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SOUTH AFRICA IN AFRICAN AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Paper for the 2013 ISA Conference in San Francisco – Draft, not for quotation without permission from the author | Thomas Mandrup



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Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu+. Shaping a better world?

Abstract

Much has been said and written about the rising powers of the BRICS and the implications for the current global order. However, the BRICS are not a harmonious group, and discrepancies between the different BRICS states can be found both in terms of actual size, regional role and power, but also in terms of values and norms. This paper focuses on South Africa as member of the BRICS. It is the newest member of the BRICS, accepted December 2010, and is dwarfed by the other BRICS countries both in terms of size of its population and its economy to an extent that it can be questioned why it has been accepted into the BRICS. This paper will argue that the explanation has to be found at the political level, where South Africa claims to be representing Africa in BRICS. The paper examines South Africa's role in Africa and scrutinises to what extent South Africa has got the backing of the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) states.

Introduction:

South Africa's foreign policy contends that our national interests are better safeguarded by not just focusing on our own national interests, but broadly, on the interests of our region and our continent. As a member of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa bloc, (Brics) is playing an important role towards the shifting and distribution of power internationally. This shift is expected to give rise to a multi-polar world order. (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2013)

We must bring about the sanity that would dictate that power should be used to advance the well-being of humankind, and not abused as an opportunity to 'control the world', with no regard for the fundamental interests of the poor and marginalised. ¹

In May 2011 the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) released its long awaited white paper on foreign policy named 'Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu'². It was the culmination of a long process of shaping the post-apartheid foreign policy identity of South Africa, moving away from its past as considered an international pariah that was the cause of conflict and instability in most of Southern Africa. Since then South Africa has transformed into an active participant and contributor to the international system, to a large extent based

¹ Mbeki in ANC Today, 22 April 2005.

² Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained Ubuntu in 2008: One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu - the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality - Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.

partnership and multilateralism. The Ubuntu paper stresses this development. In December 2010 South Africa became a member of the BRIC-grouping. However, its membership has raised a number of questions, because on what grounds have South Africa become a member? Scrutinizing the economic indicators South Africa is dwarfed by the other members of the grouping, and in relation to actual size of the population of 49 million it is only a middle size country, which would make other African countries like Nigeria and perhaps Ethiopia more obvious members?

BRICS Member	2011 nominal GDP	2011 GDP per capita	2011 HDI
Brazil	2 492 billion	12 788	0.718
Russia	1 850 billion	12 993	0.755
India	1 676 billion	1 388	0.547
China	7 298 billion	5 413	0.687
South Africa	408 billion	8 066	0.619

Nevertheless South Africa became member of the BRICS as the preferred African member and in a role as the gate-way to Africa+. The logic seemingly being that the BRIC-grouping needed an African member and whom else to choose but South Africa? South Africa has transformed itself into a regional great power in Africa, and is leading by example in Africa.

The Transition

South Africa has since 1994 been on a journey from that of a pariah state during the apartheid era to that of a benign regional hegemonic power.³ The term hegemony must of cause be kept in brackets, because changing post-apartheid government has insisted on the fact that South Africa is a partner and not hegemonic power. In this paper the concept is therefore used with this in mind and as an analytical tool helping to unpack the strategic ambitions of South Africa's foreign policy. The underlying assumption is basically being that as George Orwell once argued that: All animals

³ Power should here been understood in the spirit of that of Joseph Nye who distinguishes between military, Economic, and Soft power, where the latter include primary currencies such as values, culture, institutions etc. Nye, Soft Power, p. 31

more equal than others.⁴ The same goes for South Africa's relation with especially its immediate region, but also as an international actor. States operating in the international system recall this Orwellian phrase because they play different roles according to, for instance, their status and capacity as states. Since 1994, South Africa has attempted to balance three different, broadly defined sets of expectations: international, those of its African partners, and finally a variety of domestic expectations, as expressed in the quote by foreign minister Nkoana-Mashabane above. Seen from an international perspective, South Africa has been faced with Western expectations of its dominance. Pretoria was expected to lead the continent away from being a zone of failed good intentions and to create the basis for a new optimism. However, major regional actors like Zimbabwe and Angola expected a partner, not a hegemon, and wanted South Africa to interact with the region on equal terms with the other partners. Conversely, some of its smaller neighbours, for instance Botswana, wanted a more dominant South Africa to champion an agenda of reform and development. At the same time, other states were suspicious of South Africa's intentions, which has limited the space for South Africa's foreign policy, which by several political observers has called both inconsistent and ambiguous. (Neethling, 2012)⁵ The Pretoria government has been caught between its stated long term normative ambitions of good governance and human rights, whilst it also prioritised its African partners and a 'global south' agenda. The immanent potential clashes were recognized by the government early on, and it has with shifting levels of success tried to reconcile these interests and levels of priorities.

The South African government from 1994 need to show that it has changed from the previous dispensation, and had to convince the other states through its actual policy's and implementation of policy. This also stressed the importance for South Africa of creating regional and continental structures directing and regulating the interaction between the states. However, this had to be reconciled with domestic political ambitions and concerns. The primary objective of the ANC-led government initially, after the transition in 1994, was national reconciliation and the economic empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups, which demanded economic growth.

The result we see today is a South Africa transforming itself into a regional⁶ great power, in this context understood as a regional power structure with one dominant state, which on the one hand leads and sets standards in local interstate relations,

⁴ Orwell, Animal Farm, Chapter 10.

⁵ There is a large literature on South Africa's foreign policy in the 1990s dealing with what role South Africa was playing and especially on what role it should play. For further details see for instance: Vale, Hopping against Hope: The Prospects for South Africa's Post-Apartheid Regional Policy; Barber, Mandela's World; The International Dimension of South Africa's Political Revolution 1990-99; Cilliers, An Emerging South African Foreign Policy Identity; Müller, Some observations on South Africa's economic diplomacy and the role of the: Department of Foreign Affairs; Spence, The Debate over South Africa's Foreign Policy; Solomon, Fairy Godmother, Hegemon or Partner . In search of a South Africa's Foreign Policy; Nel et. al., South Africa's Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Change; Willet, The Pariah Comes in From the Cold: South Africa's Changing Security Environment; Westhuizen, Can The Giant Be Gentle? Peacemaking as South African Foreign Policy; Mills, Leaning all over the Place? The Not-So-New South Africa's Foreign Policy; Ahwiring-Obeng and McGowan, Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa

⁶ In this paper, regional refers to the level of organisations and regimes operating below the continental level, for instance, SADC and ECOWAS. Africa as a whole is referred to as the continental level.

ternationally with other great powers.⁷ This to a large extent resembles what Susan Strange calls the structural power of the markets, that over time will place South Africa as a regional great power.⁸ This is not to say that South Africa's position in especially Africa and in its immediate region is uncontested, but the development in South African foreign relations since 1994 stresses that it has evolved into a regional power both in terms of its own perception and by its actual role in the region, - the chairmanship of the African Union and the membership of the BRICS grouping is just a case of point. Despite arguments to the contrary by several academics, the author argues South African foreign policy is to large extent directed by strong ideological convictions and is attempting to lead by example, i.e. trying to export certain values and norms to its continent, and the international system, while carrying the standard of Africa on the global scene. However, the membership of BRICS raises several questions-marks towards the normative agenda, since the partnership globally with the likes of China and Russia makes the liberal political reform agenda more difficult to adhere to. The leader of the newly established AGANG opposition movement in South Africa Mamphela Ramphele stated in relation to this that:

Our country has lost the moral authority and international respect it enjoyed when it became a democracy. This has largely to do with our failure to understand the complexity of formulating foreign policy positions in our inter-connected world. We have also not utilized the expertise that resides amongst South Africans of goodwill beyond those in government. The most serious flaw in our foreign policy stances is our failure to consistently align our policies with the human rights principles of our Constitution. We have taken positions in the multilateral arena in recent years on vexed issues such as Zimbabwe, Darfur and Myanmar that are at variance with our human rights principles.

South Africa's global standing has also been diminished by the surrender of our country's national sovereignty to appease foreign powers such as China, as the case of the Dalai Lama's unsuccessful visa application to visit our shores showed. Moreover, South Africa's international influence has been undercut by a foreign policy that has failed to define a coherent strategy for our country's external engagements.+ (Ramphele, 2013)

The membership of BRICS seems to emphasis this development away from the liberal human rights discourse, towards a more economic focused reform agenda. However, the India, Brazil and South Africa partnership (IBSA) within the BRICS-grouping must also be taking into consideration, and could indicate a continued focus on democratic governance. However, the BRICS-membership opens several avenues of reform possibilities on global economic distribution and development issues. The role as a regional great powers is tied to its ability to not just sanction and punish, but also to exercise intellectual and moral leadership, that is, to a certain extent to promote imperialistic ambitions with good manners.⁹ To have a position as a regional great power, you need not only economic legitimacy and effectiveness and coercive capacity, but also moral credibility and both domestic and international

⁷ Structural acceptance of this role, that is, by other states, is of great importance.

⁸ For further reading see Strange, States and Markets

⁹ Gill et al. in Gill, ed., Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations, p. 93.



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Joseph Nye inspired by Gramsci calls soft power

i.e.

soft power is getting others to want what you want. It co-opts people rather than coerces them. Soft-power rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others.¹¹

This paper scrutinises how South Africa has shaped and used its dominant regional position its conduct of foreign policy since the collapse of apartheid in 1994, to place itself as a regional great power with a global reach.

South Africa in Southern Africa post-1994

The end of apartheid in 1994 meant a dramatic change in South Africa's international relations. It was once again allowed to enter international institutions, which it so far had been excluded from. The nature of the apartheid regime was of such a nature that alliances were created to counter the influence of the pariah. To be able to safeguard a bloc of states, it is necessary to be organised around a set of hegemonic ideas that are acceptable to the lesser states within the regional powers area of dominance.¹² Joseph Nye has in relation to this argued that:

If the leading country possesses soft power and behaves in a manner that benefits others, effective countercoalitions may be slow to arise. If, on the other hand, the leading country defines its interests narrowly and uses its weight arrogantly, it increases the incentives for others to coordinate to escape its hegemony.¹³

Therefore, South Africa continued to exercise economic dominance in southern Africa to some extent also in the area of security, though it never acquired the required acceptance of the other members and was to a large extent politically isolated. The lack of recognition granted to South Africa's role therefore undermined its potential character as a regional great power. After the 1994 transition to a non-racial democracy in South Africa, the structural constraints that prevented her great power role partly disappeared, and a possibility for a new politically dominant South Africa evolved. The regional system was transformed and used to reduce the perception of fear and threat between the different states in southern Africa, particularly between South Africa and the other states. Western countries in particular hoped that South Africa would retain and consolidate a central position and lead southern Africa away from war, poverty and underdevelopment, leading by example. However, new South African government only cautiously took up the dominant role, creating a degree of vagueness concerning the extent of its sphere of influence.

¹⁰ Gill et al. in Gill, ed., Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations, p. 122.

¹¹ Nye, The Paradox of American Power, p. 9

¹² Gill et al. in Gill, ed., Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations, p. 94.

¹³ Nye, The Paradox of American Power, p. 15

Consequence for South Africa

International Role

In 1994 the ANC-led government was faced with the important task of placing South Africa both culturally and politically within the African community of states, as well as within the informal structured anarchy of African states and the international system. This was continued during the Mbeki presidency to a degree that it has been argued that Mbeki rediscovered his African roots and that this became defining for several of political decisions. (Gumede, 2007) Despite this it continues to be a challenging undertaking because in this process South Africa reduced other previously dominant regional and regional actors into minor players, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe being the most obvious example.¹⁴ The Mandela administration was from the outset aware of this problem and tried to present itself as a partner, not a regional superpower. The international community, on the other hand, called for South African leadership in Africa.¹⁵ Leadership should be understood as giving direction by setting an example for others to follow.¹⁶ In relation to this, the then Vice-President Thabo Mbeki¹⁷ stated in a September 1995 address to South African ambassadors:

“the strength and persistence of the international focus on South Africa puts the South African Government of National Unity under pressure to contribute positively and constructively to the global community. The Southern African region expects a positive contribution from South Africa in terms of their own development. They expect that we interact with them as a partner and ally, not as a regional super power” .¹⁸

The expectations the West in particular had of South Africa were that, despite its years of isolation and conflict, it would play an active and constructive role in securing positive development in Africa. US Ambassador to South Africa McNamara stated in 1996 that:

“we encourage South Africa to consider what its proper leadership role should be on African and global security issues. This country’s political, economic, as well as military, capabilities make it an important player in the areas of conflict prevention, arms transfers, and non-proliferation. And the moral stature gained through your peaceful transition to democracy has made South Africa a country that people around the world look to. The US Government looks forward to continued cooperation with South Africa as we tackle security challenges around the world.”¹⁹

¹⁴ The Zimbabwean president played a pivotal and somewhat strange role in the international struggle against apartheid by, for instance, playing a key role in the creation of the Front Line State system and in keeping up international pressure for the implementation of sanctions against South Africa. At the same time, Zimbabwe had a relatively advanced system industrial and agricultural production, enabling it to pose an alternative to the South African and international markets. Due to the political transformation in South Africa this role was partly abolished, and Zimbabwean industry came under severe pressure from the generally more advanced South African companies.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the statement by McNamara further down, and the statement by Villepin above.

¹⁶ Schwarzenberger, *Hegemonic Intervention*, p. 250.

¹⁷ Thabo Mbeki was Vice-president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999 and President from 1999-2008.

¹⁸ SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 7.

¹⁹ US Ambassador Thomas N. McNamara’s speech in Johannesburg, 20th February 1996, on The US approach to Regional Security.

The US hoped that South Africa would play the role of a benign hegemon, which the other African states could look to for guidance and moral leadership. South Africa had, by its relatively peaceful transition, become an example for others to follow. One of the questions that remained to be answered was whether South Africa, and especially the ANC leadership, had the capacity and will to play this role among its African partners, especially taking its stated partnership ambitions into account? In his own statement, Mbeki very clearly distanced himself from the role that the apartheid regime had played in using coercion in securing its position on the continent. However, he did not dismiss the idea that South Africa would play a dominant role in Africa, through not as a regional superpower and especially not with military means. However, the two quotations illustrate the difficult balancing act that the South African government has found itself in since the transition in 1994, i.e. to balance the two sets of expectations. As it will be shown further down, and which was argued early on by Mandela, was the interest of the West not necessarily that of South Africa.

South Africa furthermore constantly has to be careful not to overstretch its capacity, thus undermining its regional and continental ambitions. South Africa has neither the capacity nor the will to dominate the continent by military means. Therefore, it has to bargain and trade with the other states to be able to obtain their acceptance of its role as a dominant player. The early years of co-operation after 1994 were, furthermore, an important lesson for South African decision-makers because any attempt to break away from what was perceived to be pan-African solidarity was punished by the other African states. A much cited example of this was Mandela's criticism of Nigeria's dictator Sani Abacha in 1995, which led to South Africa being shut out for breaking the African solidarity code of non-interference.²⁰ As a result, South Africa learnt the hard way that it needs the support of its African partners to achieve its long-term political objectives of economic development and political reform.

Economic Conditions for South African Foreign Policy

Since the end of the Cold War, during 1990s and well into this millennium, the SSA sub-system has been characterised as constituting some kind of black hole in international relations. The debt crisis and the subsequent economic collapse of the 1970s and 1980s increased the continent's economic marginalisation from the international economic system. Moreover, in the wake of the end of the Cold War, the continent has been excluded from the narrow international community dominated by the states in the liberal zone, and it has to some extent become the responsibility of the regional powers in Africa to deal with challenges to the continent.²¹ This is the natural consequence of a militarily unipolar world order, where the lack of competition for influence allows the unipolar power to focus exclusively on its immediate strategic

²⁰ For further details about the Nigeria issue, see, for instance, Landsberg, *The Quiet Diplomacy of Liberation*, pp. 176f.

²¹ See Buzan et al., *Regions and Powers*, pp. 32ff., for further details about the dynamics between the international systemic level and the regional level.

ements of the former Nixon doctrine²² However, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 led to fresh strategic thinking on the part of the USA, as the war on terror became the guiding principle of US foreign policy. SSA has not played a prominent role in this strategy and has therefore remained partly marginalised. However, the war in Libya, the presence of al-Qaida inspired movements in Somalia and the Sahel belt has resulted in an increased US focus on the continent. Furthermore, has the increasing US focus on alternative sources of oil and other natural resources than the Middle East and the perceived correlation between extreme poverty and terror has changed the US view of some parts of SSA, but large parts of the continent still fall outside the direct zone of US strategic interests.²³ The increased competition for the access to and control with Africa's resources, has led to competition between the major international partners like China, the US, EU, Brazil and India. Especially China's increased presence and the introduction of its Africa strategy and its institutionalisation via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has put pressure on the US and the EU, because China for instance is more willing to provide financing for projects with high risks than both the EU and the US and has less problems operating in states with daunting human right and governance problems. The re-emergence of the international great powers in Africa has reduced the influences of the regional dominant states such as South Africa. It is more difficult to get authoritarian states to reform, if they have an alliance with for instance China, - Sudan and Zimbabwe being two obvious examples. This is in part resulting in making it difficult to reform institutions like SADC and the AU. This is one of the areas where the BRICS cooperation can expect difficulties, since all five members of the grouping has national economic interests in Africa to consider, which makes South Africa's perceived role in BRICS as the %gate-way to Africa+difficult to handle in practice.

The widespread pessimism about Africa that dominated the international donor community's discourse on the continent in the post-Somalia era made it more difficult for South Africa to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). The FDI that was attracted primarily consisted of so-called hot money which was disinvested after the fall of the South African currency, the Rand, in 1997-98.²⁴ This capital flight was hotly debated in South Africa, and former president Thabo Mbeki accused sections of the dominant South African business community of causing an economic crisis. The South African government was aware of the importance of its geographical region and that the declarations of international goodwill were only provisional in nature. In the Foreign Relations Discussion document of 1996 it was stated in relation to this that:

It could be claimed with confidence that South Africa's return to the international community as a respected %world citizen+has been welcomed

²² For further details about the strategic interest in bi-polar and multi-polar world orders, see, for instance, Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 170.

²³ After the 9/11 attacks the US has increased its focus on areas like the Horn of Africa, East Africa and partially areas of the Sahel. Southern Africa, however, remains marginalised. See also Mills, *Africa's New Strategic Significance*.

²⁴ The South African rand lost 37.3% of its value against the dollar from 1997 to 1998. See, for instance, Bond, *Against Global Apartheid*, p. 141. South Africa also had problems attracting long-term development aid because of its ranking as a middle-income country. Moreover, it received mainly transitional assistance in the initial period after 1994. In 2013 most major aid donors have removed their aid to South Africa, which has transformed itself into an, limited admittingly, aid donor.

Id over. It would be hazardous, however, to read more into the world's reaction than was intended: support and admiration for South Africa's peaceful democratisation. The world's reaction does not represent an indefinite continuation of the unique relationship or so-called honeymoon which South Africa has experienced since 1994. Many expectations about South Africa's international role have been created, but at the same time many demanding responsibilities have been assumed.²⁵

In the formation of its foreign policy, the ANC government has had to take the historical texture of the apartheid state and the economic realities that it left behind in post-apartheid South Africa into consideration. According to the UNDP, by 1994 South Africa and Brazil were among the most unequal societies in the world, economically and socially, in terms of income distribution. This had not changed significantly by 2013. According to the latest statistics from the UNDP 17,4 per cent of South Africans in 2006 survived on less than a dollar a day, which is a decrease from 26,2 per cent in 2000, and with a high income disparity/gini coefficient of 57,8. (UNDP, 2011). In comparison, Brazil has managed to reduce the number of people living on less than a dollar a day from 15,49 per cent in 1990 to 3,8 per cent in 2009 (UNDP, 2011). South Africa is falling behind its partners in BRICS, which amongst other things is due to the fact that its economy is not growing fast enough to effectively move people out of poverty²⁶. President Jacob Zuma in his February 2013 State of the Nation address stated that the expected growth of the South African GDP had fallen to 2,5 per cent, well below the 5,5 per cent that government estimates to be needed to create jobs (Zuma, 2013).

However, while the domestic inequalities are a policy area that the ANC government has prioritised and is attempting to remedy, it is finding it difficult to change the global inequalities that systematically disfavour the developing world, sometimes called *global apartheid* which is an area that is high on the South African governments agenda, i.e. creating what it sees as a more just and fair international order and economic system. The terms of trade between Africa and the international system have marginalised Africa's formal economic relations with the international system, which increased focus on commodity exports, especially crude oil. Nevertheless, while the racist version of apartheid took the form of an actual political regime and could therefore be fought, global apartheid is based on the distribution of power in the international system and is therefore more difficult to combat.²⁷ The South African government has stated that it wants to create a more fair international system, but it is being criticised for just accepting the existing system.²⁸ By doing so it is also creating regional political tension, because the terms of trade between South Africa and the continent increasingly favour South Africa.

The daunting task of transforming South Africa shifted the new government's focus in 1994 from securing the interests of the small white minority to addressing poverty

²⁵ SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 7.

²⁶ Of course the assumption that economic growth leads to job creation and improvements and service delivery also needs to be interrogated.

²⁷ For further details, see Bond, *Against Global Apartheid*, pp. 134ff.

²⁸ Bond, *Against Global Apartheid*, p. 140.

frica in general. Even though the government stated that one of its main objectives was to focus on Africa and to place South Africa in Africa, in the initial period after the transition the real focus was to transform the country's internal structures. The great majority of the South African electorate expected significant economic and social improvements after the installation of the first non-racial government in South Africa. There were unrealistic expectations within a broad spectrum of the non-white population regarding the economic capacity of the country and the government's ability to redistribute its wealth. The economic reality was that the South African economy, though advanced in the African context, was relatively small and that the country only ranked as a middle-income country in the UNDP HDI. The nation's expectations were predominantly fostered by the wealth and lifestyle of the white minority. The ANC government was consequently caught between domestic, regional and international expectations, and it found that the three were not compatible. It was in this context that South African foreign policy was created, as well as an impression of the existence of a dichotomy between words and deeds. The initial problem in defining the new foreign policy was that it was too ambitious and idealistic. The list of priorities in the foreign relations document was nearly unlimited and the consequence was a lack of focus, which, to a certain extent, explains the inconsistent policies, particularly during the Mandela era, coming out of the government offices in Pretoria, but also very visible during especially South Africa's first spell in the UN Security Council 2007-08, where it was accused of not sticking to its own foreign policy principles. There was a need to prioritise fewer political goals and recognise South Africa's limitations.²⁹ Furthermore, South Africa has come to realise that foreign policy objectives and normative ambitions is a long-term process, which can be negatively influenced by day to day pragmatic politics. However, this doesn't change the fact that South African foreign policy is still to large extent shaped by clear normative ambitions of a multipolar world order based on the rights of all countries and multilateral solutions, and a clear rejection of uni-polarity and unilateral actions. (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2013) International rules apply to all, also the strongest powers in the international system. South Africa's strong critique in relation to the US led interventions in Kosovo and Iraq are cases of point.

The domestic politico-economic climate has made it difficult for the government to grant concessions in regional co-operation because it needed to use its full economic potential to remedy past injustices at home and create economic growth. The members of the ANC alliance pressured the government to protect national economic interests against regional and international competition, thereby creating doubt about South Africa's benign ambitions. South Africa's economic policy in Africa has led to criticism from scholars like Patrick Bond, but also to critical comments from for instance parliamentarians in Kenya and Zimbabwe, that fear the South African economic dominance and find it difficult to see the partnership in South Africa's trade strategy. The economic asymmetry between South Africa and most of the other states in SSA is partly to blame for this situation. In a system like this, the dominant power will try to let the smaller states in a system pay for the costs of regime relations. This will often be achieved through the regulation of trade barriers and limited access to the hegemonic power's market for the products of the other

²⁹ Mills, *Leaning all over the place? The not so new South Africa's Foreign Policy*, pp. 2f.

has very much been the case between for instance SADC and South Africa. In its financial policies, South Africa has applied a policy to the effect that what is good for South Africa is also good for Africa. This strategy has focused on a strict liberal economic policy aimed at creating economic growth and reducing inflation levels in South Africa. Private businesses have invested heavily on the continent, and South Africa's exports to the rest of the continent have grown significantly. South African businesses took advantage of their relative competitive position compared to their African competitors.³¹ The ANC government has at the same time been reluctant in allowing its African partners access to the South African market. Furthermore, South Africa has used its regional economic hegemonic position in Africa to finance its trade deficits in relation to the highly competitive international market and a domestic redistribution programme. This is, of course, a very important point because foreign policy is then reduced to a means of reaching domestic goals. It therefore also points to the tension in South African foreign policy of wanting to reform the international system, i.e. to what extent is this a wish for a real democratic reform of the existing international system, or to what extent it is merely an ambition of securing South African influence within the existing structures. It is the domestic concerns that dictate the priorities in the foreign policy, for instance the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment by large numbers of primarily black South Africans. This is also an important statement because it illustrates that a minimum of resources must be used to obtain maximum influence internationally, a perhaps self-evident point, but important nonetheless. However, this statement can also be understood more narrowly as an attempt to stress that, at the end of the day, foreign policy serves the national interests of the state. Furthermore, as Vale and Maseko show, Mbeki's launch of the renaissance idea falls within the old South African tradition of seeing itself as the locomotive in the modernization and development of the continent. According to Lodge, the notion of an African renaissance must be understood as reflecting both the market-driven ambition of attaching Africa to the international system and the aim of breaking the circle of marginalisation, hence, for instance, former Presidents Thabo Mbeki's consistent reference to globalisation as not a threat to Africa but a challenge. The other aspect of the renaissance idea is the focus on the notion of *Ubuntu* which aspires to rediscover the cultural values of the African Bantu nation.

Foreign Policy on Different Levels

Around the globe new conflicts and divides are surfacing. The chasm between the industrialised North and the underdeveloped South is deepening. If there is to be global harmony, the international community will have to discover mechanisms to bridge the divide between the rich and the poor. South Africa can play an important role in this regard because it is situated at a particular confluence of world affairs.³²

To acquire a better understanding of South Africa's foreign policy, it is necessary to distinguish between its regional, continental and international roles. On the international level, South Africa has tried to place itself in a central position as a

³⁰ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, pp. 33f.

³¹ Alden and Soko, *South Africa's Economic Relations with Africa*, p. 4.

³² Mandela, Speech, 'The Future of South Africa', *The Asian Age*, 1 March 1994.

mediator and representative of Africa and the third world, while regionally it is the great power. Continentally, that is, north of the Zambezi to use Alden and Soko's term, South Africa is one of a number of other regionally dominant powers, playing a dominant but contested role through various alliances.³³ South Africa's international role has similarities with those of smaller middle powers, even though regional powers differ significantly in the sense that the latter exercise a dominant position in their own region, even though their influence on the international community might be limited.³⁴ By using a benign co-operative strategy, South Africa has, at the regional level, tried to promote reform and co-operation in Southern African Customs Union (SACU), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU; later African Union or AU) by leading by example, as noted above. It has played a pivotal role in the reform of SADC and the AU. In its strategy towards the international system and the continental dimension, it has used a multilateral strategy. However, it has used a more mixed strategy in its relations with SADC.

During the apartheid era, South Africa played a dominant role and used military means extensively to disrupt and weaken development in the hostile neighbouring states. Since 1994, the government has for this particular reason, among other things, been reluctant to use the military tool, though it has been willing to do so under extreme circumstances, as in the military intervention in Lesotho in 1998, despite the immediate political costs, and since 2007 in the Central African Republic (CAR).³⁵ In southern Africa, to a large extent South Africa exercises a primacy in relations with its immediate neighbours in the Southern African Customs Union. In SADC it has been creating a benign great power role for itself by soft political means. This also underlines another dimension in the role of the great power, which is to protect the smaller states in the system from outside threats.³⁶ South Africa's more active international role is an example of this: for instance, it has created alliances with other dominant third-world states in an attempt to reform the international system. It has been a key player in the Burundi transition in the shape of military deployment and training, more traditional development aid projects and training. Inside SADC South Africa has deployed and is paying for the on-going (2013) SADC naval anti-piracy operation in the Mozambique Channel. It was also taken to court by 39 international pharmaceutical companies to establish its right to provide cheap HIV/AIDS medicine for its population, a problem that it shares with for instance several of the other BRICS countries Brazil and India, where the latter is considered the pharmacy of the third world.³⁷ These are issues that have wider ramifications for the whole of the Third World and show South Africa taking on the responsibility of protecting the smaller states from what it perceives to be an unjust

³³ Alden and Soko, *South Africa's Economic Relations with Africa*, p. 5.

³⁴ See, for instance, Van der Westhuizen, *South Africa's emergence as a middle power*; Cilliers, *An emerging South African Foreign Policy Identity*, p. 7, for further details about so-called middle powers.

³⁵ For further details about the new role of SANDF see Mandrup, *Garry a stick, but use it gently*.

³⁶ Schwarzenberger, *Hegemonial Intervention*, p. 264.

³⁷ A group of 39 pharmaceutical companies filed a law suit against the South African government 18 February 1998, and dropped its lawsuit against the government of South Africa on 19 April 2001 after significant international pressure. The companies had taken South Africa to court over its 1997 Medicines and Related Substances Act. The main issue was Amendment 15(c) which would allow TRIPS-compliant compulsory licensing and parallel imports of medicines in South Africa. The case was very principle in nature and was seen as an important victory for the poorer states and their right to produce cheap medicine.

of the SADC Mutual Defence Pact is another example in which, by signing this collective defence agreement, South Africa guarantees the security of the other signatories against outside threats. The ANC government has therefore changed South Africa's behaviour and thus its status from being a pariah state to a rather benign one, this being an important parameter in creating acceptance of South Africa's new role.

At the international level, the ANC leadership has deliberately tried to use its non-aligned position to create a role as a broker in international disputes between the centre and the periphery. This was the case in the negotiations following the dispute between the EU and UK on the one hand and Libya on the other³⁸ following the Lockerbie bombing, leading to a financial settlement in 2003. There was also South Africa's attempt to broker a deal between the warring parties in East Timor in 1999. Furthermore, the government continuously held talks with the Iraqi regime until the coalition attack in March 2003, and it also brought the parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict together by facilitating talks between them.³⁹ The ANC leadership has also tried to mediate between the Democratic Republic of Korea and the international community and since 2003 it has been involved in an attempt to reconcile the parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka. In 2013 the South African government is still for instance heavily involved in attempting to solve the political crisis in Zimbabwe, assisting the South Sudan government in its attempt to increase state capacity, in the continued peace process in the DR Congo, and in assisting the Somali government (South-central). These are just a few examples that underline the image of a South Africa that is trying to place itself within the international system of states in order to secure a better bargaining position for itself, both internationally and regionally. One of the main reasons why South Africa has been accepted as a mediator is because it is able to comply with the normative settings decided by the dominant powers. However, the reformist ambitions that explicitly mentioned the Ubuntu-paper and that ties for instance the IBSA countries together, and partly the BRICS bloc, challenge the neo-liberal order created by primarily the north and explains the paralysis that characterises the many international institutions like for instance the WTO and Climate negotiations, where South Africa and the bloc of developing states refuses to adhere to Northern dictates. This position was confirmed at the recent BRICS Summit, where the five members confirmed a common position on the Doha and the WTO negotiations. (Industry, 2013) The South African government is adhering to international rules and norms, but pushes a reformist ambition of reforming and democratising the international system and thereby making it legitimate. (DIRCO, 2011)⁴⁰ South Africa's extensive role as a mediator in primarily African conflicts has to do with its own experience of a negotiated transition from apartheid, using this as a model for

³⁸ Henwood, South Africa's Foreign Policy: Principles and Problems, p. 6.

³⁹ This attempt has not been very successful, partly due to the ANC's critical approach towards Israel, which in its turn sees the ANC leadership as being supportive of the Palestinian cause. The situation was exacerbated in 2004 when central ANC figures compared Israeli policies in the occupied territories to those of the apartheid regime. Relations between South Africa and Israel have been strained by Israel's close co-operation with the former apartheid regime, especially in the field of military technology. Visit and briefings at ARMSCOR, October 2004.

⁴⁰ A Danish diplomat mentioned in passing that it was today more or less impossible to get the South African government to sponsor proposals with Denmark in for instance UN Human Rights Council.

to do with the ANC government's ability to deliver the required results. An important element in being accepted as a mediator. South Africa has been relatively successful in the negotiations in, for instance, Burundi and DRC, and it was called in to assist during the last, critical part of the Darfur negotiations in May 2006. However, the results of its involvement in for instance Ivory Coast was highly criticised and Mbeki's role as a mediator in Sudan has also resulted in criticism.⁴¹ However, South Africa's mediation initiatives and its attempt to settle conflicts on the African continent constitute a unique example to an otherwise unstable Africa as to how the other states on the continent should behave. It is therefore able to use its comparative disadvantage in being geographically located outside the liberal zone by being useful to both the dominant states and the states of the periphery, a bridge-builder between the two spheres. One of the problems with this strategy has been that South Africa has yet to capitalise on it economically, which is also why the South African government is increasingly turning to the BRIC-grouping, and has as a stated strategy to increase south-south cooperation in all sectors and trade, decreasing the dependence on the North. South Africa has learned the hard way that what former foreign minister Alfred Nzo assumed on 14 March 1995 in relation to this is not always the case. South Africa's trade relations with the EU on FTA is just a case of point.:

There is also an interplay of bilateral relations between two countries and their actions towards each other in a multilateral context. Support of a candidate in one organisation may result in a favourable bilateral action, more trade credits or more development assistance. Countries and especially delegates are often faced with a barrage of requests for a vote of support for issues or candidates in the interest of bilateral relations. Trade-offs are not uncommon. Sensible handling of these situations requires early consultation and the developing of practical criteria to facilitate and justify decisions.⁴²

Although the economic advantages of this role still need to materialise, South Africa has nevertheless gained some international prestige and trust in it as a reliable international partner. A good example of an indirect trade-off was South Africa's joining the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty (NPT) of 1991, where pressure from the US led South Africa to sign. In return the South African leadership, besides standing out as an international example to follow as being the first and so far only state to dismantle its nuclear weapons capacity⁴³, secured a yearly bilateral meeting with the US.⁴⁴ It also used this position in 1996 during the renegotiation of the NPT agreement and managed to bridge the major divide between the North and the South.⁴⁵ But South Africa's recent role in Zimbabwe and UNSC, WTO and COP15-

⁴¹ For further reading on South Africa's mediation see for instance: Schilling Eds. Africa's Peacemaker?+

⁴² SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 17.

⁴³ The author is of course aware of the fact that the Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus in principle also gave up their share of the Soviet nuclear weapons capacity with the dismantling of the USSR. The cost to South Africa of striking this deal was limited because the ANC leadership had already decided to abolish its nuclear arms programme as part of the strategy to improve the poor international reputation of the former pariah state.

⁴⁴ The SA-US Binational Commission was established in 1995 and consists of nine committees and one subcommittee where government officials and business leaders meet in an attempt to strengthen bilateral relations. Today, the US is South Africa's single largest trading partner. Source: South African Yearbook 2000/01.

⁴⁵ For further details, see, for instance, Schoeman, South Africa as an Emerging Middle Power: 1994-2003, in The State of the Nation 2003-2004.

South Africa's role, and has created uncertainty in the North on South Africa's role and ambitions internationally. However, the ambitions of the ANC-government are stated relatively clear in its Ubuntu-paper, which is to serve South African national interest by creating a sustained growth path and to contributing to the development of the African continent. The government for sees a shift in the balance of power in the international system, which creates new, and read better, possibilities for South Africa. (DIRCO, 2011) The membership of the BRICS-grouping must also be understood through that lens. This has left the ANC government with a number of difficult choices, because sticking strictly to multilateral solutions in the contemporary world often also means not serving the remaining superpowers interests. Consequently, the relationship with the US government has been and continues to be a difficult balancing act for the Zuma administration.⁴⁶

The ANC government has in its attempt to take up the role as the bridge between the North and developing world had a mixed strategy where, for instance, it has been very focused on multilateralism and reform of the international system, while simultaneously continuing to support old friends from the time of the liberation struggle. Despite the disagreements with the USA over a number of central issues such as international trade, pre-emptive war and unilateralism exemplified in particularly with the war in Iraq and what it considered the misuse of the given mandate in Libya, South Africa is an important state for the Americans in Africa because of its influential role on the continent. The American market is also important for South African business, where the US is the second largest market for South African export only exceeded by China. However, that China has taken over the role as biggest trading partner, the economic crisis in the Euro-zone, and the BRIC countries in general become still more important for South African trade, also illustrate this foreign policy move away from the north to a more South oriented agenda. Despite disagreements on certain issues, South Africa shares the fundamental normative principles of international arbitration, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, adherence to liberal democracy and human rights, and compliance with the principles and rules characterising the international liberal economic order. Some African leaders have criticised South Africa for being too closely connected with Western countries, and the increased cooperation and coordination with BRIC-grouping is therefore a way of avoiding this critique. This has also been visible during South Africa's two periods in the UNSC, where South Africa on several occasions have voted against resolution put forward by Western states on topic such as Burma, Sudan, Syria and Zimbabwe, despite its stated normative value based focus in its foreign policy. The argument has been, as it was in 1999 during the Kosovo vote, the third Golf war in 2003, that South Africa does not accept unilateralism in any way or form. The UNSC must not be used as political vehicle by certain states against specific regime, and not against others. President Zuma for instance argued in UN General Assembly that South Africa could not support a resolution against Syria,

⁴⁶ One example of this was President Bush's visit to South Africa in July 2003, when Mbeki stated that he was grateful for the support the US had given South Africa and the rest of the African continent in enabling it to solve the challenges that confront the continent. This happened simultaneously with a US suspension of economic support for SANDF because of the South African refusal to sign an agreement with US government concerning the ICC. However, in reality this suspension was only of a cosmetic nature because US support has continued and has been redirected through financial support for anti-terror capacity funding, which has a higher priority for the US administration than the ICC. Conversation with Professor Gavin Cawthra of Wits University, August 2004.

continue its illegal actions against Palestine. Rules must apply for all and not just for some because it serves the interest of certain Western powers. (Zuma, Speech to UN General Assembly, 2012)

Dogmatism versus pragmatism – the Foreign Policy Principle of contemporary South Africa?

Because the world is a more dangerous place, the international community dare not relinquish its commitment to human rights. This appeal also has a special significance for South Africa. The anti-apartheid campaign was the most important human rights crusade of the post World War II era. Its success was a demonstration, in my opinion, of the oneness of our common humanity: in these troubled times, its passion should not be lost. Consequently, South Africa will not be indifferent to the rights of others. Human rights will be the light that guides our foreign affairs. Only true democracy can guarantee rights.⁴⁷

This speech was given by then President-to-be Nelson Mandela, two months prior to his inauguration. It underlined some of the basic ideals that the ANC leadership, especially during the Mandela era, prioritised as being central for South Africa. In a number of speeches and statements from that period, central ANC actors underlined the importance of issues like humanity, human rights and democracy. The Mandela administration's international relations were based on the idealistic and ambitious aims of multilateralism, co-operation and global governance based on human rights, both first and second generation, peaceful coexistent between states, economic equality and democratisation. With regard to the ANC's foreign relations, Mandela stated:

We have always embraced the cry for democracy across the world and South Africa will therefore be at the forefront of global efforts to promote and foster democratic systems of government. This is especially important in Africa, and our concerns will be fixed upon securing a spirit of tolerance and the ethos of government throughout the continent. There cannot be one system for Africa and another for the rest of the world. If there is a single lesson to be drawn from Africa's postcolonial history, it is that accountable government is good government.⁴⁸

The statement that there cannot be one system for Africa and another for the rest of the world is particularly interesting as it later had to be applied to the realities of the African context, namely that the ANC government had to implement a more pragmatic approach than it initially had planned for, illustrated by, for instance, its policies on Zimbabwe. The principles shaping South African foreign policy has been relatively consistent and in the foreign relations strategy paper of 2012, the central priorities in South Africa's foreign policy were outlined as follows:

⁴⁷ Mandela, Speech, 'The Future of South Africa', The Asian Age, 1 March 1994.

⁴⁸ Mandela, Speech, 'The Future of South Africa', The Asian Age, 1 March 1994.

otion of human rights;

- A commitment to the **promotion of democracy**;
- A commitment to **justice and international law** in the conduct of relations between nations;
- A commitment to **international peace and to internationally agreed upon** mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts;
- A commitment to promote **the African Agenda** in world affairs; and
- A commitment to economic development through regional and international co-operation in an **interdependent world**.

Even though the government's initial commitments turned out to be over-ambitious and it had to focus its attention on fewer foreign policy objectives, it has relentlessly sought to promote and adhere to these six basic principles. The ANC felt that, in the post-apartheid era, it had a unique chance to influence and set new standards for international relations, and to present and implement a new ideal, particularly regarding relations with its African neighbours. The Mandela government's ambitious formulation of its foreign policy, combined with international expectations of the newly democratised state, put a heavy burden on the ANC leadership to take on a regional leadership role in southern Africa and be instrumental in creating the much needed peace and stability. Thabo Mbeki recognised this when, in 1995, he stated:

There are also expectations from Africa that South Africa should make significant contributions towards peace and development on the continent. South Africa's problems cannot be worse than those experienced by other African countries. Despite our own limitations and problems, it is our objective to make a significant contribution to ensuring peace, democracy, respect for human rights and sustained development. These principles are fundamental to our foreign policy.⁴⁹

The idea was that South Africa's experience of its own conflict resolution and process of transition, together with the ending of the Cold War, should be used in creating a new and more just world order.⁵⁰ In any society, order is not just maintained by a sense of common interest in creating order or avoiding disorder, but by rules that spell out what kind of behaviour is to be considered orderly.⁵¹ The ANC leadership therefore had a normative ambition to change the existing order and create what it perceived as being a more just international order, a statement that has been repeated many times since then for instance in the Ubuntu paper. (DIRCO, 2011) It wished to break the negative cycle of global apartheid and deal with the negative consequences for the third world of the globalisation of the economic system. This idealistic and ambitious objective in relation to the new world order was outlined in the Foreign Relations discussion document, in which it was argued that:

⁴⁹ SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 7.

⁵⁰ According to Hedley Bull, order in international relations means: order is a pattern of behavior that sustains the elementary or primary goals of social life. Order in this sense is maintained by a sense of common interests in those elementary or primary goals; by rules which prescribe the pattern of behavior that sustains them; and by institutions which make these rules effective. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* p. 51.

⁵¹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society* p. 52.

is actively engaged in efforts to secure world-wide peace, promote disarmament, prevent genocide, restrict proliferation of nuclear and other arms of mass destruction and achieve a new world security regime.⁵²

This section of the discussion document underlines some of the central problems in the early days of the ANC government's foreign policy strategy. The naivety and romanticised self-image that followed the relatively peaceful transition in South Africa itself meant that, within ANC circles especially, there was a definite belief that the country had a duty to project and make its own experiences useful in the area of conflict resolution on both the regional and international scales. The South Africans thought and still think that they have some uniquely different experiences to contribute to the international community. The problem with this strategy is that the South African situation was unique, and the experience of this particular process cannot be transferred unproblematically to other types of conflicts as a conflict resolution strategy. Another problem faced by the ANC leadership was that its negotiating strategy was sometimes considered too harsh by the belligerent parties because the result of the peace negotiations often included an element of power-sharing and political reform, something which often runs counter to the interest of the old elites. Mbeki called his ambition an attempt to reach a *Pax Africana* while critics, for instance the late dictator of the DRC, Laurent Kabila, in anger called it a *Pax Pretoriana*.⁵³ Former Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad recognised the pressing dilemmas faced by the ANC when he stated at a Department of Foreign Affairs workshop at Randburg in 1996:

We start from the premise that South Africa is committed to human rights. The problem we face in this regard is the issue of possibilities and limitations on South Africa in the real world. How do we get human rights enforced and implemented in the international environment? There must be a possible [*sic*] contradiction between South-South co-operation and the values which we may want to protect. There has to be interaction between theory and practice.⁵⁴

In this statement, Pahad recognised that these ambitions, that is, the foreign policy of outreach, are limited by the realities of interstate relations in the international system. But more importantly, he also underlined the discrepancy between these idealistic aims and the very ambition for, for instance, African partnership. Consequently, there was a need for a long-term strategy in order to fulfil the government's ambitions. This also meant that short-term compromises and setbacks had to be accepted as an integral part of the greater objective, Zimbabwe being an extreme case in point. However, this could also be interpreted as being equivalent to an excuse to do nothing. Political pragmatism, that is, the politics of the possible, must be seen as a compromise on ideals in the attempt to reach the best possible result. Of course, there is a fine line between political pragmatism and political and economic opportunism serving narrow South African interest, and there are elements of both in

⁵² SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 14.

⁵³ Landberg also uses this term; see *The Quiet Diplomacy of Liberation*, pp. 159ff.

⁵⁴ Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad. September 1996. Quoted in Mills, *Leaning all over the place?* p. 1.

Although the Foreign Relations discussion document was only an early discussion paper and should be treated merely as a guideline to the Mandela administration's foreign policy strategy, many of the principles remains the same and can be found in the 2011 Ubuntu-paper. The objectives were also influenced by South Africa's ambition to become an accepted member of the international community after its many years of political exclusion. South Africa was constrained by the limitations that small and medium-sized states are faced with in international relations. The structural constraints, that is, the norms, rules, regulations etc., in relations between state actors in the international community mean that a state like South Africa only has limited political manoeuvrability, only being able to challenge the existing order to a limited degree because any deviation may cause (partial) exclusion from the international society. South Africa's formation of alliances among like-minded states, for instance the IBSA⁵⁵, G20,⁵⁶ G77 and the BRICS has to be understood within this analytical framework, as this type of regime creation enables South Africa and its partners to challenge the existing norms, rules and regulations of the international system more forcefully. The WTO negotiations in Cancun in 2003 were an excellent example of such a situation, as through joint efforts the G20 managed to destroy the negotiations by refusing to accept the EU/US draft proposals, something that to a certain extent was repeated in Copenhagen in December 2009 during the climate summit and later climate negotiation leading to the previously mentioned international paralysis. The South African strategy and stance should be seen through the lens of the statements above and as part of an attempt to create a new world order, where the sorrows and needs of poor and marginalised are taken seriously. Former Foreign Minister Zuma in 1999 argued that

We also need to challenge the rich countries and institutions of the world, and to say that it is unacceptable for one part of the world to be so rich and for the other to be dying of hunger. The three richest people in the world have more assets than the least developed countries (LLDC) combined. This is totally unacceptable morally. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone and enough money to take care of the basic needs of everybody. The question is how to redistribute that wealth in such a way that nobody goes hungry.⁵⁷

The early Zuma statement stresses the fact that South Africa in its post-apartheid foreign policy has been focused on address what it perceive to be an unjust international system. The focus on human rights and good governance are important, but must be put into and seen as part of the larger paradigm of deconstructing the existing international system based on power politics and inequality, and construct a

⁵⁵ The India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Forum was formally launched by Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Lula da Silva and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the margins of the 58th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 58) in New York in September 2003. Ideologically, this forum seems to have been inspired by Kothari's vision of a bloc of third world states countering the dominance of the industrialised world in the international system; see Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 296.

⁵⁶ The formation of the G20 in particular during the WTO negotiations in Cancun, with China, India, Brazil and South Africa in the lead, has the potential to alter significantly the bargaining position of the third world in international trade negotiations. In Cancun, it led to a collapse of the negotiations and was seen as a victory for the interests of the third world.

⁵⁷ Interview with Zuma, in *Global Dialog Vol. 4.3*, pp 11

1. To paraphrase from Mbeki above, power should be used to bring about good for all human kind, not to force through the will of the few. This is of central importance when trying to understand the overall strategy of South Africa in its foreign policy conduct. South Africa's foreign minister Nkoana-Mashabane recently confirmed this strategy and argued that one of the purposes of South African foreign policy is to help establish a multi-polar world order, dominated and directed by commonly agreed rules and regulations (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2013). Whether it is the most effective strategy is of course another matter in the sense that this approach creates opposition and frustration because it by nature produces a counter hegemonic idea and challenges the existing order. This struggle has been very visible in international forums where South Africa in alliance with the G77 states and especially its IBSA partners, has produced a strong and powerful negotiation platform challenging the OECD members.

When Idealism Meets the Real World

When Thabo Mbeki was inaugurated as President in June 1999, his government continued the dual foreign political strategy, that is, the double regional and international foreign policy roles. However, whereas discrepancies existed between actual policies and stated ambitions during the reign of Mandela and foreign minister Nzo, the Mbeki administration initiated a process focused on streamlining the stated political objectives, reducing political ambitions and making them attainable.⁵⁸ Then Foreign Minister Zuma stated in summer 2003 that the most important immediate foreign-policy objectives for South Africa were to secure a peace deal in the Great Lakes region and to promote South African business interests in Africa. This was later confirmed by President Mbeki.⁵⁹ Even though Mbeki had been playing an instrumental role as Vice-President in the Mandela government, the new government was very different in nature. The whole attitude of the government changed the previous self-image significantly, as illustrated in the following statement taken from the Foreign Relations document of July 1996:

South Africa should deal with African partners as equals and avoid all hegemonic ambitions. A narrow, short term approach aimed at promoting self-interest must be avoided.⁶⁰

This statement should be compared to the attitude from 2003, when the DFA sees South Africa as the more or less obvious choice for an African seat in a reformed security council by asking *who else?*⁶¹ This has since then been confirmed both in the Ubuntu-paper, and by the action of the Zuma government seeking the membership of the BRICS-grouping, and by seeking to increasingly taking up a role as the representative of African and the developing world interest in international institutions, as described above, even though it increasingly pitted South African against the dominant OECD countries. The apologetic attitude has been replaced by

⁵⁸ The author is here in line with for instance Laurie Nathan, which argues that South Africa's foreign policy today is entirely coherent. For further details see, Nathan, Consistency and inconsistencies in South African foreign policy.

⁵⁹ President Mbeki in Parliament, 23 June 2004.

⁶⁰ SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, pp. 14.

⁶¹ Interview in the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, 10 September 2003.

to South Africa's role in Africa, and the world in general. The symbolic value of this type of statement is significant. South Africa sees itself as being in a different and more powerful position than its African partners. Its participation in the BRICS and IBSA is important and stresses this dominant South African role, and the very fact that it has been accepted into these types of institutional arrangements are seen as both an acceptance of South Africa's international status and as a culmination of a successful foreign policy strategy. However, a number of other African states have similar ambitions and are thus contesting South Africa's position. Indeed, the limitations on South Africa's dominant role in Africa have also become very visible, as the government chose not to participate in the joint, Indian, Japanese, German and Brazilian initiative to secure a permanent seat in a reformed security council, despite pressure from these states to do so. South Africa fears that such a step would be perceived very negatively by its African partners and that it could undermine South Africa's chances of obtaining a permanent seat.⁶³ This underlines the limitations in South Africa's position in Africa because it cannot act alone without obtaining the approval of the other African states, something the Indian and Brazilian positions are not affected by. The debate concerning reform of the UNSC is instructive because several African states want to be awarded the permanent seat in the UNSC.⁶⁴ Therefore, the political crisis in Zimbabwe has become a delicate political issue for the ANC government, because it needs the full support of at least the SADC states to be able to convince the other AU members and the international community that it is a serious candidate for a permanent seat. This is also why it was important for South Africa that it succeeded in getting former Foreign Minister Ms. N. Zuma elected chairman of the AU, since this, apart from an ambition of reforming the AU faster than so far had been the case, was seen as an acceptance in Africa of South Africa's special role.

Leading by Example

First Mandela's decision to step down as president, and later Mbeki being replaced as part of a democratic process inside the ANC, showed the international community and South Africa's African partners that it was determined to follow democratic principles and leave the control of the state to junior ANC leaders.⁶⁵ This stood in stark contrast to what happened in South Africa's two neighbouring states, Zimbabwe and partly Namibia, where the two heroes of the liberation exemplified the claim that a revolutionary hero might not make a good peacetime leader. Therefore, Mandela's decision to step down was also a way of stating to the continent that no one has monopoly of political power, not even a political leader with the god-like status of Mandela. He thus also remained true to his statement in his 1994 speech that there cannot be one political system for Africa and one for the rest of the world. This transfer of power in South Africa was of great symbolic importance. However,

⁶² Interestingly enough this increased confidence coincided with increased focus on the ANC government lack of delivery domestically and increased corruption in government.

⁶³ I thank Professor Gavin Cawthra for this point.

⁶⁴ In April 2005 South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt and Kenya had all announced that they wanted to take up one of the two permanent seats if and when UNSC was reformed.

⁶⁵ However, the so-called Polokwane process also stressed some of the fault-lines that has evolved inside the ANC and in South African society in general, after the party being in power for nearly twenty years. Corruption and bad governance, misuse of state institutions are just some of the allegations that are putting question-marks on South Africa as the good example. The real test is still outstanding in the sense that the ANC has yet to be challenged by a credible political opposition, to test its willingness to relinquish power.

al internationalism distinguished foreign policy during the Mandela administration, the later administrations chose to make dealing with South African domestic concern for international niceties a priority.⁶⁶ The country's foreign policy has to serve South Africa's economic interests and national interest, that is, it has to create economic and social improvements for the marginalised sections of the South African society. This has resulted in the adoption of an apparently pragmatic, ad hoc, case-to-case strategy and in some peculiar political decisions by the Mbeki administration, such as the joint South African, Nigerian and Australian decision to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth after the presidential elections in 2002, while SADC heads of state, including Mbeki, were at the same time recognising and congratulating Mugabe on his victory. However, if South Africa had tried to impose a critical stand on SADC regarding Zimbabwe, it would have split the organisation. At the same time, a South African refusal to react on the basis of the critical election observers report would have inflicted severe damage on South Africa's international reputation at a time when Africa needed good international publicity before the launch of the AU in July 2002 and the G8 Summit in Kananaskis in June 2002, with its focus on Africa.

The Mbeki administration was subsequently criticised by its SADC partners for supporting the Commonwealth suspension and thus violating the mandate given to it by the SADC, thus damaging regional coherence. The ANC government therefore has problems in balancing its role of a link between states in the liberal zone and the African continent with its more regional interests. The problem for the Mbeki administration is that the two systems are increasingly on a collision course, because during the 1990s, as part of the new democratic normative discourse, the states of the liberal zone used different types of intervention to force through regime change. In the case of Zimbabwe, this has taken the form of economic sanctions, while in Sudan a war crimes tribunal was set up under the auspices of the ICC. South Africa has tried to function as a go-between in Zimbabwe and through its membership of the AU has exerted an influence over the negotiations in the Sudan as well. As previously described, the government has generally attempted to counter the increased tension between the two worlds by taking on the role of mediator, not only in Africa but also, for instance, in Iran, where it has used its good relations to facilitate dialogue. But the government has also come to realise that the international pressure on South Africa to play a constructive role in Africa is not limited to its possible diplomatic and political involvement but also focuses on firmer commitments like the deployment of military forces. One aspect of the marginalisation of Africa within the international system means that African continental and regional organisations must increasingly be willing to deploy troops to the PSOs in Africa, because the states in the liberal zone since the failed UN mission in Somalia have been more or less unwilling to make large force contributions to the PSO in Africa.⁶⁷ As described, military capacity and the willingness to use it are among the features that make a regional hegemonic power. The regional power is further expected to bear the cost of

⁶⁶ Niewkerk et al., in *Global Dialog*, Vol. 4.3, p. 3.

⁶⁷ For some peculiar reason does the decision makers and the people in the civil service in the NATO countries seem more reluctant to send troops to Africa than for instance Afghanistan. The author has made this observation on several occasions working in Danish Defence.

expensive and effective weapons, for example, of being able to provide specialised functions in a PSO.⁶⁸

The officially stated normative focus from the Nzu era on first-generation human rights and democratisation has to some extent been toned down during Mbeki's presidency and been replaced by a prioritisation of second-generation human rights issues such as social and economic welfare, sustainable development and poverty reduction.⁶⁹ Former Foreign Minister Zuma responded to issues concerning first-generation human rights with a very pragmatic approach:

If you define human rights in terms of how much freedom the media has in a specific country, these are issues that each country should deal with internally, in terms of its constitution. [ō] Each country still needs to make its own laws and its own people need to engage with those laws.⁷⁰

The Zuma administration has succeeded seeing this strategy through and for instance by getting the parties in Zimbabwe to form a government of national and create consensus around a new constitution. It shows that the ANC government is not going to engage in short-term political confrontation with other SADC members over this type of issue, it is a long term reform ambition that South Africa is trying to introduce slowly. The most important short term priority of the ANC government is political stability, not the type of rule in other states. Consequently, although South Africa's policy towards its regional partners has been focused on reform and the introduction of new norms, it has taken a pragmatic approach in pursuing these ends. In Africa, the normative changes directing interstate relations in the liberal zone still largely have to take place, despite their introduction in, for instance, the AU charter, and military power is still an important parameter in the effort to identify structures of power between the actors in this region, both as an actual means of coercion, but also as a bargaining chip in interstate relations. It could even be argued that, because the international norms set down by the dominant powers have yet to stamp their mark on Africa, and because of the country's location in what Holsti defines as a war zone, that is, an area of conflict and instability, South Africa must relate to and act in accordance with the existing norms regarding its partners on the continent. These norms do not work well among the members of the liberal zone, and South Africa is caught between the two sets of norms and expectations. It is therefore trying to change the idea from within African regimes, that is, SADC and the AU/New Plan for Africa's Development (NEPAD)⁷¹, because the lack of concurrence between the two value systems is blocking increased trade relations between the two worlds. For example, attempts to attract foreign direct investment are being hampered by insecurity, poor governance and inadequate judicial systems.

⁶⁸ Schwarzenberger, *Hegemonial Intervention*, p. 253. For further details about this topic, see Chapter 7.

⁶⁹ See the previously listed priorities of the ANC government.

⁷⁰ Interview with Zuma, in *Global Dialog*, Vol. 4.3, p. 10.

⁷¹ When NEPAD was endorsed at the July 2002 Durban Summit, its objectives were stated as being primarily of a long-term nature: to eradicate poverty in Africa and place the African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and thus halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process. See Reynhardt, *Regional Co-operation in Disaster Prevention and Management*, p. 2.

eracts with its African partners by applying a pragmatic approach, trying to facilitate the resolution of conflicts and disputes, etc. The longer-term strategy seems to be tied to a reform strategy in which the democratic framework included in the treaties of, for instance, both the SADC and the AU will over time result in democratic reform on the continent. The situation in Africa concerning liberal political freedoms and rights seems to be moving in the right direction and is now better than at the end of the Cold War, despite the problematic cases like for instance the CAR, DR. Congo and Mali. South Africa will continue to lead by example by showing the other African countries that a focus on democratic reform and political and corporate governance will create the necessary foundations for economic and social development. As Mandela's 1994 speech shows, this has been the ANC's political strategy all along. The advantage of this model is that South Africa is using benevolent means in its attempt to achieve its objectives and it can therefore not be accused of trying to impose democratisation upon its African partners. The government's approach seems to be that South Africa wants to set an example for others to follow and that the best way to influence others is through dialogue, not political condemnation. A significant change has happened in the foreign policy of the ANC since the days of the criticisms of the Nigerian military dictator, Sani Abacha. The pragmatic approach to the country's regional partners is now very evident. The old Teddy Roosevelt policy of 'speak softly, but carry a big stick' combined with a carrot is an appropriate way of describing the South African strategy, though since 1994 its stick has only partly been of a military nature, as seen in the badly executed military intervention in Lesotho in 1998, for it also comes in the form of an economic carrot. The ANC government has managed to transform South Africa from a pariah state to a mostly benign regional great power. It has done this through the transition, creating domestic legitimacy. Internationally, it has sought to comply with the normative rules and legislation framing the international community. It has purposely strived for multilateral solutions and as far as possible abstained from taking unilateral action. It has launched a co-operative diplomatic strategy in its reform drive in Africa and not tried to impose proposals for reform.

However, it remains a part of the African continent and is forced to deal with this geographical reality. The consequences of distancing itself from the other states on the continent could be devastating for South Africa's ambitions because South Africa, as opposed to the OECD states, for example, depends on its trade and cultural relations with the continent. Moreover, South Africa needs the other regional actors to accept its benign role, and therefore it also bears the responsibility of protecting the regime from outside threats. This does not always suit the interests or positions of the dominant international powers. As chair of the Non-aligned Movement⁷² from 1998 to 2003, South Africa pushed for a confrontation with the so-called 'first-world' states on issues such as a more equal distribution of resources and a reform of trade regulations.⁷³ Consequently, the government has to be extremely cautious in its

⁷² 'South Africa has a leadership role to play in SADC and in the NAM, and a clear vision as well as a set of objectives for that role should be developed'; SA Foreign Relations Discussion Document, p. 19 The current Non-Aligned Movement has 117 member states, and it has focused its attention primarily on developmental problems, and on problems between the North and the South. During the South African chairmanship, the emphasis on South-South co-operation increased.

⁷³ Mbeki's address as Chairperson of the NAM at the Opening of the South Summit, Havana, 12th April 2000, pp. 1f.

On several occasions, former Foreign Minister Zuma stressed that, for South Africa, we need to be careful not to patronise other countries about human rights.⁷⁴ A dogmatic and superimposed democratic reform process would eventually backfire and risk turning a number of African leaders against South Africa. Slow reform, regional integration and co-operation were, and still are, the way forward according to the ANC. This was a strategy that the donor states, increasingly pessimistic about Africa, found difficult to accept because they needed positive results to justify continuing development aid to their domestic constituencies. According to this discourse, democratisation had to be initiated quickly. The debate concerning the voluntary Peer Review Mechanism in the NEPAD programme between the major donors and the African states headed by South Africa is one illustration of this potential conflict.⁷⁵ Adherence to the principles of critical dialogue combined with a pragmatic approach to democratisation is based on the principles of all-inclusiveness. The ANC government believes that, to be able to solve a conflict, direct dialogue with all actors is necessary. The former head of the SADC office in the DFA, Horst Bremmer, stated that South Africa would even talk to the devil if we believed that it would help.⁷⁶ The ANC government believes that, by excluding one or more actors in a conflict from negotiations, they will damage the prospects for a positive result. The South African rejection of the implementation of sanctions against the Former Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 has to be understood in this context. The decision of the SADC summit in Mauritius in the autumn of 1998 condemning the late leader of UNITA, Jonas Savimbi, is another example. At an internal DFA conference in January 1999, it was subsequently concluded that: "The department has regretted the Savimbi resolution in particular, as it believes isolating the UNITA leader politically helped to provoke the full-scale military assault he is currently engaged in."⁷⁷

Concluding remarks: BRICS as tool in fulfilling the Renaissance Ambition?

Our foreign policy, therefore, is not only anchored in our domestic policy, but on this very fact and responsibility that South Africa offers hope for all humanity. Thus, we cannot only strive for a better life for South Africans, but we have to contribute to the ongoing struggle for a better world. That is what gives us a degree of moral authority in the world.⁷⁸

Can a giant be gentle? This question was often posed at the end of the 1990s in relation to South Africa's foreign policy. It could be gentle, but it was still a giant. It became increasingly apparent to the South African administration that the country had a different role to play in Africa than its smaller partner countries. Until 1994, due to international sanctions and boycotts, South Africa had been excluded from the

⁷⁴ Interview with Zuma, in *Global Dialog*, Vol. 4.3, p. 10.

⁷⁵ For further details about the nature of the African Peer Review Mechanism, see, for instance, Cilliers, NEPADs Peer Review Mechanisms, and Kanbur, *The African peer review mechanism (APRM): an assessment of concept and design*.

⁷⁶ Interview with Horst Bremmer in the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, 16 February 2000.

⁷⁷ *The Sunday Independent*, 24th of January 1999, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Statement by Foreign Minister Zuma to Parliament, 8 May 2001.

South Africa, both in real terms in relation to membership of regional organisations, and on a more cultural level, where the apartheid state was considered to be a European anachronism among the post-colonial African community of states. It therefore launched its dual foreign policy strategy in 1994, trying to be a partner on equal terms with the other African states while at the same time trying to fulfil the international expectations of being a dominant state among its African partners. This created an immanent conflict: how was it possible to ensure that the regional giant, South Africa, was not going to act in a dominant way when its policies are apparently to promote, for instance, democracy, development and human rights? Deputy Foreign Minister Pahad recognised this dilemma in the above quotation, because political reforms will by nature be a threat to autocratic political leaders. The relative size and capacity of South Africa also makes it a giant, compared especially with its SADC partners.⁷⁹ Today, South Africa has taken on the responsibilities of a regional powerhouse, functioning, for instance, as peace mediator in Burundi, Sudan, Zimbabwe and the DRC, and was a leading force in the establishment of NEPAD and the AU, and has played a dominant role in the reform process in SADC. This is a paradigm change from its foreign policy prior to 1994, both the detente policies of the Vorster government in the 1970s and the subsequent Botha administration. However, as predicted by the theory of hegemonic stability, the ANC government has come to realise that its foreign policy drive must be propped up by a firm commitment in terms of resources, both financial and military in the form of, for instance, deploying peacekeepers. Operation Boleas, the pre-emptive, South African-led military intervention in Lesotho in September 1998, can be seen as South Africa's answer to the challenge to the country presented by Zimbabwe, that is, to what has been perceived internationally as a South African natural regional leadership role and the hegemonic idea of a Pax Pretoriana. As of 1994, the use of the military tool in its international relations and the intervention itself was made difficult by an inconsistent foreign policy. Until then, the role of the armed forces in South African foreign policy had been undecided, partially because the armed forces were seen as the very symbol of the former apartheid state. The ANC government found it difficult to decide what role this institution should have in the new society. On the one hand, South Africa needed to show the international community that it was trying to promote a renaissance in Africa that included democracy and human rights. On the other hand, in its relations with its African partners, it needed to change the negative image left by the apartheid regime and to show that it was part of Africa and not a European anachronism. A failure to impress the international community would have had severe consequences for the prospect for international foreign direct investment reaching South Africa and Africa. However, if South Africa was perceived by its African partners as being an agent of the West it would lose its influence in the region.

In 1996 then Vice-President Thabo Mbeki launched his renaissance⁸⁰ campaign, which was an attempt to turn around the negative trend in Sub-Saharan Africa in the

⁷⁹ South Africa's GDP, for instance, is approximately twice the size of the combined GDPs of the other 13 other SADC member states. Alden and Soko, *South Africa's Economic Relations with Africa*, p. 13.

⁸⁰ A South African historian quite interestingly pointed out that the word renaissance was an interesting one to choose because the word itself refers to a process of going back to a better and more prosperous period. Looking at African history and the contemporary integration process, it is difficult to see where Africa should pick up from. However, according to Basil Davidson's *Black Man's Burden* the Ashanti kingdom was on the verge of creating

at Lakes region and in Somalia. South Africa's ambitions for a renaissance were seen as a way for SSA to start taking responsibility for and adopting ownership of the development process on the continent. Renaissance ambition was also seen as an example of South Africa taking its shared leadership role in Africa seriously.⁸¹ However, this ambition proved more difficult to implement than might have been expected. Due primarily to its history, the other African countries viewed South Africa with a combination of suspicion and mistrust in relation to her intentions. However, this ambition was more complicated to implement than what might have been expected. The country's regional partners did not unconditionally accept South African leadership, and her role in Africa therefore remained undefined and unsettled during the Mandela era. The period from 1994 until today has been characterised by a South African ambition to create a leadership role for itself in Africa by *deserving* this role. According to Lodge, the notion of an African renaissance must be understood as reflecting both the market-driven ambition of attaching Africa to the international system and the aim of breaking the circle of marginalisation, hence, for instance, Mbeki's consistent referral to globalisation as not a threat to Africa but a challenge. The other aspect of the renaissance idea is the focus on the notion of *Ubuntu* a commitment that was confirmed by the publication of the Ubuntu-foreign policy strategy paper in 2011.

As shown in various statements above, the international community has special expectations of South Africa, while its African partners are to a large extent looking to South Africa for leadership concerning the integration process in NEPAD and the AU and the mediation process in certain conflict areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Comoros.⁸² This shows that regional great powers like South Africa may have special rights and duties in their relations with other states, but also normative responsibilities. The South African drive for an African renaissance and its mediating role are just some examples. The debate concerning South African participation in the Liberia mission is illustrative because it shows that if South Africa wants to be accepted as a dominant power, it must satisfy the expectations of the other African states to take part in peace missions on the continent. This is one aspect of being a regional power. Political actions must be followed up by further involvement, such as the deployment of troops. The South African military command and leadership was and still are aware of this, one indication of which is General Nyanda's statement in the *Mail & Guardian* in 2003 that the African renaissance must be supported by military muscle.⁸³ The Zuma government has increased the pressure on the SANDF to play a significant role in propping up governments foreign policy initiative, forcing it to deploy in the maritime domain with a frigate in the Mozambican Channel, and by deploying troops both in international operations such as the support of the Central African Republic government and in UN missions, while

a Japanese-style state at the time of the initial slave trade, which would have been a breakthrough.

⁸¹ It must be recognised that other economic recovery plans than the South African one were in play and that the initial decision to launch the NEPAD programme was a result of a merger between the South African idea of a renaissance, the Nigerian/Algerian Millennium plan, and the Senegalese OMEGA plan. South Africa, together with these other central actors, played a pivotal role in fostering the reform of the AU and the NEPAD.

⁸² This has, for instance, become evident through the AU requests to South Africa to lead mediation attempts in the DRC, Burundi, Madagascar and Ivory Coast, and by placing the new AU parliament in South Africa, to mention just a few examples.

⁸³ Nyanda, in Cornish, *Mail & Guardian* online, 19th August 2003.

domestically in support of the police. All these activities are done on a tight budget, maybe to tight which the tragic incidents in CAR that resulted in the death of 13 South African soldiers indicate? This also points to the limitation of South African great power potential, since it failed to successfully sustain and execute this military operation, which was of a relatively limited scale.

Nevertheless, in South Africa itself there has been reluctance to be seen as a hegemon or even a regional dominant state. The Mandela-government stated that it wanted to be a partner to its African neighbours, not a hegemon to the extent that some African states⁸⁴ were asking for in calling for South African leadership. However, during the Mbeki presidency, the perception of South Africa's role in Africa has changed dramatically. It is now generally perceived that South Africa is trying to introduce new norms of human rights and democracy to its African partners through what was called an open door-closed door strategy in DIRCO, that is, introducing new democratic principles into treaties for regional co-operation and removing old bad habits⁸⁵. This is also why both the South African and the international press have been so critical of the ANC government's strategy towards Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, because at first glance it runs against the very principles that the government claims to adhere to. In contemporary Africa, it can be argued that South Africa is slowly realising its regional great power potential. It is transforming existing African regimes around a set of hegemonic ideas, such as NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism, the AU, and its Peace and Security Council (PSC), with the right to intervention, the new set of SADC election codes of conduct, and the AU's general refusal to accept non-constitutional takeovers of government.⁸⁶ This is one of the tasks that a regional great power in a liberal system will be expected to undertake, in addition to securing, and providing the framework structures enabling free and fair trade and a stable currency.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Botswana has on several occasions asked for a more dominant South African profile.

⁸⁵ Interview in the DFA (DIRCO), 9th September 2003.

⁸⁶ South Africa is not transforming African institutions by itself, but it is playing an instrumental role in this process together with other like-minded regional powers such as Nigeria, Egypt, Senegal and Algeria.

⁸⁷ Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, p. 75.

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