

# CHAPTER 12

## LESSONS LEARNED AND THE PATH FORWARD

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### 1 Introduction

This book seeks to understand the context in which South African foreign policy makers will operate in the 2020s and to offer some suggestions on what they can do to function most effectively within this context. In the introductory chapter, we posed six questions regarding South Africa's foreign policy in the 2020s that we invited readers to think about as they read this book. This concluding chapter draws some general lessons from the specific findings and recommendations of the various contributions to this volume that are relevant to answering these questions. In addition, it makes some general recommendations that are relevant to the making and conduct of South African foreign policy in the 2020s.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides some historical background, focusing on the factors that have shaped South Africa's foreign policy. It also discusses the factors that are likely to continue shaping it in the 2020s. The second section discusses the lessons learned from the various chapters in this book. The third section proposes a possible strategy for the country's foreign policy in the 2020s. The final section provides some recommendations.

## **2 Current and prospective factors shaping South African foreign policy**

### **2.1 Three domestic challenges and their international implications**

It is clear that the 2020s will be a challenging decade for South African foreign policy makers. They will be constrained by three aspects of the country's difficult domestic situation, each of which has international implications.

First, the country is facing profound economic challenges. As this book goes to press, South Africa's economy is stuck on its longest downward trajectory since the Second World War. In the past ten years the country has made minimal progress in addressing its ongoing problems of structural unemployment, poverty and inequality. Currently, the economy is experiencing growth rates that are below the rate of population increase. This means that *per capita* incomes are falling and people are becoming poorer. In addition, the government is facing both significant declines in its tax collections and increasing demands on its resources. The country's significant economic challenges are being exacerbated by the public health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic caused by the coronavirus.

The economic situation creates particular challenges for the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), which is the government department with primary responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs. On the one hand, it cannot easily demonstrate how its operations, which include supporting many overseas missions and a great deal of foreign travel and diplomatic functions, contribute to the resolution of pressing domestic challenges. On the other hand, the demand for its services is growing. There is an expanding range of issues with an international dimension that requires DIRCO'S attention. They include, in addition to the traditional issues of peace and security and international trade, investment and development finance, such diverse issues as climate change, water governance, the digital economy, cybersecurity, research and education, public health, and energy policy.

Second, the government has failed over the past decade to make progress in addressing the complex social, economic and environmental problems facing South Africa. In some cases, for example youth employment, energy supply and housing, the situation has actually deteriorated. This has adversely affected the country's soft power and

prestige on the continent and beyond. As a result, despite its economic and military power, it is no longer seen as the continent's leading political voice in international forums. The legacy of the corruption scandals of the past decade have further eroded the country's moral authority and its capacity to exercise leadership in political and economic terms in Africa.

Third, the urgency and complexity of the structural challenges facing the country's economy mean that the government and the president have to concentrate on domestic issues. This imperative detracts from their ability to drive an innovative and entrepreneurial foreign policy from the Union Buildings. This is important because South Africa's global influence over the past 25 years has depended, to a significant extent, on the international profile of its presidents. For example, in the decade of the Mbeki presidency, South Africa earned international respect for its norm entrepreneurship, its bridge-building role in difficult multilateral negotiations, its willingness to expend time and money on difficult conflict resolution processes, and working with other continental leaders to devise new African institutions more fit-for-purpose than those that emerged in the immediate post-colonial period. Significantly, as discussed by Muresan and Kornegay, these efforts were led from the Union Buildings, rather than from DIRCO's OR Tambo Building.

## **2.2 The need for a reassessment**

In order for South African foreign policy makers to operate effectively in this challenging context, they will need to engage in a rigorous reassessment of the country's foreign policy options.

The first step in this regard, is to identify the broad range of international issues with which the country will need to engage over the coming decade. They include issues that have been on the country's international agenda since the advent of democracy, such as regional and global trade and investment relations, sustainable development, climate change, human rights, regional and global governance arrangements, international organisational reforms, South-South cooperation, and regional peace and security. They will also include some issues that are either new or have recently risen up the international agenda such as public health, cybersecurity, illicit financial flows and money laundering, the digital economy, migration, terrorism, and the shifts in the balance of international power. It is clear that South Africa does not have the financial and human resources to give equal attention to all these issues. Consequently, it will need to decide which issues to prioritise and how to allocate its resources to maximise its ability to influence developments relating to the issues of highest priority.

This suggests that the second step is to develop a strategic framework for determining which international issues are of highest priority. Such a framework will incorporate a concept of the national interest and the criteria that can be used to determine the country's international priorities. It should also include guidance on the institutional capabilities needed to analyse the issues and develop the policy positions on those matters that are of greatest relevance to the national interest.

As early as 1993, the African National Congress (through Nelson Mandela) recognised that, in the context of a globalising world, South Africa's transformation required South Africa's full 'participat[ion] ... in world affairs'.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the country's foreign policy needed to be included as one element in the strategy for addressing the country's domestic socio-economic needs, and for overcoming the deep-seated legacy of apartheid. This meant that the South African government should creatively utilise foreign policy to leverage opportunities to stimulate growth and employment and promote a more equal distribution of resources in the country.

DIRCO, in recognising the close link between international and domestic affairs, has stated that 'a successful SA [South African] foreign policy is one that is deeply rooted in our constitution and national priorities'.<sup>2</sup> This is effectively an acknowledgement that a key driver of the country's foreign policy should be the values expressed in the Constitution and that promoting these values is in the national interest. The role of the Constitution in regard to foreign policy and of the courts that must interpret and apply it have been explored in the chapters by Klaaren and Halim and by Fritz in this book.

The link between foreign policy and the country's domestic socio-economic needs also has implications for South Africa's national security considerations at a sub-regional, African and global level. This follows from the fact that both national security and socio-economic transformation are affected by issues such as food security, climate change, maritime security, borders and immigration. This suggests that South Africa's assessment of its national security priorities should incorporate some consideration of the relationship between national security and domestic social and economic transformation. The relevant officials should treat the freedom from both fear and want as relevant national security concerns. This

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1 Mandela N, 'South Africa's future foreign policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 5, November–December 1993, p. 86.

2 Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation, 'Foreign Policy Review: Media briefing on the Ministerial Panel Report presented by Mr Aziz Pahad, Chairperson of the Review Panel', 17 April 2019, [http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2019/foreign\\_policy\\_review\\_report0417.pdf](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2019/foreign_policy_review_report0417.pdf) (accessed 28 March 2020).

approach also has a constitutional and human rights dimension. It seeks to promote ‘the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair’<sup>3</sup> as a national security matter. This vision informs the human security approach that Lalbahadur and van Nieuwkerk, and Le Pere and Otto promote in this book.

This approach also draws a link between national security and regional and global economic relations. As can be seen in the chapters by Nkhonjera and Roberts and Mondji, regional stability and the prospects for South Africa’s own social and economic transformation will be enhanced as the economic ties between South Africa and other countries in the region improve and economic growth in the region is stimulated. They are also affected by South Africa’s economic relations with other African countries, countries in the Global South and with the so-called advanced economies. Both the substance of these relations and the institutional arrangements for their governance are relevant to South Africa’s economic and political prospects. As seen in the chapter by Rose-Innes, South Africa’s and the region’s economic prospects can be positively affected if the country is able to play a meaningful role in global economic governance.

A further factor that is likely to grow in importance both domestically and internationally during the 2020s is the issue of climate change. South Africa has already begun to feel the effects of climate change, as evidenced by the severity of the recent droughts in Cape Town and the Eastern Cape and the harsh storms experienced in KwaZulu-Natal. Climate change is also affecting the region as was forcefully demonstrated by Cyclone Idai which hit the south-east coast of Africa in early 2019. It caused unprecedented damage to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The urgency of this global issue is likely to result in increased pressure on South Africa to decarbonise the economy, particularly in the coal-dependent energy sector. As the chapter by Davies, Fakir and Nagiah demonstrates, the international climate negotiations offer South Africa an opportunity to play a leading role in global governance and to advance its domestic social and environmental agenda. Unless South Africa is able to deal effectively with the challenge of climate change, many of its other priorities – peace and security, economic development and an equitable world order – will be near impossible to realise.

The growing range of actors who participate in international affairs is another factor that needs to be accounted for in this foreign policy reassessment. Over the past 25 years, there has been a substantial increase

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3 UN Trust Fund for Human Security, ‘General Assembly Resolutions: Follow-up to Paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (A/RES/66/290), 10 September 2012’, <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/reports-resolutions/> (accessed 7 April 2020).

in the range of non-traditional actors who have an interest in and the capacity to influence international affairs. These actors include civil society groups, which often have international linkages of their own, business and labour groups, universities, and religious groups. This issue is discussed in the chapter by Nganje and Letshele.

Compounding the complexity of these various issues, is the general uncertainty in the world. As pointed out by Le Pere and Otto, the unsteady equilibrium that dominated the world during the Cold War was broken by the fall of the USSR. Today it is ‘an environment... subject to greater volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity’. It is characterised by the leading superpower withdrawing from its previous leadership role in global governance and by the rise of new powers such as China. In this environment, unless a small country with a small open economy carefully plans its foreign policy strategy and adroitly executes it, it risks being caught in the global crossfire. In this case, South Africa will become, to a significant extent, a hostage to a future shaped by others.

### **3 Lessons learned**

The chapters in this book offer two general lessons that are applicable to the making of South Africa’s foreign policy. The first general lesson, as noted above and in the chapter by Klaaren and Halim, is that the starting point for any consideration of South Africa’s foreign policy is the Constitution. As the supreme law, it stipulates both the norms that should guide the country’s foreign policy and the allocation of foreign policy roles to each of the three branches of government. As noted by Klaaren and Halim, these are the ‘planks upon which ... [this policy] must be constructed’.

The second is that South Africa’s space for making foreign policy is path dependant. Muresan and Kornegay argue that one feature of South Africa’s foreign policy is that, in the democratic era, it has been heavily dependent on the identity and priorities of the president. However, it has also been encumbered with the tragic legacy of the apartheid era, including the clandestine approach to evading the international campaign against apartheid. The result is that South Africa’s foreign policy in the 2020s will be shaped by the trajectory from the perverse objectives of the apartheid era, through the idealism of the Mandela presidency in the immediate post-1994 period, the realpolitik and elitist African focus of the Mbeki era to the largely corrupt and conspiratorial vision of the Zuma years. As a result, Muresan and Kornegay maintain that the ruling party’s current approach to foreign policy is a mixture of solidarity and Global South diplomacy and neoliberal economic policies.

### **3.1 Lessons from South Africa's foreign policy successes**

Despite the uneven trajectory of foreign policy under South Africa's recent presidencies, South Africa has achieved a number of foreign policy successes. Some of them offer lessons on how to construct an effective South African foreign policy for the next decade.

One qualified success is South Africa's membership in the BRICS. This was pursued most actively by President Zuma and, in the economic area by Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan. Rose-Innes in her chapter notes that they viewed this bloc as offering 'considerable opportunity to build networks of relationships'. It would enable South Africa to leverage its connections to key actors in the Global South which would help improve its access to sources of development finance.

To some extent South Africa's expectations have been met. The BRICS have created the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement that are intended to serve the development financing needs and financial stability concerns of the participating states. In addition, the BRICS offered the possibility to advance South Africa's interest in reforming the arrangements for global economic governance. In fact, as noted by Rose-Innes, these connections helped South Africa gain greater voice and influence in the multilateral negotiations concerning the financing of infrastructure in Africa, and regarding tax base erosion and profit shifting. However, the BRICS have not helped South Africa to achieve its objective of gaining a third seat for sub-Saharan Africa on the IMF Executive Board.

It should also be noted that South Africa achieved some success regarding global economic governance before joining the BRICS. Former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel was successful in his effort to raise South Africa's profile in the Bretton Woods institutions. He also succeeded in securing a third seat for sub-Saharan Africa on the Executive Board of the World Bank. This too corresponded with Mbeki's 'signature renaissance vision'<sup>4</sup> which prioritised African development, and the reform of global institutions. Another important Manuel success was his chairmanship of the Development Committee at the World Bank, where he pushed for increased financial support especially for sub-Saharan Africa. Rose-Innes describes how Manuel's persistence resulted in Africa's concerns and needs being included on the G8 agenda. This was foreshadowed by Mbeki's efforts which successfully culminated in the adoption of the G8

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4 Sidiropoulos E, 'South Africa's Changing Role in Global Development Structures: Being in Them but Not Always of Them', Discussion Paper 4. Bonn: DIE (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik), April 2019.

Africa Action Plan in Kananaskis, Canada, in 2002. Manuel's efforts also contributed to the United Kingdom, which was then the G8 host, inviting a number of developing countries, including South Africa to participate in the 2005 G8 summit.

The country's foreign policy successes were not limited to the area of global economic governance. It also had considerable success in regional affairs. Under President Mbeki, the country played an effective leadership role in the creation of the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

These relative successes demonstrate the importance of setting clear foreign policy priorities and then identifying which relations to utilise and which arguments to make in order to achieve the desired objective.

Davies, Fakir and Nagiah suggest that another South African international relations success has been its role in climate change negotiations. They note that South Africa has played a leading role in a number of forums including the G77 plus China, the African Group of Negotiators, and the BASIC group which consists of China, India, Brazil and South Africa. While South Africa holds a stronger position in the African Group of Negotiators due to its relative position within Africa, South Africa has nonetheless 'become an influential voice' within the G77 plus China, and the BASIC group both of which have played a critical role in the global climate change negotiations.

The climate change issue is another demonstration of the complex relationship between domestic and international affairs. While South Africa has played a leading role in the international arena, it has not capitalised on this success in dealing with the challenge of climate change domestically. In fact, the failure of the country to deal forcefully with its own emissions risk undermines the credibility of its international position. This may also have adverse implications for its ability to access climate funding.

During the first decade and a half after democratisation, South Africa achieved some success in its conflict resolution efforts. Lalbahadur and van Nieuwkerk note that while South Africa, under President Mbeki, was intensely and reasonably effectively engaged in the DRC in the early 2000s it eventually adopted a more 'hands off' approach even as the situation deteriorated.

South Africa's engagement in the DRC serves as a useful lesson of the risks of taking international positions in which the country's interests are not well formulated. The risk of failure in any effort to resolve complex conflicts is always present. It is therefore necessary to have a clear

understanding of how engaging in conflict resolution will advance the national interest and of how large an investment the country wishes to make in any particular conflict. Furthermore, the cost of engaging and then disengaging in a conflict, without clarifying the rationale in terms of the country's foreign policy objectives, for the decision, is high in terms of credibility and reputation.

### **3.2 Lessons from foreign policy failures**

Inevitably, not all South Africa's foreign policy initiatives have been successful. These less successful examples also offer useful lessons for the future of South African foreign policy. The first of these is the failure of South Africa to uphold the international rule of law in the case of the SADC Tribunal. In this example, President Zuma agreed with the majority of his regional counterparts to undermine the Tribunal rather than demand that Zimbabwe respect and comply with the Tribunal's judgement as it had agreed to do in the applicable treaty. The resulting efforts to use the domestic courts to force the South African president to comply with the country's international legal obligations are discussed in the chapter by Fritz.

President Zuma also contributed to another failed attempt to uphold the international rule of law, when South Africa failed to detain Sudanese President al-Bashir when requested to do so by the International Criminal Court. His acquiescence in President al-Bashir's leaving the country in violation of a South African court order also harmed the domestic rule of law. The domestic courts were also used in the resulting attempt by the Zuma government to leave the ICC. Nevertheless, as both the chapters by Fritz, and Klaaren and Halim show, the Constitution and the courts, on occasion, have acted as an important check when the government sought to conduct foreign policy in an unlawful manner.

In both these cases, South Africa's international reputation was harmed by its failure to provide a plausible explanation for its disregard of its own law and its failure to comply with its international legal obligations. It is also not clear that South Africa gained any international or domestic benefits from executing these unlawful actions.

These two examples also demonstrate the relevance of the Constitution to South Africa's foreign policy. The Constitution is admired around the world and is the source of substantial soft power for the country. Therefore, when the country fails to demonstrate its respect for international law and for upholding the principles of its own Constitution, it undermines its credibility and soft power. The adverse impact on its reputation extends

beyond the immediate case and has ramifications for other aspects of South Africa's international relations. For example, it is unclear how much confidence other international partners will have in a country that ignores its international obligations when they become inconvenient.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the Constitution does not impose an unrealistic straitjacket on the government's ability to engage in international affairs. It makes clear that the executive has the primary responsibility in this area. It has the authority to decide which factors to consider and how to prioritise them in dealing with particular international events and interactions. As the chapter by Fritz demonstrates, the courts will defer to the executive in the foreign policy area unless the South African government's decisions or actions implicate the rights of people protected by the Constitution.

Another lesson is offered by the inability of South Africa to fully exploit the opportunities created in the area of non-traditional diplomacy. These opportunities relate to the role that sub-national governments and non-state actors such as civil society, businesses, academic institutions and think-tanks play in international relations. The chapter by Nganje and Letshele makes clear how important non-traditional diplomacy is becoming. It describes some of the efforts that South Africa has made to incorporate these non-state and sub-state actors into foreign policy making. The authors also provide insights into why they have not been as effective as they could be. Similarly, the chapter by Mondli explores the dysfunctional relationship between the state and business in regard to investment and trade in Africa. He suggests that if these relations were healthier and more effective it would result in greater opportunities for South African businesses in Africa. This in turn could produce benefits in terms of addressing the problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality domestically.

## **4 A strategy for the 2020s**

In this section we focus on the strategic considerations that can help shape an effective and forward-thinking national foreign policy strategy for South Africa over the next decade.

### **4.1 Identifying foreign policy priorities**

As discussed above, this strategy should be tied to a clear conception of the national interest. Based on the lessons of this book and the National Development Plan and the white paper, the two official documents

that discuss the national interest, we propose that the definition of the national interest for foreign policy purposes should have four elements. First, foreign policy must contribute to the domestic economic and social transformation agenda. Second, foreign policy must be consistent with the values and governance arrangements stipulated in the South African Constitution. This document is the product of long struggle and is an expression of the aspirations of the South African population regarding the type of society they want and of how it should be governed. Consequently, the government needs to make a concerted effort to express these values and aspirations in its international relations, thereby contributing to the strengthening of the role of the Constitution in South African society. The international respect for the South African Constitution suggests that the third element of the national interest is to promote South Africa's role as a norm entrepreneur in global affairs. Finally, foreign policy must be aimed at reforming the arrangements for global governance so that they become more responsive to the concerns of countries in the Global South and more accountable to them and their citizens.

Each element is discussed below.

International relations influence the potential for the realisation of the domestic economic and social transformation agenda in two ways. First, international economic relations influence the space available for the country's economic and social transformation. These relations shape the quantity and quality of the country's trade relations, capital flows into and out of the country, the nature of the direct investments made by foreign companies into South Africa and by South African companies abroad, and the country's access to technology. Second, international events affect such key elements of the domestic social transformation agenda as urban-rural migration patterns, the role of women and youth in society, and the management of the environmental and social impacts of development projects.

A good example of the close connection between foreign policy and domestic transformation is climate change. As pointed out by Davies, Fakir and Nagiah, in regard to South Africa's domestic transformation, 'climate change will undermine many of its development gains and impede its ability to achieve its development objectives'. The country's role in the international climate change negotiations can help the country deal with its domestic environmental challenges. For example, by positioning itself as a leader in the international negotiations on climate change, South Africa can win more support for what it sees as important but possibly under-addressed aspects of the issue. Thus, South Africa can argue for more attention to be paid to social justice and just transitions in shaping

the policies and actions for adapting, mitigating and combating ecological degradation and climate change.

Critically however, South Africa's leadership role in global deliberations, whether this is linked to reducing its carbon footprint or adopting energy policies that are environmentally and socially sustainable, requires the country to implement domestically the decisions that it has helped shape internationally.

The second element is the role that the Constitution plays in regard to foreign policy making. As Klaaren and Halim point out the Constitution stipulates how responsibilities, including for foreign policy, should be shared among the executive, parliament, courts and Chapter 9 institutions. In addition, it postulates the values that should guide all policy making and governance in South Africa. These are set out in the Bill of Rights and the Preamble to the Constitution. They provide both a substantive and procedural basis for foreign policy decision-making.

The relevance of the Constitution is clearly demonstrated in Fritz's chapter on the courts and foreign policy in this book. Her discussion of *Law Society of South Africa v President of the Republic of South Africa*<sup>5</sup> (the *SADC Tribunal* judgment) reaffirms the need for the executive to take heed of the Constitution and its substantive provisions in order to avoid a 'review [of its]... rights compliance'. This case suggests that foreign policy decision-makers should consistently use these constitutional rights and values as the prism through which to realise a domestic transformation agenda for the 'advancement of human rights and freedoms'.<sup>6</sup>

A third strategic objective that should guide South African foreign policy over the next decade is the need to re-establish itself as an international 'norm entrepreneur'. This was a role which South Africa was able to play effectively in the first post-apartheid decade. However, as Le Pere and Otto argue, South Africa's credibility in this regard diminished during the Zuma presidency. They agree with Klaaren and Halim and Fritz in maintaining that the Constitution can be an important support in this regard. This is because the South African Constitution is universally recognised as a creative and progressive expression of human aspirations and so its 'set of enduring norms and values' can form the basis for a principled foreign policy for the 2020s.

They all agree that human rights can provide an effective basis for South African norm entrepreneurship. This would enable the country

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5 (CCT67/18) [2018] ZACC 51.

6 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Section 1(a) of the Founding Provisions.

to reclaim its 'moral' agenda and normative soft power. This would require a consistent and coherent strategy of human rights promotion and protection. For example, South Africa could use its voice and vote in forums such as the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council to promote the values expressed in its Constitution.

It is important to recognise that the role of norm entrepreneur is a difficult one that is likely to open the country to charges of inconsistency if not outright hypocrisy. This follows from the fact that different norms may lead to contradictory conclusions in a particular situation. In addition, being a norm entrepreneur is not the only consideration that drives foreign policy decisions and these other concerns may sometimes override norm promotion. For example, South Africa has in the past favoured strategic votes in support of sovereignty (and non-interference) as opposed to strong condemnation of (or provision for monitoring to prevent) human rights abuses. An example cited by Le Pere and Otto is that South Africa opposed the UN draft resolution calling for free, fair and credible presidential elections in Venezuela, in favour of the principle of non-interference. A counter example is that South Africa supported the UN resolution calling for intervention in Libya on humanitarian grounds in 2011, even though it later condemned the actions taken by the UK, France, the US and Gulf states which were based on the resolution's stipulation that member states could 'take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas'.<sup>7</sup>

A fourth strategic consideration for foreign policy making in the 2020s is identifying the risks and the rewards that South Africa can reap from the changing power relations in global governance. The ultimate outcome of these shifts in power relations and their impact on the institutions of global governance cannot yet be discerned. However, it is clear that the world is currently in a period of changes in the balance of global power. Such periods are inevitably periods of heightened uncertainty. While the outcome is unclear, it is evident that these shifts are periods of great risk with potentially adverse impacts on countries in the Global South, including South Africa and fellow African states. Le Pere and Otto maintain that this is because many African states' links to the global economy are based primarily on commodity exports and aid flows. In addition, as discussed by Rose-Innes, they have a relatively small voice in the institutions of global governance. Furthermore, they are vulnerable to the consequences that will follow from the loss of a stable economic, political and security environment.

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7 Paragraph 4, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011)) (accessed 7 April 2020).

While the risks associated with these changes are clear, it is important to recognise that the changing power relations also offer middle powers like South Africa opportunities. They may create the space for forming new international economic and political relations and for promoting reforms in the relations and institutions of global governance. This suggests that South Africa should pay close attention to opportunities for changes in the role that formal and informal multilateral and regional entities play and can play in global governance. South Africa will only be able to exploit these opportunities if it develops a clear idea of the role that it wishes to play in global governance. While it is tempting for the country to seek a leading role in at least some of these entities, it also behoves the country to exercise some caution in this regard. The reason is that the cost of an active role in global governance is not inconsiderable in terms of financial, human and institutional resources.

## **4.2 Managing changing regional relations**

The changing global power dynamics are also affecting African continental governance and intra-African relations. For example, the new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has the potential to change both the relations between individual African states and the institutional arrangements for regional economic governance. These developments are opening up economic and developmental opportunities in African countries that South Africa may be able to utilise both for its own benefit and that of African countries with which it interacts. This suggests it is in South Africa's interest to take a leadership role in seeking ways of fostering this African cooperation. As discussed by Mondji, and Nkhonjera and Roberts, while economic relations are likely to be the first productive area in which to seek this cooperation, the benefits of deeper and stronger economic relations are likely to spill over into other areas, such as national and regional peace and security.

It is likely that as Africa strengthens its intra-continental relations and institutions, the credibility of its voice in global governance will be enhanced. A more united Africa will speak more persuasively and consistently about issues of African concern in the forums of global governance. This in turn could lead to both more satisfactory outcomes and a louder voice and vote for Africa in these forums. For example, this could result in South Africa and Africa's concerns receiving more consideration in multilateral discussions on how to deal with issues such as the management of transnational non-state actors, such as multinational corporations and terrorist groups and issues with transnational impact, such as climate change, and illicit financial flows.

### **4.3 Managing new actors in international relations**

Another consideration that should shape the South African government's foreign policy strategy for the 2020s is the role that non-state actors can play in the making and implementation of South African foreign policy. This will be influenced by the relationship between state and non-state actors in the domestic sphere. As Mondi demonstrates the relations between business and the state in domestic affairs can influence the success or failure of South African businesses outside the country. This in turn can affect the contribution these businesses make to social and economic development domestically. Nganje and Letshele show that similar dynamics influence the contributions that other sub-national and non-state actors – civil society organisations, labour unions, and think tanks and universities—can make to the country's foreign policy.

However, it is clear that in order for all these actors to play a constructive foreign policy role they and the state will need to develop a common understanding about national priorities and how they find expression in South Africa's foreign policy. This will require the government and these actors to engage in open, respectful and frank dialogue with each other. They will also have to agree on modes of cooperation and on how to handle the inevitable disagreements that will arise between them.

### **4.4 The institutional arrangements for foreign policy**

The chapters in this book suggest that the South Africa government needs to re-assess the bureaucratic arrangements for the making and implementation of foreign policy. To date, the state has not succeeded in developing an effective foreign policy bureaucracy or in efficiently managing inter-agency relations in regard to foreign policy. Muresan and Kornegay argue that one reason for this has been an over-reliance on personality and individual leadership, particularly the president, to drive the foreign policy decision-making. The result has been an inconsistent policy and weakened bureaucratic arrangements. They maintain that in order for the country to develop a more effective foreign policy, there needs to be better cooperation and coordination among ministries and departments. This, they contend, will help reduce the 'silo' tendencies of the various ministries and departments in the development and actioning of policy agendas. These improvements in bureaucratic relations will also facilitate the development of a common understanding between government and non-government stakeholders within the state apparatus itself.

## 5 Recommendations

Based on the above, we propose the following specific recommendations for enhancing South Africa's foreign policy. They are grouped into specific topic areas.

### **Institutional arrangements**

- The complex and interdependent nature of foreign policy requires developing more effective intra-governmental coordination. The presidency should establish an inter-agency coordinating council that focuses on national strategy and development, and that includes political parties. The recently established Policy Analysis and Research Services unit could provide support to such a council. This would facilitate the elaboration of South African foreign policy priorities based on a clearly defined national interest and coordination across departments.
- Parliament and Chapter 9 institutions, as state institutions supporting constitutional democracy, need to become more actively involved in foreign policy making. To facilitate their engagement, the executive, either through the presidency or DIRCO should have an annual meeting with representatives of these bodies at which the government's foreign policy objectives for the year can be discussed. Such a meeting would also enable a process of proper discussion about the potential trade-offs between constitutional norms and values and *realpolitik* in regard to these objectives. The Policy Analysis and Research Services unit could play an important role in informing this discussion.
- Given the complexity and rapid changes in the global environment, which are bound to accelerate, the South African government should institutionalise a five-yearly exercise to review how changes in the region and globally have affected its national interests. This could include a 'horizon-scanning' exercises that then feeds into South Africa's strategy with regard to economic diplomacy and foreign policy objectives.
- South Africa's sub-national governments need their own international connections. But there needs to be greater

communication between sub-national government and the national government about these international activities.

### **DIRCO operational requirements**

- In the foreign service there should be an emphasis on a diversity of skills in the recruitment process in line with the broadening of areas of focus in international relations. DIRCO requires diplomats with expertise in climate change and sustainability, global economic governance, trade and law, and development economics, among others. Equally important is that foreign service officers are educated about the linkages between domestic social and economic transformation and foreign policy and are equipped with the information to explain them clearly to both domestic stakeholders and their foreign counterparts. South Africa should also ensure that its foreign service officials and trade officials have the technical knowledge and skills and the institutional structures to promote South African trade and economic relations. Subject and country expertise should be encouraged, rewarded and utilised effectively. Too often diplomats build up expertise in one area, and are then moved to other areas, resulting in the specific knowledge being lost to the department. Language skills should also be prized and encouraged.
- In the same vein DIRCO should build up a research analyst career path, with a strong policy analysis focus. The NDP has already recommended that DIRCO's research capabilities be strengthened and that it collaborate with research and academic institutions in developing the country's foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>
- The Digital Age creates many opportunities but also uncertainties and fears. In that regard DIRCO should initiate a process to make better use of digital diplomacy. This would require focusing on its knowledge management and information systems, with the requisite investment in infrastructure, training and the development of a rules framework that enables diplomats to engage more

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<sup>8</sup> National Planning Commission, 'National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it Work', 2011, pp. 235, <https://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030> (accessed 5 November 2019).

systematically and meaningfully in the social media realm, while not jeopardising classified information.

## Thematic areas

### Economic development and cooperation

- South Africa must recognise that state–business relations affect economic development at the international and domestic level and must establish the mechanisms for making these relations more effective and synergistic. South Africa is among the largest investors in a number of African countries and there should be an integrated strategy developed between government and business to mitigate the risks and take advantage of the opportunities in the continent, especially in the context of developing regional value chains. Other interested stakeholders, such as labour, should also be included in these arrangements.
- Over the short to medium term South Africa will have to focus on a number of international trade and economic challenges:
  - South Africa needs to strengthen the regional economic governance arrangements in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and promote the conclusion of the negotiations of the new AfCFTA and its implementation.
  - South Africa needs a new agreement with the UK after Brexit once its future trade relationship with the EU is clarified. This could involve areas that were not included under the SADC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).<sup>9</sup>
  - South Africa needs to start negotiations with the US about its bilateral trade relations after the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expires in 2025. The US has already indicated that it plans to negotiate bilateral free trade agreements with individual African countries when the current AGOA expires.<sup>10</sup>
- South Africa has invested much time and effort over the last 25 years in South-South and triangular cooperation. In the 2020s it should focus on advancing development partnerships in Africa and beyond, both as a way of contributing to the achievement of the

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9 In September 2019 the UK and SACU plus Mozambique initialled an economic partnership agreement that would see the relationship continue after Brexit with the same preferential trading arrangements as those applicable under the EU agreement.

10 South Africa has been an important beneficiary of AGOA. According to figures provided by the US Trade Representative in 2018, it is the top US export market (some \$5 billion), followed by Nigeria with \$2.2 billion and Ghana with \$866 million). It is also the largest exporter to the US (\$7.8 billion), followed by Nigeria (\$7.1 billion) and Angola (\$2.6 billion).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and as a tool of soft power. In this regard, the establishment of the South African Development Partnership Agency is long overdue. While it will need financial resources, South Africa should not underestimate the importance of technical/in-kind assistance or the opportunities presented by triangular cooperation.

### **Climate change**

- South Africa's climate change leadership in articulating the interests of developing and more specifically African countries in the global United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations as a key member of the African Group of Negotiators should continue. Furthermore, South Africa should take a more proactive role in promoting awareness and action on the issue of climate change in the SADC. This will be in line with South Africa taking a lead role in championing the climate change agenda at the global level. Such a consistent approach domestically, regionally and globally will further promote South Africa's soft power and align itself with the strategy of 'norm entrepreneurship'.
- South Africa should reduce the inconsistencies between its domestic and international climate change related policies. In particular, it needs to stress in both arenas the important linkages between dealing with climate change and social justice.

### **Peace and security**

- South Africa should initiate another defence white paper process, based on the changing global security threat complex.
- South Africa should review the lessons learnt from its experiences in peace-making on the continent. This should include what has changed since the 1990s and early 2000s in terms of the nature of conflict, how the stronger role of AU institutions has affected the way in which South Africa operates in peace and security compared to earlier years, and the implications of these changes for its conflict resolution engagement.
- Focusing on greater peace, security and stability in SADC should be the priority. In the short to medium term this means prioritising the DRC and Zimbabwe. South Africa also needs to monitor the rising jihadi tensions in northern Mozambique and develop regional responses to encroachment by these radical elements.
- South Africa is bounded by two major oceans and its exclusive economic zone is bigger than its land mass. However, over the years

South Africa has concentrated more on its hinterland as it sought to reconnect with the continent. Maritime security is growing in importance around the world. South Africa's maritime strategy needs to be embedded in an overarching framework that takes into account the growing geopolitical interest of a number of external players in the Indian Ocean, that is now seen as part of a bigger maritime space stretching from the Pacific to the east coast of Africa (the Indo-Pacific). This ocean has also experienced piracy. Since South Africa straddles the Indian and the Atlantic and has islands in the sub-Antarctic and the Southern Ocean, the country should move quickly to define and action its (and the region's) broader geostrategic and security interests in the Indo-Atlantic space. Potential heightened tension in the course of the decade in Asia over the South China Sea could reinforce the importance of the Cape route, while also making it and the Indian Ocean the centre of superpower rivalry.

### **The multilateral system**

- South Africa should defend the rules-based multilateral system, which has come under increasing strain in the last few years. However, as South Africa's former trade and industry minister, Rob Davies, wrote in his recent book, regarding the WTO, 'defence of a rules-based multi-lateral trading system decidedly does not mean defence of the status quo'.<sup>11</sup> South Africa has long argued for the imperative of global governance reform. In the short to medium term, the WTO is undergoing, as Davies characterised it, an 'existential crisis'.<sup>12</sup> South Africa should continue to be engaged in the debates both inside and outside the WTO on reforming the body to strengthen multilateralism so that unilateralism or plurilateralism do not define the trading system.
- Given that the current problems in the UN Security Council suggest that the prospects for meaningful reform in the UN system are limited, the South African government should prioritise reform of the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. Consequently, South Africa should advocate strongly but realistically for governance reform in the IMF and the World Bank and other organisations and forums involved in global economic governance. These reforms

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11 Davies R, *The Politics of Trade in the Era of Hyperglobalisation: A Southern African Perspective*. Geneva: South Centre, 2019, p. 55.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

should focus on greater voice for under-represented countries and more public accountability and transparency.

- In both the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions, South Africa should look for both state and non-state partners with whom it shares common interests and with whom it can collaborate in promoting these reforms. It should leverage further its position in Global South forums, such as the G77, G24, and BRICS to promote issues of concern to Africa and to foster greater inter-regional cooperation.

## **6 Conclusion**

This volume was not designed to be a comprehensive review of every issue relevant to the making and implementation of South African foreign policy. Rather it was intended to raise key issues that foreign policy makers will need to address over the course of the next decade. It is our hope that it will stimulate discussion and debate and that it will contribute to a more effective foreign policy for the country. We also hope that by doing so, it will contribute to the development of a foreign policy that supports the social and economic transformation of South Africa and the achievement of the aspirations expressed in the Constitution.