Rwanda in August 1998, precipitating a counter-invasion by Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, and later, Chad and Sudan also sent troops in support of Kabila.

It would be on the sidelines of the inauguration of President Thabo Mbeki in Pretoria in June 1999 that a serious process of negotiating a ceasefire and a peaceful settlement would begin. This difficult negotiation process under SADC's watch took place in Lusaka, first amongst state parties and secondly between Congolese belligerents. The then reached Lusaka Accords provided for an inter-Congolese dialogue to resolve all political problems. Sir Ketumile Masire of Gaborone was the appointed facilitator of this process.<sup>39</sup> South Africa virtually took over the facilitation of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue that finally took place in Sun City, South Africa, from February to April 2002. The Dialogue produced an agreement signed by about 70% of the 360 delegates in attendance. South Africa also convened and chaired the subsequent dialogue held in Pretoria to bring on board the disgruntled remainder of parties.<sup>40</sup> According to Ajulu (2008), South Africa threw its political weight to get international donors and financial incentives to expedite the process of bringing the parties to the negotiating table.

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue at Sun City took 52 days and cost the South African taxpayer some R37 million. The reason for the choice of a protracted process of negotiations was that South Africa wanted the parties to find political agreement on all issues that had been put on the table rather than rushing into incomplete or exclusive agreements.

<sup>39</sup> Claude Kabemba and Roger Kibasomba, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: A Diagnosis of the Prospect for Peace*. Issue No 27, October 2003.

<sup>40</sup> See M, Baregu's input into IGD, *The DRC: Challenges and Prospects*, 2006.

They had mediators on hand to help the parties overcome every area of disagreement. After the signing of the Inclusive Political Agreement in Pretoria in December 2002, South Africa would be heavily involved in supporting its implementation, especially in ensuring the stability of the 24-month transitional government leading to a democratic election, and which actually took place much later in 2006. Subsequently, South Africa has continued to help by pushing for increased commercial investments; keeping its peacekeepers on the ground; and ensuring that the international community remained involved. At times, South Africa has been accused of placing its economic interests above political goals of peace and democracy.

## Zimbabwe

SADC appointed President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa as its principal facilitator of political discussions between the governing Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the two factions of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This followed years of conflict between the two parties with the former using its control of the state apparatus to suppress and weaken the latter. From its birth in 1999, the MDC undertook mobilization campaigns to effect democratic change by winning elections away from the long-standing governing party. In contrast, the ZANU-PF saw it as part of a western-backed regime change to stop the complete decolonization of Zimbabwe through forced redistribution of land owned by white farmers. It supported land grabs by groups led by former war veterans disgruntled about the impact of the compromises made at Lancaster House during negotiations for independence.

The conflict that escalated after the defeat of the ZANU-PF sponsored constitutional reform in 2001 would worsen with every electioneering period,

suggesting a systematic strategy of using brute violence to maintain ZANU-PF's control of the state. Africa's response to these developments between 2001 and 2006 was to search for political solutions through behind-the-scenes efforts of former Mozambican president, Joaquim Chissano, former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and various chairmen of the African Union. Nigeria and South Africa persuaded the Commonwealth to also back a political solution at the time when western nations, especially the UK, were building a case for a more robust, and possibly interventionist approach comprising isolation, embargoes, sanctions, and so forth.

When the Zimbabwean police descended on a MDC-convened prayer meeting in March 2007, leaving many including the MDC president badly beaten and bleeding in front of international television cameras, SADC was forced to intervene. Following its leaders' consultations within the region and on an international level, SADC convened a special Summit to the Zimbabwean situation. The summit expressed unhappiness about the turn of events and decided to mandate South Africa to facilitate an urgent round of political talks aimed at finding a lasting solution to the fundamental problem of governance in Zimbabwe. However, the facilitation would have to overcome a number of challenges, not least of which was a deep mistrust between the parties. The MDC had serious concerns about the credibility of South Africa given the close relationship among liberation movements that governed key Southern African countries including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Right from the onset, South Africa took a lead in the push for a diplomatic rather than an interventionist / forceful approach. This put it at loggerheads with Western powers that wanted the crisis in Zimbabwe to end quickly and decisively. This disagreement came to the head during the Commonwealth Summit of 2002 where the

suspension of Zimbabwe and a series of tough actions were hotly debated. South Africa led SADC and AU in pushing for a diplomatic approach to the Zimbabwean crisis, fearing that a robustly interventionist approach could harden the positions of internal belligerents and lead to even harsher political suppression, and ultimately, precipitate a complete internal meltdown. At the same time, western nations intensified their own responses including public condemnation, imposition of sanctions and international isolation of the ZANU-PF government. The SADC decision of April 2007 was a victory for South Africa's position in the Zimbabwean situation at a time when the region rising more and more concerns about the wisdom of the diplomatic approach.

The South African approach to the facilitated political discussions was to allow both sides to suggest Agenda items in which a large number of items were put forward. Then, a process of consolidation and prioritization of items for discussion followed. On this basis, the parties were forced to find each other, make compromises and focus on the agenda even before the negotiations. The actual negotiations of each item took place in secret locations in various parts of Southern Africa overseen by President Thabo Mbeki and his team of facilitators. It would be three months before there were a number of significant areas of agreement between the parties, leading to a set of constitutional amendments passed by parliament through a vote by both parties. However, it would take several more months of tough and relentless negotiations before a comprehensive agreement even was reached and publicly signed on 17 September 2008. The Global Political Agreement included agreements on constitutional reform, security reform, power-sharing, economic reform, social justice and reconciliation, and legal reforms. On this basis, an inclusive government was established in which President Mugabe retained his positions with less power and Morgan Tsvangarai

became the Prime Minister.

While the inclusive government has been dogged by many troubles and remains shaky, it heralded a period of improved political and economic stability. This sent a signal to the international community that Zimbabwean parties are able to work together in rebuilding their country. Even the EU and the US began political engagements with the ZANU-PF-led government for the first time in many years. Thus, the South African approach was somewhat vindicated. Yet, the lack of western support, the violations of some terms of agreement, and the countless discords within the government suggest that its approach only works optimally to the extent that the parties are willing to implement their agreements fully.

There is very little difference in the manner in which President Zuma handles the facilitation process from how President Mbeki did. Like Mbeki, Zuma is focused on getting the conflict parties to resolve the problems that each side identifies as legitimate issues of concern. There is an intense interaction with the parties to the conflict. Zuma makes sure that the SADC chair and the Organ are fully informed about progress in implementing the regional body's instructions to the conflicting parties. On one such occasion early in 2011, the mediator reported on why the Global Political Agreement was not being fully implemented, pointing fingers at the ZANU-PF and President Mugabe, and thus causing his supporters to condemn South Africa for meddling in Zimbabwe's internal matters instead of mediating.<sup>41</sup> They went to the point of suggesting that South Africa had become an extension of a western imperial agenda to stop land distribution in South Africa by showing

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, a comment and readers comments in 'Tinkering SA overhauls Zimbabwe' at [http://www.herald.co.zw/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7635:tinkering-sa-overhauling-zim&catid=39:opinion&Itemid=132](http://www.herald.co.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7635:tinkering-sa-overhauling-zim&catid=39:opinion&Itemid=132) (accessed 31 June 2011).

that the Zimbabwe process failed. Some even labelled Zuma as a disaster-prone leader.<sup>42</sup> The following Livingstone Summit of the Organ and the Sandton Summit of SADC demonstrated that South Africa's strategic use of its power will have a catalytic effect when the country uses its influence in a collective platform like SADC summits. The difficult relations between governments governed by former liberation movements complicate South Africa's regional leadership, both leading from the front and from behind.<sup>43</sup>

## Rebuilding Post-Conflict Societies

Referring to the period of 1994 to 2004, the South African government's *Ten Year Review* report makes the point that the provision of aid to countries in dire need, especially those coming out of conflict, has been a key focus of South Africa's foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> To this end, the International Cooperation Fund was established in 2001 as a disbursement mechanisms to finance reconstruction and development projects, especially in Southern Africa. It repealed the apartheid era Economic Cooperation Promotion Loan Fund Act (Act No. 68 of 1968), which the apartheid South Africa had used to drum up political support from pliable African states like Malawi, Zaire and Cote d'Ivoire through the provision of soft loans and grants for the construction of infrastructure and for emergency

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42 For a week the government owned Herald newspaper and ZBC radios reported statements by unknown sources that singled out South Africa for misleading its neighbours to take the decision to add SADC observers directly in negotiations and to criticize weak implementation of the political agreement. See, for instance, "Jacob Zuma", Herald, 10 April 2011.

43 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. 2011. *Reconstructing the Implications of Liberation Struggle History on SADC Mediation in Zimbabwe*, SAIIA Occasional Paper No 92, September 2011.

44 The Presidency, *Ten Year Review*, p. 69.

assistance. It was seen as an instrument for dividing the region in order to weaken the exiled liberation movements by isolating them from African states.

Establishing the African Renaissance Fund, the Act indicates that the goal was to enable the government to proactively fund cooperation between South Africa and other countries, especially in Africa. Amongst objectives to be achieved through this, the Act expressly mentions the prevention and resolution of conflict; promotion of democracy and good governance; support for socio-economic development and integration, human resource development, and humanitarian assistance.

The Act envisaged that the Fund would provide support for the work towards the vision of African Renaissance in which the principle of African self-reliance or solutions for African problems was seen as central. In a statement introducing the Act on 22 January 2002, the government said it did not want to create an impression that there would be unlimited resources to fund deserving projects, but "serious consideration will be given to initiatives that would 'make a difference' in the Southern African region and on the Continent."<sup>45</sup> This is the clearest statement of connection between the development assistance through the Fund and the ambition of South Africa to help transform the region through high-impact interventions. The resources set aside through appropriation by parliament on a yearly basis provided the muscles that South Africa needed to enhance its role in the stabilization of the continent.

The Fund would be used to buttress peace processes by supporting post-conflict reconstruction efforts, especially with regard to peacekeeping, institution-building and on-going political dialogue. The

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45 Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Establishment of the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund,' 22 January 2001 at [www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/profiles/arfund.htm](http://www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/profiles/arfund.htm) (accessed 4 July 2006).

government statement on this said that “(i)n order to achieve the social and economic regeneration and development of the Continent, the pre-eminent issue of poverty alleviation, through sustained people-centred development, must be vigorously pursued, so as to provide an improved quality of life for all Africa and her people. The engine for poverty alleviation and people-centred development is the economy.”<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the government saw it as fundamentally important to provide support for economic growth through diversification of African economies that had been found to struggle because of narrow production structures. In this view, an area of focus was to boost agricultural production especially commercial agriculture and agro-business in Southern Africa with countries like Zambia benefiting from this. But the statement also made the point that, “(h)owever, there are two further pre-requisites for the success of social and economic regeneration. These are security and stability. There can be little sustainable development and growth in conditions of instability and conflict.”

On this basis, these pre-requisites would receive significant attention in the management of the fund, in particular during Mbeki’s presidency. These interventions would include the funding of mediation processes with the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Sun City, South Africa, being the most important realized. The Fund was used to fund the meeting of over 300 delegates for a period of three months at the cost of R37 million. Moreover, the Fund supported peacekeeping missions with the most important being the ones in the DRC and Burundi from 2004 to 2008. It also contributed to humanitarian assistance where humanitarian crises were seen as detrimental to the economic Renaissance of Africa or Southern Africa. In this regard, the assistance to Mozambique during the devastating

floods of 2000 was the most important one.

There was an intention to use the Fund to redefine the relationship between Africa and other parts of the world, particularly the developed world. While the Fund’s resources were relatively insignificant to displace donor funding in the region, it was an important political statement about Africa taking care of its own distressed nations. It would also encourage triangular cooperation between major donors regarding post-conflict situations as part of the strategy of aligning donor assistance with the vision of African Renaissance. The statement introducing the Fund indicated that it would become a conduit through which major donors could support the African Renaissance initiatives, meaning South Africa’s own Africa Agenda, would disburse their funds. The statement said, “(i)t is vital that Africa and the South develop a common agenda and then, in a coordinated fashion, secure the support of the developed world for the achievement of the goals of this agenda.”<sup>47</sup>

To illustrate this strategic orientation and South Africa’s influence in the approach to post-conflict reconstruction in the region, we describe a few highlights in the Fund’s decade of existence. According to the annual report of the then Department of Foreign Affairs for the 2007/08 financial year, the Fund spent over R368 million on such initiatives with regard to the strengthening of South Africa’s bilateral relations with beneficiary countries; promotion of democracy and good governance; resolution of conflict; enhancing socio-economic development, humanitarian assistance, and human capital development.<sup>48</sup>

R278 million were spent on support for the DRC stabilization project. According to the report, the

<sup>46</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, ‘Establishment of the African Renaissance.’

<sup>47</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, ‘Establishment of the African Renaissance.’

<sup>48</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Annual Report, 2007/08 Financial Year.

purpose was to contribute to the establishment and the growth of an institutional framework constituting a legitimate and democratic government to prevent conflict in the run up to a general election. This included key sectors of government, parliament and other oversight institutions including auditing functions. The Department of Defence provided an additional R7.5 million towards security sector reform in order to strengthen security in this fragile SADC member state. The hope was also that South Africa would reinforce its diplomatic relations with the DRC, thus enabling the country to benefit from its stabilization efforts irrespective of whether economic interests determined its strategy towards the DRC in the first place.

R26 million were used to assist in the reconstruction of the economy of Seychelles after a major Tsunami. The focus was on stimulating investment in the rebuilding of the essential infrastructure and linkages between economic centres. While there were opportunities for South Africa's big business, the motivation was to cement its leadership role in the region by taking up SADC's challenge on its own.

## What to Make of the Transition from Mbeki to Zuma?

There is no significant difference between how Mbeki and Zuma have approached South Africa's role in the region, although there are some differences in style. Whereas Mbeki was portrayed as a diplomat and philosopher, Zuma is projected as a populist to focus on fixing domestic problems. Many expected that South Africa's foreign policy and its commitment to the African Agenda would wane. It is hard to sustain the argument that there is a significant difference in foreign policy between the Mbeki and Zuma era, not only because they both have been carefully guided by the ANC policy decisions on international relations, but also because they served together in the top leadership of the ANC and government for a long time. Yet, there have been differences of emphasis, nuances and depth in the interpretation of foreign policy. There are better opportunities for analyzing this than major foreign policy decisions that Zuma took, which Mbeki is known to have had views on the same developments. We will briefly analyse the Zuma government's responses to the crises in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya of 2011 and what it demonstrates about continuity and change in South Africa's stabilization agenda.

### Libya

South Africa's vote in favour of the Western-inspired UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing the Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya to protect civilians against the suppressive state forces also surprised many keen observers of South Africa's foreign policy who were worried about the West's illicit intentions on Libya, while it gratified those opposed to South Africa's voting with China and Russia. The Libyan government had responded harshly to an uprising in Benghazi using military

weapons to hurt and kill many. The assurance by South Africa and Nigeria that the AU's position is in favour of a negotiated political solution and against any military intervention had been integrated into the text of the resolution. However, it did little to allay the fears that these African countries had acted naively in voting for the resolution that authorized "all means necessary" to be used in establishing a no-fly zone.

As it turned out, South Africa had completely misread the sub-text of the resolution. A day after the resolution, its initiators, France and the US, would hand over the task of enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which has no jurisdiction over Africa. Thus a *de facto* military intervention was undertaken without the deployment of ground forces but they would go even further than this. France would drop arms in mountains near the rebel stronghold in the west of Libya, while the US and UK would provide so-called military advisors who happened to be soldiers. This helped to tilt the balance of forces in favour of the rebels, leading to the toppling of the regime. Muamar Qadaffi would later be executed by rebels and Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, would hail this as a victory.

When South Africa realized its errors in misreading the resolution, it somersaulted and started campaigning against the NATO and explained that it did not authorize regime change in Libya. Indeed, regime change and ground forces were not expressly provided in the resolution, but they were not expressly excluded either. In fact, the phrase "all means necessary" overrode whatever exclusions might have applied to the implementation of the resolution. This suggested poor judgment on the part of the South African government. This also suggested that under Zuma, the Africa policy had veered towards political expediency where this meant using voting positions in the UN Security Council to build relations with the west in

atonement for the controversies of its dissent from western positions during its first stint in the Council in 2007-8. This means that the principles that had helped South Africa to pursue its Africa Agenda, consistently were comprised for bridge building in global affairs.

## Cote d'Ivoire

Again, South Africa voted in favour of France-initiated UN Security Council Resolution 1975 on 30 March 2011 condemning post-election violence and Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to concede electoral defeat, and calling for enforcement of sanctions against him and his associates as well as supporting the AU's demand that he should step down. It went further to demand that state institutions should henceforth pay homage to the new president, Allasane Ouattara. The resolution integrated the AU position on the need for a political solution as opposed to a military one. But then again, in Article 6, the resolution authorized the UN mission (UNOCI) to Cote d'Ivoire, which comprised humanitarian and peacekeeping elements to use "all means necessary to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capability and its areas of deployment, including to prevent the use of heavy weapons against the civilian population." It then demanded that all parties should cooperate with the actions of UNOCI.

The resolution's expressed support for political solutions, including the efforts of the AU's committee of presidents and by this also President Zuma, has been rendered by the strong provisions giving UNOCI powers to use "all means necessary" to protect civilians including from heavy weapons it deems are being against the population. South Africa again failed to read between the lines concerning the implications of this for the respective political solution. UNOCI worked closely and usually through French forces stationed in

Cote d'Ivoire to discharge its peacekeeping duties. It was always going to naturally defer the French forces to discharge the duty to stop the use of heavy weapons against civilians. The definition of threat against civilians and which civilians will be protected in a virtual civil war was left to UNOCI and by default to France to decide.

Indeed, the resolution was used to enable France to provide logistical and military support to the anti-Gbagbo side in order to strengthen the hand of northern-based rebels to march down to the capital, Abidjan, killing with impunity thousands of Gbagbo supported on its way. When the rebels were still unable to dislodge the Gbagbo-aligned Ivorian army, which lost its air force fleet some years ago because of bombs by the French air force, French military helicopters openly attacked the Ivorian army's positions and Gbagbo's house, forcing both to surrender. After about a month of heavy fighting, Gbagbo and his family were arrested on 13 April 2011 in full view of France 24 TV crews in a humiliating style. Later that year, he was handed over to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Cote d'Ivoire headed for elections before the parties to the conflict had fully implemented the Ouagadougou Agreement of March 2007, which was built on the foundations laid by South Africa's mediation earlier. As its foreign affairs minister put it, the election results were seen by South Africa as 'inconclusive' in view of the dispute on who won and by how much because the results released by the electoral body differed from those certified by the UN. South Africa had a direct interest in ensuring that peace diplomacy prevailed as it was concerned about a military solution, which it predictably opposed. However, Nigeria was fully committed to ensuring a military solution to resolve this impasse in favour of Ouattara much against the AU Peace and Security Council decisions to which ECOWAS had handed over the task of responding

to the conflict after failing to find a willing leader of its preferred military intervention. It and ECOWAS were worried that South Africa was undermining their pro-interventionist stance.

South Africa's weak bilateral relations with Nigeria, Senegal and other major African countries meant that its influence on the options in Cote d'Ivoire could not be taken up by West Africa, which saw South Africa as interfering in its backyard. It is reported by sources that Nigeria even threatened to interfere in Madagascar and the DRC if South Africa did not stay out of Cote d'Ivoire, its domain of influence.<sup>49</sup> The intense conflict between South Africa and Nigeria, both non-permanent members of the Security Council at the time, reflected badly on both countries' commitment to a strong African Agenda and posed serious challenges for South Africa's Africa policy. At the time of writing, there were indications that the situation was being remedied in any way. This may become an indelible mark on the Zuma presidency's foreign policy and its Africa dimension for years to come.

### Implications of Cote d'Ivoire and Libya

The two case studies demonstrate a few dilemmas for South Africa's Africa policy. The first is the old challenge relating to how the country should exercise its leadership on the continent. Relatively weak bilateral relations with Nigeria as a big African state responsible for leadership in West Africa undermined the African Agenda. Secondly, South Africa's UN Security Council votes on both cases may have diminished its standing in the eyes of all but Nigeria with whom it voted similarly in the Council. Therefore, there is fear and suspicion that South Africa's political expediency or so-called pragmatic voting patterns will sacrifice the

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with two AU officials on the AU Peace and Security Council discussions on Cote d'Ivoire and Libya, 17-18 November 2011, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

principles on which its alliances with countries like Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania are based. This is not to say that all of these countries fully shared the commitment to political solutions to African problems, to strengthen the regional capacity to resolve conflicts, and to non-interference by non-African powers in African conflicts. However, these principles do unite them on African crises in general - except where one of them is directly affected.

Another dilemma relates to the alignment of South Africa's global strategy, which increasingly seems to reflect a return to Mandela's tricky balancing between active pursuit of an Africa Agenda and bridge building between the north and south. This vacillation between idealism and pragmatism works when the country commands support on both fronts, but not when mutual suspicions are high both in Africa and between the west and Africans. The new power struggles involving the re-emerging world powers like China and Russia, on the one hand, and the old world powers, on the other, represent changed dynamics, which make the balancing act rather difficult. The repercussions for this, be it in favour of the west or of the new south, are simply dire for a country whose domestic constituency is split to fixed positions either for or against western agendas.

Another dilemma for the Zuma government is to maintain an independent foreign policy even as it champions stronger economic relations with both the global north and BRICS countries at a time when they have both become more assertive on the African continent. Such independence lies in the balance between principles and values of South Africa's own foreign policy rather than in merely sitting on the proverbial fence between the west and the rising global south. Though, this point requires a separate paper to be fully developed.

## Synopsis and Prognosis: Where to from Here?

Thus, South Africa has helped to promote a coordinated action to tackle common security problems at global and regional levels. South Africa has also helped to reinforce international institutions, rules, norms and conventions to promote greater equity in international relations in the hope that this creates a climate for its push for strong regional and continental security architecture. By convening forums for dialogue, it has strengthened multilateral co-operation and peaceful resolutions of conflict. South Africa's faith in the ethical foundations of multilateralism and effective global governance might be misplaced and its energies too dispersed, so as to dilute its overall impact as a system reformer.

The main drivers of South Africa's role in the region are unlikely to change in the medium term, suggesting that the tendencies that are described above are likely to persist. This does not rule out change in emphasis and style of leadership. The main drivers of the kind of regional leadership South Africa exercises include the following:

- **Relative economic size and hunger for markets:** South Africa's commitment to regional stability and prosperity is tied to its deep economic interests in the region. The 350 million population in the region falls within the country's economic sphere of interests and a large part of it has not been fully utilized. With South Africa trying to intensify its economic diplomacy in relation to Africa in the coming years, the increased regional power will bring new responsibilities with regard to the ensuring of a stable and growing region.
- **The region and South Africa's international ambitions:** Influence over the region is an

important source of soft power currency that enables South Africa to 'punch above its weight' in international affairs. Its ability to project itself as responsible for the entire region compensates for its relatively small population and size of economy. The recognition it has been given in the BRICS, G20, G8 Outreach and other global platforms can be directly linked to its regional power status. In order to maintain and strengthen this international prestige, South Africa will have to take even more efforts in leading regional stabilization and development.

- **Fear of contagion and spill-over:** Aware of the fact that its relative stability and prosperity attracts refugees and economic migrants, South Africa sees it as fundamental to its national security and development to stabilize the region in order to avoid a situation where it is flooded by migrants and refugees of neighbouring countries. Secondly, just as South Africa rides on the perception that it is a regional power, it fears the risk that regional instability would be construed as South Africa's instability. The media reports regarding the attacks on the Togolese team in Angola in 2009, which was projected as violence that took place in South Africa, is a case in point.
- **The power of memory and the liberation struggle:** The governing elite in South Africa and the African National Congress, which is likely to remain in power for at least the next decade, benefited from support by OAU member states and SADC countries during the struggle. The moral obligation to plough back in the region will remain strong and encourage South Africa to take a keen interest in leading positive change in the region.

This suggests that South Africa's cautious but dedicated leadership in the region is likely to

continue and even consolidate. This continuity will express itself in a continued attempt to lead through a collective of states in finding political solutions to all African crises. Of course, individual South African governments interpret this in different ways, leading to different leadership styles. The emerging willingness to conduct political solutions as in the case of Zimbabwe at the Livingstone Summit of SADC or Swaziland, signals an imminent change of leadership style towards a willingness to use its regional power more robustly in order to enforce regional decisions on peace diplomacy.

The areas of change are likely to be in more forthright pursuit of economic interests due to pressure from domestic constituencies for South Africa to show the dividends of its commitment to consolidating the African Agenda. The partnerships that are formed will also continue to change. Under Mandela, Mozambique and Botswana were key partners for SA's stabilization agenda; while under Mbeki, it was Mozambique and Tanzania. Since Jacob Zuma came to power, it seems that Angola and Mozambique are considered co-drivers of its regional agenda.

While South Africa consciously avoids a type of regional leadership that unsettles its neighbours' like apartheid South Africa did in the 1980s, it instead focuses on its energy to promote negotiated settlements and to protect those by contributing soldiers and military equipment under the auspices of the AU and the UN. It is aware of its soft power capacity, namely the power to persuade countries in the region to follow its agenda in the region. Hence, it is not necessary for it to exercise its power aggressively. However, the decision to nominate its Home Affairs Minister and former Foreign Affairs Minister under Mbeki, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for the post of AU Commission chairperson in January 2012 signals a willingness to actively use its relatively superior power currency to influence the centre of continental governance directly -

irrespective of whether this is correct or not.

Looking to the future, South Africa should seek to nuance and improve its ability to balance this reluctance with its responsibility to lead. In that balance, we propose the following as key considerations:

- South Africa should push for a stronger and a more efficient SADC architecture with central organs that are able to implement the decisions of the body, especially on governance and security. This is about encouraging regional countries, especially the bigger powers like Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This is to cede elements of their sovereignty to the central organs to enable them to act without having to defer to the ministerial and heads of state meetings on even routine activities. To do so effectively, South Africa should voluntarily subject itself to scrutiny by the SADC central organs on its implementation of the regional agenda and be compliant in order to encourage exemplary behaviour by its regional partner states.
- South Africa should be willing to ensure that its nationals, especially senior professionals, are employed at the senior level in SADC both to boost the capacity of the SADC institutions including the command structures of the Stand-By Force and to enable them to push for a progressive regional stabilization agenda.
- South Africa should push for the establishment of a mediation capacity in the region supported by large SADC states with manpower and resources to boost the region's ability to respond to opportunities for peacemaking in areas of crisis. This involves formalizing structures to support SADC's envoys, so to enable them to act decisively without permanent recourse to all 15 member-states of SADC at every point.

- South Africa should fully establish its SADC National Committee to deepen internal coherence in its linkage with SADC as provided for in the RISDP. This committee provides a platform for various stakeholders to align their strategies and operations in respect of the SADC agenda, a coherence that would enhance South Africa's overall regional leadership in SADC. The committee should comprise of key government departments concerned with elements of international affairs, civil society, business with a regional outlook, and parliament. The failure of South Africa to build a functional and effective National Committee is partly due to its weak coherence of policy regarding regional stability.

## Conclusion

Through the SADC, South Africa has been able to implement its own foreign policy initiatives of the African Agenda. South Africa's involvement in SADC allows the country to strategically promote its foreign policy objectives of consolidating the African Agenda as well as of strengthening political and economic integration in Southern Africa. For the moment and in the foreseeable future, South Africa's immediate Africa policy is focused on Southern Africa. Due to its superior technology, economic resources, location, and military power, South Africa retained a predominant position in comparison to regional neighbours.

A challenge to South Africa's Africa Agenda is that it remains constrained in its capacity to robustly pursue this foreign policy. Limitations include insufficient finances and human resources, inadequate institutional capacity, persistent (mis) conceptions about South Africa's ambitions on the continent and poor appreciation of the complexities of the landscape, evidenced by its tendency to export its model of negotiated transition.

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The study at hand is part of a series of three studies that investigate how regional powers in West-, East-, and South Africa are shaping the process of integration and institutionalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). While regional solutions to global challenges are becoming more important, the regional powers are not putting enough efforts into shaping regional solutions. Also the respective countries are not supporting the integration of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to the same extent. To tackle global challenges, regional and even continental approaches are crucial to

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