



AN EMERGING SOUTH AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY?

Jakkie Cilliers, Institute for Security Studies

Occasional Paper No 39 - April 1999

INTRODUCTION

Five years after South Africa's first democratic elections, the new direction of Pretoria's foreign policy on Africa is emerging, and is increasingly bringing South Africans to confront the realities of a continent that is facing severe institutional challenges. With all the enthusiasm of the newly converted, many South Africans might well be described as 'born again democrats',¹ sometimes naive and unrealistic about foreign policy and the capacity of their own country to effect regional change.²

With the passage of time, the 'miracle' that has been the negotiated settlement in South Africa has started to give way to a more balanced and sober assessment of South Africa, its foreign relations and particularly its engagement in Africa. This paper attempts to provide a broad framework for reviewing South Africa's emerging foreign policy identity on the eve of the second elections in June 1999, and amidst the turmoil that has come to characterise much of Africa in recent years. In order to do so, the paper briefly comments upon recent developments on the continent, as well as South Africa's dependence on the region. The final sections explore the emerging South African foreign policy identity with particular focus on the country's future participation in peace missions and the potential role of civil society.

AFRICA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY³

There can be little doubt, even to the most idealistic of optimists, that African state collapse is gathering pace as the twentieth century draws to a close and that this has important implications for South Africa. Much of the evidence for this can be found in the escalating war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that now also directly threatens to engulf Zambia and in the renewed war in neighbouring Angola, where UNITA appear to be in a position to threaten Luanda itself. Without an end to these wars and the establishment of an effective state in countries such as the DRC and Angola, there cannot be stability or democracy, and therefore no sustainable economic growth.

In much of Africa, the nature of state formation — or lack of — has a long history and must be situated within its appropriate historical context, even if the space here does not allow for more than cursory remarks.

Effective colonial rule in Africa lasted for a relatively brief historical period of eighty years at most. As a result, the modern state structure in Africa that was imposed on the continent during this period often forms little more than a thin carapace over the largely hidden realms of the informal economy and its companion polity.

It is important to bear in mind that, at root, the colonial state was based on domination, and on its ability to impose its hegemony upon the subject peoples and extract from them the taxes necessary for the maintenance of the colonial state apparatus. Even in those cases where constitutional reforms were introduced to limit the absolute power of the state, this happened only during the immediate period before independence. Colonial administrations were bound by a common code of ethics and surety of racial solidarity — an intrusion ruled by a foreign élite banded together under the governor by a code of behaviour, "... a set of

*guardians whose strength lay in the pack."*⁴

While the colonial state was essentially bureaucratic, the post-independence regimes have been ultrapolitical.⁵ The rulers of independent African states had to rely on their fellow nationals to maintain law and order. These people were full citizens of the new country, some with political ideas and ambitions of their own, for it soon became evident that the closer one was to the centre of the political apparatus, the greater the chances of material reward. As a result, the state has been the primary arena for competition, for power, and for influence over the distribution of scarce resources. As Jackson and Rosberg noted:

*"What the church was for ambitious men in medieval Europe or the business corporation in nineteenth and twentieth century America, the state is today for ambitious Africans with skill and fortune."*⁶

The driving force behind Africa's second experiment with democracy during the eighties and early nineties came from both ideological conviction coupled with the growing impatience of an ever-bolder public consciousness, and from the related matter of the continent's prevailing economic crisis. For the first time since independence, domestic support became more important than foreign patrons, and African leaders had to confront the inherent weaknesses of their regimes and to consider sharing power with others. These were uncomfortable times for Africa's rulers and their clients, for all this happened at a time of deep and structural economic crisis.

At the very moment when democratisation stimulated the popular demand for better social and welfare services, structural adjustment required that this should be denied. In broad terms, this played a significant part in further undermining the state's claims to legitimacy in the eyes of its own citizens. As the World Bank itself recognised in its 1997 World Development Report:

"An institutional vacuum of significant proportions has emerged in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, leading to increased crime and an absence of security, affecting investment and growth."

Yet, it is difficult to see how the Bank's prescription of higher real wages for the civil service, higher spending on social services and vast investments in personnel development could be sustained at the same time as cutting public sector deficits and rebuilding physical and institutional infrastructure.⁷

The demand for governmental accountability and the reduction in 'corrupt' practices this has brought in its wake, has put severe pressure upon state-centred patronage networks. This means that rulers have to attempt to build new constituencies based on consent. In as much as structural adjustment creates a drastic change in patterns of resource allocation, it has not eroded the clientelistic foundations on which most African state-systems are based.

The result has been widespread privatisation, whether in the field of security or economics. International donor aid co-operation in Africa has shifted from purely assisting public institutions to decentralising aid flows and approaches that include civil society as well, with clear acknowledgement of macro-economic policies based on the Bretton Woods philosophy of open and competitive markets. In many instances, donor-driven outsourcing, however, has been matched by the outsourcing of patronage systems.

Although the end of superpower competition had resulted in a reduction in state-sponsored arms transfers to Africa, the fact that local disputes were less globalised meant that outside powers had less will to impact upon the conduct, termination and outcome of these conflicts. Local rivalries and antagonisms were given freer rein, being more remote from world centres of power and insignificant in terms of the global system. African states could no longer rely on outside assistance to end local wars that were no threat to vital foreign interests and are now forced to accept responsibility for peace and security themselves — at a time when the African state is at its weakest.

Increasingly, external non-state actors, including private military companies, have stepped into the void left by the international community. They sometimes act as proxies, and sometimes as independent agents, able by virtue of their wealth and command of expertise to influence local events to their own, often short-term advantage.

The loss of the coherence of the state has also encouraged the emergence of new forms of power relations, notably between central government and local actors, and of new institutions, such as vigilante groups and private militias. The creation of new economic and financial opportunities has seen the emergence of national and transnational actors who are directly implicated in criminal economic activities such as drug-trafficking, trade in stolen cars, general smuggling, and more. In short, the outsourcing and commercialisation of state functions in unconsolidated states have not proven to be a panacea for the lack of capacity, corruption and poor delivery that have characterised the post-colonial state.

Africa is clearly in a state of crisis at a time when South Africa is emerging from post-transition concerns about its internal integration challenges and is casting its eyes beyond the Limpopo. The country will have to acknowledge and confront the realities of Africa in a forthright and honest way without being moralistic or unrealistic in its approach — particularly given its economic dependence upon the continent and the degree to which insecurity north of its borders will inevitably impact upon South Africa.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICA FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Africa is now South Africa's largest export market and trade with the continent is rapidly growing. The fact that the South African Department of Customs and Excise has not historically reported data on South Africa's trade with other member countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) [9](#) obscures SACU's status as South Africa's single largest export market and the importance of African markets as a whole for South Africa. According to Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan, South African

"... exports to Africa are sharply different from South Africa's exports to its traditional Triad markets [Europe, North America and Japan]. Unlike South Africa's continuing export of gems, precious metals, minerals and base metals to the North, South Africa's exports to Africa are now the largest destination for value-added goods, taking nearly 30 per cent of total benefited exports ... in manufacturing and services South Africa's prime growing market is Africa, particularly Southern Africa. Other than tourism and trade in minerals and niche agriculture (wine and fruit) with the North, it is in Africa that South Africa has its strongest competitive advantages." [9](#)

Southern Africa is also important as a potential source of hydroelectricity, water and labour, and as an affordable tourist destination. Indeed, because of South Africa's rapidly growing population, even more rapid urbanisation and possible climate changes affecting agriculture, the region will become an increasingly important food supplier to South Africa in the next century.

The initial euphoria at the creation of a free South Africa has already turned to *angst* in a country such as Zimbabwe with whom South Africa's relations are increasingly strained. There are many reasons for the dramatic worsening of relations between South Africa and Zimbabwe, some based on personalities, others around issues of substance. Undeniably, it is South African dominance in the region that lies at the root of these differences.

In fact, it is difficult to overstate South Africa's dominant position in much of Africa, whether with reference to communications (in particular, the Internet), transport, population, economy or the military. [10](#) And thus far, there is no indication that black empowerment in South Africa will change this relationship, since there is no evidence that 'black capital' in South Africa relates differently from 'white capital' to the rest of Africa. [11](#)

EXPLORING THE SOUTH AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY

South Africa is a country where violence, race and policy are inextricably mixed. Depending on whose figures one wishes to believe, crime is either stabilising or continuing to increase —

but the levels of violent crime remain extremely high and have clearly not started to decline. Government policy and even the Constitution reflect a commitment to values, transformation and service delivery that have often floundered because of the lack of training and funds, corruption, inappropriate policy or unrealistic goals. Yet, both the international community and South Africans themselves have underestimated the extent of restructuring and transformation of literally every aspect of life that is required in the country. In a predictable response to the high levels of crime and violence, many South Africans argue that the intent and content of the Constitution are ill at ease with the harsh realities of the country — and the conditions in much of the rest of the continent. South African foreign policy also sometimes appears to try and apply so-called 'First World' standards when dealing with dictatorial rulers and one-party states, while often appearing to fail to come to grips with the realities of the continent and even of South Africa itself.

South Africa's diplomatic engagement of Africa displays the same ambivalence — almost as if South Africans do not understand Africa. Certainly, South Africa subscribes to different rules and criteria than do much of the rest of Africa. And when Thabo Mbeki, in frustration, throws this into the face of fellow Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders, as he did in Swakopmund on 27 July 1998, the result is more than a murmur of hostility among *de facto* life presidents and heads of state.¹²

South Africa's confusion springs, in part, from the large internal disparities within the country that is the legacy of apartheid. In 1992, it was calculated that the Human Development Indicator (HDI) for the white segment of the South African population compared with that of Spain (0,878), while the HDI of the rest of the population was just above that of Congo-Brazzaville (0,462).¹³ Medical care, education, housing and security commensurate with standards in industrialised countries are still available in South Africa — to those who can afford it. The vast majority of South Africans — overwhelmingly black — continue to live in abject poverty in the rural hinterland where the delivery of services remains poor. Under immense domestic pressure to improve the imbalances that beset his nation, Nelson Mandela cautioned his SADC allies that South Africa was not a gold mine or a bastion for employment: "*We are equally beset with unemployment*" and illegal immigration into the country is "... *sensitive and needs to be tackled with caution ...*" Mandela's remarks at the September 1997 SADC summit meeting that he chaired, followed only two weeks after South African street vendors had attacked 'foreign' hawkers in downtown Johannesburg.¹⁴

Given the realities of Africa, and South Africa's own internal challenges which have detracted from coherent foreign policy formulation and engagement, it should come as no surprise that South African diplomatic forays into Africa, as opposed to those at the global level, have not produced spectacular results. President Mandela's moral authority appeared to have little impact in his initial attempts to defuse the Nigerian crisis of November 1995, for example, in contrast to his ability to affect events much further away, such as those in Sri Lanka and the resolution of the impasse on the extradition of the suspects in the Lockerbie bombing case.

By comparison, the resolution of the Lesotho crisis in 1995 was skillfully handled in co-operation with the governments of Zimbabwe and Namibia — in effect, South Africa carried the stick, but stood back for Zimbabwe to do the hard talking. This experience would stand in marked contrast to the events of October 1998 when South Africa, under a dubious mandate from SADC, intervened in Lesotho by force of arms. Perhaps most importantly, South Africa and Botswana's forceful intervention in Lesotho, as well as that of Zimbabwe and Namibia in the DRC, underline the requirement to formalise and legalise the framework for subregional intervention, presently the responsibility of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security.

South Africa's attempt to mediate in the crisis in the former Zaire during April-May 1997 and thereafter has won the government some plaudits for the role and commitment of the President himself. The overall outcome, however, was not an unqualified success and appeared to highlight the limits of Pretoria's diplomatic mantras of 'governments of national unity and reconciliation' and 'inclusive political processes'.¹⁵

Pretoria has increasingly come to recognise that the African environment is not necessarily a

benign one for the application of strategies that proved effective in South Africa's transition to democratic rule. In the stand-off between South Africa and Zimbabwe over the control, leadership and structure of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, South Africa has repeatedly decided to back off in the interests of regional solidarity.¹⁶ Similarly, whenever issues around corruption and good governance are raised for discussion by South Africa — even behind closed doors during SADC heads of state and government meetings — the atmosphere is often chilly if not outright hostile. More recently, South African leaders appear to be making a concerted effort to support and not oppose Zimbabwean leadership on issues dealing with the DRC.¹⁷

At least formally, South African policy on Africa will soon be denied the stature and moral impact of Nelson Mandela and the immense reputation and pressure that he could bring to bear. Thabo Mbeki will inevitably find that his ability to formulate policy and make an impact upon Africa will depend much more on the success with which he rejuvenates the economy, as well as South Africa's ability to put its money and perhaps its armed forces where its mouth is.

While not originally envisaged as such, South Africa's strategic response to its hegemonic position in Africa is perhaps best encapsulated in its call for a rebirth, for an African Renaissance. Increasingly, foreign policy analysts and government officials alike have called for the country to take a leadership role in Southern Africa — to move beyond the consultation and consensus-seeking patterns of engagement that have stymied progress in the region thus far. Yet, there are clear limits to the ability of South Africa to impact upon the region. Not only does multilateralism at the global level have to be reflected in the way in which the country engages its regional partners, but the extent of the challenges facing Africa defy easy resolution, while South Africa's resources — although large in regional terms — remain miniscule in real terms.

AN EMERGING SOUTH AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY?

Reputation, even that of someone like President Mandela, is a declining asset that is dependent upon renewal for its continued relevance.

For some years, commentators and even analysts from within the ANC have expressed their concern about the leadership role of the Department of Foreign Affairs *vis-à-vis* that of the President and Deputy President's offices. In the run-up to the elections in South Africa, to be held on 2 June 1999, it would appear as if things are set to change. Not only has the incumbent Foreign Minister decided to retire, but the energy and vigour that the new Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Jackie Selebi, brings to the Department is reinvigorating an institution that has been suffering from a declining budget,¹⁸ poor morale, racism and internal divisions. This process has culminated in a renewed effort to restructure the Department in accordance with the emerging foreign policy priorities of South Africa. The Department faces the added challenge of having to reclaim policy areas from other government departments that it had relinquished over many years (such as foreign trade and human rights) and to stake its claim in new areas (for South Africa), such as the co-ordination of development aid and, crucially, participation in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Most importantly, South Africa has virtually no tradition or experience of multilateral diplomacy apart from that brought to the table by the influx of ANC cadres — and even this experience is one of liberation politics and not of the conduct of conventional foreign policy.¹⁹ This challenge is particularly important, since multilateralism is possibly the key component in South Africa's emerging foreign policy agenda. At the ministerial meeting of the Co-ordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in Colombia, Alfred Nzo committed South Africa to "... a *global system of social security that is created and operated through the vehicle of multilateralism.*"²⁰

Within the broader global rubric, South Africa appears to aspire to so-called 'middle-power leadership'. In other words, South Africa wishes to align and present itself as part of that consortium of countries that includes Norway, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands in the North and, less comfortably, developing countries such as India, Cuba and Brazil. Middle-powers rely on multilateralism and networking to advance a vast array of common issues

where they believe they cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact as part of a small group or through international institutions. Middle-power alliances between developed and developing countries tend to ameliorate the North-South divide — a reformist stance that is also closely in line with the emerging South African foreign policy agenda following the accession of South Africa to the presidency of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD IX) and the chair of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

There is a close affinity between middle powers and multilateralism. Essentially, the concept of middle-power diplomacy provides a central role to multilateral institutions, therefore it is an anti-hegemonic approach to the conduct of international relations. At its core is a vision of a collaborative and not a competitive world. In part, the insistence on moving towards a rules-based international system — within which a particular set of norms is applied without discrimination — is inevitable for a country that has struggled so hard for its own freedom and independence, and one that is intent on bringing its own values of justice and fairness to the international table. It is also self-evident for a country where the anti-hegemonic feelings against a superpower such as the United States still run deep within both liberation and National Party factions, despite the improvement in relations in recent years.²¹ Furthermore,

*"[m]iddle powers ... [are] characterised by a tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to vexing international issues and a tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes ... An ability to stand a certain distance from direct involvement in major conflicts, a sufficient degree of autonomy in relation to major powers, a commitment to orderliness and security in interstate relations and to the facilitation of orderly change in the world system are the critical elements for the fulfilment of the middle power role."*²²

South Africa has certainly shown a remarkable ability to engage in and contribute to progress with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the recent successful campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines, the so-called Ottawa process. It is also evident that the country is intent on playing a similar leadership role regarding the increased global insistence on reducing the scourge of light weapons, including small arms. At the same time, the country has acceded to a leadership role in the NAM, became president of UNCTAD IX, and will be hosting the Commonwealth Summit in November 1999. Yet, while the country has been remarkably successful at the global level, it has not had equal success regionally. South Africa has no regional partner who shares either its values or can counterbalance its inherent strength. All South Africa's neighbours instinctively fear the political clout that follows the country's economic muscle. This is, of course, not a South African problem alone. Axiomatically, the aspiring middle powers of the developing world are all regional powers who are themselves often accused of bully-boy tactics and actions.

The move towards middle-powership is borne out by the restructuring that is presently under way in the South African Department of Foreign Affairs where there is a clear move favouring the increased importance of multilateral efforts and initiatives at the expense of bilateral issues. According to Nel, Taylor and Van der Westhuizen,

*"Since 1994 South Africa has joined, re-joined, or acceded to some forty-five inter-governmental organisations and multi-lateral treaties. In addition, it has committed itself heavily to the reform of the UN, the IMF, and the World Bank, and to the possibilities of South-South co-operation in the framework of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation and the Zone of Peace and Co-operation of the South Atlantic."*²³

Selebi started this process in October 1998 with a review of the applicable legislative process. In November, the Department subsequently conducted a functional review of foreign policy during which it identified thirteen thematic issues/themes around which it wishes to organise its activities, as well as its interaction with civil society.²⁴ This process culminated in a ten-day retreat at the Vaal River in January 1999, involving literally the entire senior management cadre of the Department. On this occasion, officials debated an extensive strategic planning document replete with aims, objectives, action plans and performance indicators for each theme.

Significantly, the new Director-General has identified the lack of a policy-planning unit within the Department as his greatest challenge and most important priority. The further challenge is to rectify the Department's isolation from other government institutions in which the Department often works. While these developments are very much 'work in progress', the intention of the Department is to establish and manage interdepartmental teams, that may even include representatives from civil society, that will focus on each of the thirteen issues.

The vision formulated by the Department is the effective promotion of South Africa's national interests and values abroad. Foreign policy, in other words, is an extension of domestic policy. But in the interpretation of this deceptively simple statement, it is important to situate the South African domestic challenge within its appropriate context — that of the consolidation of democracy and transformation within the country.

The extrapolation of South African domestic values to its foreign relations, including those with the rest of Africa, is evident in many sections of the Constitution. For example, the Founding Provisions of the Constitution hold the following values:

- "Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- Non-racialism and non-sexism.
- Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law.
- Universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness."²⁵

Constrained as it is by a lack of resources, the ANC government has shown a deep commitment to export and engage the South African recipe and values to the region. In recent years, this engagement has occurred under the mantra of the African Renaissance — a call to action by South Africa and African leaders alike to responsible, accountable and sound government, as argued earlier. South African intentions, however, have not been reflected in developments within the region, nor, some proclaim, have they been matched by the country's economic engagement of the region. In other cases, the South African recipe has even been rejected outright.

It is for this reason that commentators and academics alike criticised the intervention of the South African government in Lesotho during 1998, for in this first foreign foray involving the use of armed force, the government appeared to come very close to flaunting its own tenets and ideals. As events would turn out, the Lesotho intervention has served as an important wake-up call for the government, and the policy failures that were so apparent during the intervention are in the process of being addressed. Importantly, the problems experienced by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) prior to and during Operation Boleas have also raised alarm bells with regard to the ability of the SANDF to participate competently in peace missions.

It is hardly surprising that the government has aspired to foreign and defence policies that reflect the values explicit in the constitutional settlement. How could it be otherwise for a state that owes its re-creation to the remarkable global human rights campaign in the form of the anti-apartheid movement? Coupled with this aspiration to be a model citizen of the international community has been a commitment to seek a leadership role in the developing world, the NAM and, more tentatively, in Africa.

Within the SADC regional arrangement, two matters have shown very little progress. The areas form part of Article 5 of the Treaty of Windhoek that brought the new SADC into being on 5 October 1993, and constitute the requirement to:

- evolve common political values, systems and institutions; and
- promote and defend (regional) peace and security.

It is here that the region is failing most obviously, with Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, among others, committing troops to the defence of Laurent Kabila in the DRC and, more recently, the threat to draw Zambia into the fray. Apart from these, Rwanda, Uganda, Chad, Sudan, Congo-Brazzaville and Libya are also involved in the war in the DRC.

Part of the problem in this regard lies at the heart of SADC's vision of itself. While the

subsequent aims and objectives of the stalemated Organ of Politics, Defence and Security speak of collective defence, the real intentions of SADC — at least prior to the conflict being waged between countries such as Zimbabwe and Namibia against Rwanda and Uganda on the territory of the DRC — should be that of collective security, not collective defence. As Sir Michael Alexander pointed out, "[c]ollective defence looks outward, collective security looks inwards. Collective security aims to make collective defence unnecessary."²⁶ SADC should aspire to a security community, not a military alliance. A move to a security community will inevitably also impact upon military force structures, planning and equipment, since those required for crisis management and humanitarian tasks differ in certain respects from the provision for defence tasks.

The challenges that the region faces, relate to effective governance as opposed to external military defence. It is the porous borders of the various member countries of the Community and historical patterns of population movement rather than the desire for military invasion or territorial conquest that have led to the intervention of countries in the internal affairs of others. In retrospect, there can also be little doubt that the ill-conceived expansion of SADC to include a country such as the DRC has seriously undermined the ability of the Community to serve as an additional security unit to the brittle countries that constitute its member states. As a result, the requirement to find additional security units at regional and subnational levels as a basis (or perhaps alternative) for state formation remains unchanged and unfulfilled at present. Over time, South Africa may yet revert to smaller regional units, such as the expanding SACU, as more workable regional building blocks.

To date, South Africa's response to the crises in its immediate region has been an intensive bout of shuttle diplomacy within which the country's leadership position was challenged and eventually sidelined, particularly by Zimbabwe. Given its legacy and economic dominance, South Africa is, in any event, anxious not to be seen to take the diplomatic lead too obviously. The unwillingness of South Africa to support diplomacy with military or other means has also left a vacuum that has been exploited by others more disposed to the practice of *realpolitik*.²⁷

But lack of movement with regard to the DRC should not be mistaken for lack of effort. While much of the world's attention is focused on the war in the DRC, Pretoria has quietly assumed an important role in the promising but barely reported peace process in neighbouring Burundi, where President Pierre Buyoya created a government of national unity consisting of the governing party and Hutu moderates last year.²⁸ And in the DRC, the proclivity for negotiations will inevitably increase as the military stalemate deepens and the cost for the intervening countries escalates.

PEACE MISSIONS AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

During October 1998, the South African cabinet approved the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions, which was subsequently debated in some of the parliamentary committees during February 1999, but not yet within Parliament as such. In many respects, the White Paper is a ground-breaking document both in South Africa, where its significance has not permeated as widely as one would expect, and internationally, where it sets new standards in policy formulation. It is possibly the most important foreign policy document yet to pass Cabinet and (limited) parliamentary scrutiny, since it forced government to outline its national interests and how these interfaced with its philosophy on conflict resolution and, indeed, its approach to Africa in general.

While much of this input was the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the White Paper would eventually cast peace missions within a wider, peacebuilding framework, emphasising that military participation in peace missions is only one of many tools that are available for the engagement of Africa. The document reflects a genuine desire by South Africa to come to grips with the challenge of accepting partial responsibility for stability in Africa and elsewhere. The challenge that must now be met is how to communicate, resource and implement the good intentions of the White Paper. Practically, the next steps will be the establishment of a peace missions centre within the Department of Foreign Affairs,²⁹ the creation and maintenance of a peace missions database for government officials, the compilation of interdepartmental standard operating procedures, and so on.

While the White Paper is a remarkably perceptive document, South Africa's apparent commitment to peace missions has yet to be translated into government action of even the most moderate nature — such as a positive response to UN requests for even a few civilian police and military observers, or even accession to the UN standby arrangement. It is not surprising, therefore, that more than one informed commentator have argued that the government, in fact, has been using the drawn-out policy process as an excuse not to involve itself in peace missions — particularly in Africa. It is also evident that some members of Cabinet, and even large sections within the departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence do not (yet) consider South African participation in peacekeeping as a foreign policy priority.³⁰ In all fairness, perceptions have changed quite markedly after the hard lessons that South Africa learned in Lesotho and the obligations that the country's active diplomatic engagement in the DRC is creating.³¹ But will Africa provide South Africa with the luxury of getting its policy and management house in order? Events in the region are moving rapidly and may demand commitments much sooner than most would prefer.

A combination of developments — Africa's peripheral status in a period of global financial instability, the failures of Western peacekeeping in Somalia, Rwanda and, more recently, in Angola, and the enthusiasm for subregional initiatives under the auspices of organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and SADC — has led to successive French, British, American and, recently, Danish initiatives to create African peacekeeping capacities to deal with African emergencies. In this process of obtaining 'peacekeeping on the cheap', countries such as Nigeria and Ghana have had to bear a huge financial, diplomatic and political burden — irrespective of one's judgement of the efficacy of these efforts. With the failure of the last true UN-resourced peacekeeping mission in Africa, MONUA in Angola, it is even more unlikely that significant resources will readily be forthcoming for peacekeeping in Africa. As Hutchful has stated so clearly:

*"Sub-regional peacekeeping will continue to be both 'do it yourself' and 'mini-max', in terms of the relationship of available means to scope and complexity of peace support operations. The reality is that African peacekeeping will remain underfunded, and that the functional devolution by the UN will fail to be matched by resource devolution."*³²

In West Africa, poor countries have been forced to organise and sustain their own peace support initiatives. The era of 'lean peacekeeping'³³ has arrived, requiring the ability to 'make do' with available resources where peacekeepers are neither impartial nor engaged in consensual peacekeeping. The prospects of improved resource availability is slim. What is to prove decisive, is rather "...the ability of African peacekeepers to adapt to these conditions of stringency."³⁴

While much of the African Renaissance is evident in the manner in which African leaders and armed factions are taking control of and responsibility for their own destiny, this engagement and sense of responsibility are as much products of Africa's marginalisation as they are of the increased speed with which Africa is imploding. As a result, while South Africa and the recent White Paper insist upon a UN mandate, the support of both the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and SADC, as well as clear entry and exit strategies, the future of peacekeeping in Africa may be a much more messy process than policy planners desire or government may wish — and much more expensive.

These tendencies, if they are correct, have important implications for South Africa, and in particular for the departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence. The latter, fixated with preparing for external defence, needs to refocus its roles and missions, and therefore its force structure, equipment and logistic support systems, to address the realities of African peacekeeping. Foreign Affairs, and the executive for that matter, need to be much more proactive in preparing South Africans for the inevitable at a practical level.

Through its acceptance of a peacebuilding agenda, the White Paper has admitted the involvement of both state and non-state actors. Whereas the Defence Review had viewed

"... the involvement of civil society as being that of an interest group, the White Paper on Peace Missions sees civil society as being a critical stakeholder in the peacebuilding process

and raised the prospect of how to co-ordinate this state/civil society interface."[35](#)

South Africa, with its relatively strong civil society, has the potential to leverage advantages for democracy in a region characterised by single-party dominance and authoritarian control, often marked by a dictatorial and corrupt élite masquerading as governments. The consultations that the Department has undertaken among academics and civil society, and their inclusion in the drafting of the White Paper on peace missions, as well as in the future engagement of South Africa in peace missions on the continent and elsewhere, are important developments that augur well for the future. The extent to which South African NGOs are ready for such a challenge is, of course, a completely different issue.

THE 'RENAISSANCE' CHALLENGE

This paper has argued that state collapse in Africa is continuing apace and that the major challenge facing the continent is indeed statebuilding. Furthermore, South Africa is on a steep foreign policy learning curve, but the tenets of a multilateral approach to foreign policy are emerging which see South Africa as an emergent middle power in the South. Contrary to its middle-power partners in North America and Europe, middle powers from the developing world tend to be regionally dominant. South Africa's position in the region is also that of an economic hegemon. The country will therefore need to go to extraordinary lengths to make multilateralism, consultation and peacebuilding reflective of its engagement in the region. In this process, the events surrounding South Africa's intervention in Lesotho (as opposed to the decision to intervene itself) were, hopefully, aberrations. Nevertheless, it seems inevitable that Pretoria will be drawn into peacekeeping missions that are poorly resourced and non-consensual, given the realities of the continent. Beyond stability operations, South African civil society has a particularly important role to play in peacebuilding, and may constitute a key ally for government in the engagement of the region over time.

There is some danger that South Africa could focus too much attention and energy on the reform of global institutions at the cost of essential areas in foreign engagement.

"Today, the UN is as ineffectual as it has ever been, and attempts at reforming it have been more 'a strategy of avoidance' than anything else. Other multilateral institutions fare no better. The international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF seem so caught up in the politics of Washington D.C. and the G-7 nexus, and of an emerging new rentier class in the world that they seem to be more institutions of hegemony than of reciprocity and of non-discrimination."[36](#)

Clearly, the new century requires a new multilateral order similar to the process which occurred at the end of the two world wars earlier this century, and that eventually provided the framework that contained the Cold War to a proxy conflict and prevented mutually assured nuclear destruction. But the obstacles to the achievement of these ambitions are truly awesome and would require a very carefully co-ordinated campaign among like-minded countries. Building common coalitions for such reforms will inevitably be a long and arduous process that will tax even the abilities of established middle powers. South Africa will have to be careful not to be drawn into a never-ending quest for the proverbial holy grail.

Despite the predictions of those who argue that the economic forces of globalisation are eroding the power of and even the requirement for the state, strong, efficient and capable states will remain the prerequisite for both stability and democracy in Africa. Concerted statebuilding remains the key precondition for regional peacebuilding in Africa — not only because the state remains the keystone upon which the global legal system is built and because it is the cornerstone of democracy, but also because the state provides the only measure of protection and counterbalance in containing the forces of the free market which are so heavily tilted against the developing world.[37](#)

One of the most important implications of financial globalisation, we are taught, is the requirement for increased discipline of governments in maintaining sound and consistent macro-economic and structural policies. For the strong and competitive, globalisation has strengthened the benefits of sound policies and raised the costs of bad policies. For the poor and the weak, globalisation means the threat that marginal changes in investment patterns by

global standards can spell economic catastrophe, or as Thabo Mbeki has put it:

*"A marginal portfolio adjustment by the investor can easily amount to a first order event for the recipient. A slight turn by the sleeping elephant, to make itself more comfortable, can result in the complete annihilation of the entire universe of a colony of ants."*³⁸

Over time, it is probably only consolidated statehood that can provide Africa with some protection against the fickle international market game.

The detailed analysis of South African trade and economic relations conducted by McGowan and Ahwiring-Obeng in 1998, point to the danger that South Africa will unconsciously continue to act as a selfish hegemon despite the country's overwhelming economic, infrastructural and military dominance within sub-Saharan Africa.³⁹ In response, South Africans, the Deputy President in particular, have formulated a vision of an African Renaissance — a call to action that will be translated into practice through action plans and initiatives under his presidency.

Many commentators and academics in South Africa and abroad have poured scorn on the concept of the Renaissance, both questioning the content and the timing of an idea that is as woolly as it is ephemeral. Yet, if one looks at its emerging content, as opposed to the rhetoric of government action, there is more to the call than meets the obvious and often inappropriate comparison with events in Europe several centuries ago. Given the asymmetry in the region, the hegemonic nature of South Africa's economic position in Southern Africa and the nature of African state collapse, the country and the region require a new paradigm that can serve to motivate and frame the engagement of issues of good governance, corruption and democracy in a manner that does not directly threaten African leaders of long standing. In this process, the challenge for South Africa is to lead by example and not through dominance. It is an immense challenge, but one that the country must face if it is to survive and eventually prosper.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

While the picture of Africa in 1999 is necessarily a bleak one, it is also one that is not without hope. Africa stands today as a continent at one of the most critical junctures in its history. Not since the conferences of 1884 and 1885 has the situation seemed so fluid, so fraught with danger, yet also so challenging in terms of the need for vision and wise leadership. The most important component of the African Renaissance is Africans' acceptance of responsibility for their own destiny. While the global community, commentators and analysts are deeply concerned with recent conflicts in Africa, these are no longer proxy Cold War battles fought on behalf of distant powers, or colonial powers providing stability in exchange for political support in multinational forums aimed at protecting captive markets. The wars in Africa are being fought by Africans for Africa in an environment where, eventually, Africans must come to terms with their own identity and security — of water finding its own level. Key to this is the process through which the incipient state establishes its monopoly on the use of force and the provision of security — and democratic theory presupposes a territorial unit of democracy.

The Cold War scaffolding that ensured both borders and stability in post-colonial Africa has been removed. As a result, African leaders and the African state are involved in a long-delayed process of shake-out. Seen in perspective, this development is of strategic and long-term significance in any debate on Africa and provides the real cause of hope for the future of the continent.

Paris, London and Washington have no intention of staging a modern version of the 'scramble for Africa', as the European colonial powers did at the end of the 19th century. For these countries, their focus lies elsewhere: in the collective security of Europe, in world trade, and in the Near and Middle East. Forty years after independence, the central issue for African countries and their donors is the consolidation or establishment of the African version of the state as a precondition for economic growth and recovery.

Given the arc of crisis that now stretches from Eritrea, through Sudan, Rwanda and the DRC to Angola, affecting almost a score of states, many would argue that, unless an African

equivalent to the Treaty of Westphalia is signed, some African states will continue to impose their own strategic objectives upon their neighbours. Africans must guarantee Africa — and it may still be that, what started off with the Congo in the latter part of the previous century with the Berlin conference, will come full circle in the near future and end in the Congo slightly more than a hundred years later. It is to this ideal that the government under Mbeki should commit its vision of the African Renaissance. Without stability there will only be war, poverty and the continued marginalisation of Africa — and no chance for economic development and growth.

ENDNOTES

Edited version of a paper presented in Stockholm at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs, and in Oslo at the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs on 9 and 17 March 1999, respectively.

1. According to J Spence, *The New South African foreign policy: Moral incentives and political constraints*, ISSUP Bulletin, 1/98, p. 2
2. It was in this vein that Deputy President Mbeki enthused in Chantilly, Virginia during April 1997: "Those who have eyes to see, let them see. The African renaissance is upon us ... What we have been talking about is the establishment of genuine and stable democracies in Africa, in which the systems of governance will flourish because they derive their authority and legitimacy from the will of the people." See T Mbeki, *Address to the Corporate Council Summit — Attracting capital to Africa, Chantilly, Virginia, USA, April 1997*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Papers, May 1998, Johannesburg, p. 10. In retrospect, many of Mbeki's remarks at Chantilly were unfortunate, dwelling as they did on the return of stability to Angola and peace in the former Zaire.
3. Taken largely from J Cilliers & R Cornwell, *Africa — From the privatisation of security to the privatisation of war?*, in J Cilliers & P Mason (eds), [Peace, Profit or Plunder? The privatisation of security in war-torn African societies](#), Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 1999.
4. D Austin, *Things fall apart*, Orbis, Winter 1982, pp. 928-929.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 929.
6. R H Jackson & C G Rosberg, *Personal rule in black Africa: Prince, autocrat, prophet, tyrant*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, p. 14.
7. T Hawkins, *Zimbabwe: Opinion — The Role Of Institutions*, Reuters Business Briefing, 27 June 1997.
8. Members are South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Except for Botswana, the other countries also belong to the Common Monetary Area in which their currencies are linked to the South African rand.
9. F Ahwireng-Obeng & P J McGowan, *Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa (part one)*, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(1), Abingdon, January 1998, p. 11.
10. For example, "... Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland (BLNS) may be juridically independent sovereign states; but from the point of view of regional trade they are totally dependent on South Africa. And this relationship is very unequal ..."; *ibid.*, p. 10
11. Patrick J McGowan & F Ahwireng-Obeng, *Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa (part two)*, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(2), March 1998, pp. 172, 190.
12. See the address by Mbeki at the occasion of the smart partnership dinner, Swakopmund, 27 July 1998, when he started off with the remark: "... part of what I have to do tonight is to destabilise a sense of a comfortable mutual accommodation that has attended our discussions at this interaction."
13. McGowan & Ahwireng-Obeng, p. 172.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-9.
15. From Patrick Smith, quoted by Spence, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
16. For example, Mandela's threat to resign as chair of SADC prior to the September 1997 SADC summit in Blantyre, Malawi.
17. See, for example, the way in which the press conference between Mandela, Nujoma and Mugabe was managed on 4 March 1999 in South Africa.

18. According to Minister Nzo, speaking in the House of Assembly on 4 March 1999, the operational budget of the Department of Foreign Affairs has declined from R1 289 million in the 1997/8 financial year to R1 137 in 1998/9. Even with inflation stabilised at below 10 per cent, this represents a major cut in real terms.
19. Paradoxically, much of the work which led to the successes in the NPT and landmines came from white officials who served in the Department well before 1994.
20. Quoted by P Nel, I Taylor and J van der Westhuizen, *Multilateralism in South Africa's foreign policy: The search for a critical rationale*, undated, footnote 1.
21. The point is often made, too simplistically, that the continuing ambivalent relationship between South Africa and the US is a remnant of the manner in which the US executive let the Botha government down when the SADF was within sight of Luanda in 1976. While there may be some truth in this explanation — even if of a declining relevance — the basic anti-American ideology that underpinned the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance throughout their existence, provides a much stronger explanation.
22. Nel et al., op. cit., p. 5.
23. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
24. Globalisation; arts, culture and sport; tourism; science and technology; environment and marine issues; trade and investment; development co-operation and development finance; and human resource development and education and training. Collectively, these first eight themes are grouped under the rubric of wealth creation. The enhancement of security, in turn, will be sought by focusing on crime; migration; conflict prevention and resolution; disarmament and non-proliferation; and human rights.
25. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Act 108 of 1996, chapter 1, Section 1.
26. M Alexander, *Eight steps for the Alliance's future*, RUSI Journal, February/March 1999, p. 14.
27. S Cleary, *African Renaissance: Challenges for South Africa*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Papers, May 1998, p. 25.
28. P Fabricius, *SA playing key role in Burundi*, The Star, Johannesburg, 19 February 1999. Both the former South African ambassador to the OAU, now Deputy Director-General Nhlapo, and former ANC member of parliament Jan van Eck, now working as a consultant to the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town, have been engaged for some time in the efforts to effect reconciliation between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority populations in Burundi. Recently, President Mandela also seconded his legal advisor, Professor Fink Haysom, to act as the chairperson of a committee of seventeen political parties in Burundi, attempting to reach agreement on constitutional reform, as well as transitional institutions which would enjoy the support of all. SANDF Major-General Andrew Masondo has also been seconded as vice-chairperson of the committee dealing with the cessation of hostilities and related military matters.
29. Tentatively called the National Office for the Co-ordination of Peace Missions (NOCPM).
30. Two examples will suffice. According to a Cabinet decision as recently as December 1997, peacekeeping was 'diplomatically significant', but ranked as a non-essential service for the SANDF in the short to medium term. Secondly, following a consultative process, the White Paper on peace missions was finalised during April 1998. It took until October 1998 for it to be approved by Cabinet (unchanged) and was debated, without much fanfare, in the various parliamentary committees during February 1999. The mere fact that the April document survived almost unscathed through this process is a third indicator of the lack of engagement and perhaps knowledge of peace missions in South Africa.
31. See, for example, M Malan, *'Renaissance Peacekeeping' — A South African solution to the conflict in the DRC?*, [ISS Papers, 37](#), March 1999.
32. E Hutchful, *Peacekeeping under conditions of resource stringency: The Ghana Army in Liberia*, paper presented at the [From Peacekeeping to Complex Emergencies](#) conference, ISS and SAILA, Johannesburg, 25 March 1999, p. 17.
33. Ibid., p. 2.
34. Ibid.

35. R Williams, *From peacekeeping to peacebuilding: Challenges of conflict resolution for South Africa and Southern Africa in the new millennium*, paper presented at the Complex Emergencies conference, op. cit., p. 9.
36. Nel et al., op. cit., p. 18.
37. P du Toit, *Peacebuilding in Africa: Prospects for security and democracy beyond the state*, [African Security Review](#), 8(1), 1999, p. 12.
38. T Mbeki, *Opening address of the Ministerial Meeting of the XII NAM Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Durban, 31 August 1998*, SA Journal of International Affairs, 1998, p. 121.
39. Their analysis leans heavily on events during the new SACU treaty negotiations and those regarding the proposed SADC Free Trade Protocol. See McGowan & Ahwireng-Obeng, pp. 177-186.
40. As Kornegay and Landsberg have asked: Is leadership without dominance in fact possible? See F A Kornegay & C Landsberg, *Mayivuke iAfrica!: Can South Africa lead an African renaissance?*, Policy: Issues and Actors, 11(1), January 1998, Johannesburg, p. 46