

Africa's pre-eminent peacemaker? An appraisal of South Africa's peacemaking role in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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■ Executive summary

This report reflects on the role of South Africa (SA) as peacemaker on the African continent from 1996 until 2013, focusing in particular on its role in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). SA's efforts in the realm of peace and security in Africa are scrutinised through a case study of its engagement in the DRC from 1996 to 2013. The report shows that SA has played and still plays an important role in conflict resolution and peacemaking on the African continent. SA is not acting on its own; it is supported by and operating within the parameters of the South African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU). Many of SA's peacemaking efforts, for instance in relation to the DRC, are also undertaken under the auspices of the UN. The country's status as an emerging power, its relatively strong economy, its technology and know-how, its past experience of a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy, and the respect and high esteem in which SA is held by other African countries are all characteristics that equip SA to play the role of a continental peacemaker.

Introduction

Unlike the apartheid regime, SA's new and democratically elected government affirms the close links and mutual responsibilities between SA and other African countries:

"The ending of apartheid was a joyous moment in the history of our continent. Africa sacrificed much during the course of our struggle. Our people – refugees and the liberation movement – were offered food, shelter and facilities to enhance the common endeavour to put an end to racist tyranny and oppression. With fellow Africans we share a vision to transform our continent into an entity that is free, peaceful and vibrant" (African National Congress (ANC), 1994).

SA's own experience, both during the anti-apartheid struggle and during the peaceful resolution of intractable conflicts, is exactly what compels the country to engage in peace missions to alleviate the plight of other peoples who are trapped in similar conflicts (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1998). SA's consolidation of peace and democracy – the South African peace model – is marked by a firm belief in non-violent conflict resolution with dialogue and the inclusion of all belligerent factions as main pillars. The intention is to get everyone to compromise and reach

consensus on inclusive transitional political arrangements as part of a peace agreement. The proposed agreement usually consists of: a broad-based national unity government involving the warring parties; confidence-building measures and the reform of security forces; provisions to address justice issues; and a timetable for the drafting of a new permanent constitution and the holding of democratic elections (Curtis, 2007: 257). SA has, over the years, used this model in peace mediation in countries such as Burundi, the DRC, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire.

This report examines SA's agency and credentials as peacemaker in Africa through a case study of the country's involvement in attempts to resolve the conflict in the DRC. Not only does the DRC peace process represent one of SA's longest international engagements to secure peace (from 1996 to the present), the DRC case is also interesting because all three of the country's post-apartheid presidents have been involved in efforts to secure peace in the Great Lakes region generally and in the DRC specifically. The DRC case, therefore, represents one of the most important cases for gauging the breadth and depth of the country's commitment towards playing the role of Africa's peacemaker.¹

¹ The case study included field research in both SA and the DRC, using semi-structured interviews with 13 key informants to gain greater insight into and understanding of SA's role as peacemaker in the DRC.

South Africa's Role as peacemaker in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In an address to the Congolese parliament on October 29th 2013, President Zuma (2013) emphasised the loyalty and close relationship between SA and the DRC, dating back to the time of the apartheid regime and the ANC's liberation struggle. The Congolese, as shown here through the words of a key informant, feel the same mutual solidarity: "The political changes that took place in South Africa in 1994 were a victory also for us. Now it is we who are in trouble, and it is South Africa's turn to help us." However, this picture of unproblematic and deep relations between the two countries is a simplification of a much more nuanced reality.

The First Congo War

SA's intervention in the crisis in Zaire (as the DRC was then called) was its first major diplomatic initiative on the continent. President Nelson Mandela entered the peace negotiation scene in the DRC during the First Congo War (1996–1997), in which Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his rebel group Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) sought to overthrow President Sese Seko Mubutu. Before the ADFL took power in Congo, there was a strong intervention of SA through Mandela, who initiated talks between Mubutu and Kabila. The aim was to persuade Mubutu to quietly leave Kinshasa to avoid further bloodshed "while pushing Kabila to come to terms with other elements of the Zairian opposition" (Landsberg, 2002: 172). The talks were to take place in May 1997 on a South African navy supply vessel (*Outeniqua*) at Pointe-Noire in Congo-Brazzaville. To the consternation of stakeholders involved, Kabila refused the invitation and did not turn up for the scheduled meeting. A diplomatic source stated at the time that it was "'not too smart' for the Zairian guerrilla chief to offend powerful countries, such as the United States and South Africa, that he will likely have to work with in the future if he does take power" (*Los Angeles Times*, 1997), and indeed the SA–DRC relationship remained distrustful and weak as long as Laurent Kabila was in power.

The Second Congo War

In the rebellion against Mubutu, Kabila and the ADFL were strongly backed by Rwanda and Uganda. However, after about a year in power Kabila turned his back on his supporters in the east, and ordered Rwandan and Ugandan troops to leave Congolese territory. This infuriated his former allies and led to yet another war (the Second Congo War, 1998–2003), starting less than a year after the first war had ended. Because of the conflicts with its eastern neighbours, the DRC turned to southern Africa and became, in 1997, a member of the SADC. When the war broke out in 1998, the SADC countries were summoned to discuss whether what was taking place was a war of aggression, whereby Congo had been invaded by Rwandan

and Ugandan troops, or whether it was an internal conflict with ethnic undertones, the problem being the integration of the Banyamulenge, the Congolese Tutsis. According to a key informant, a SADC report based on an investigation in Kisangani and Goma was presented at the meeting, but, despite the report's conclusion that Congo had indeed been invaded by Rwandan and Ugandan troops, SA claimed that the conflict was an internal problem. This view was backed by important Western powers such as the USA and the United Kingdom (key informant).

While SA sought to intervene diplomatically rather than militarily, several other SADC countries saw military force as necessary to settle the conflict. Unable to reach consensus, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola decided to deploy troops to strengthen the defence of Kabila's regime. Following SA's reluctance to support the DRC against what they saw as their aggressors, its impartiality, and hence also its capability of being a peace moderator, was strongly questioned by Kabila and his allies. Between 1998 and 2000, SA was accused of siding with the anti-government rebels (Mangu, 2003; Curtis, 2007). Not only did SA refuse to send military troops, they were also selling arms to Rwanda and Uganda. As emphasised by Human Rights Watch (2000), "these arms sales run counter to South Africa's policy", whereby it committed to refrain from selling arms to countries involved in armed conflicts. Moreover, while it strongly defended a non-violent approach to the conflict in the DRC, SA opted for a military approach to its own conflict with neighbouring Lesotho. This was necessarily interpreted as a double standard by the pro-Kabila camp and raised serious questions about SA's credibility. One key informant notes that at this time there was almost a total breaking off of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Later, Mandela and the South African government halted arm sales to Rwanda, Uganda and any other country involved in the DRC conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2000). Whether this was an effort to win Kabila's confidence or simply to adhere to their own arms trade regulation can only be speculated upon.

When Thabo Mbeki became president in 1999, he acknowledged "that South Africa's policy toward the DRC was in need of a major overhaul" (Landsberg, 2002: 177). Mbeki pushed for a peace plan, urging all foreign forces to withdraw from the DRC (and thus recognising that the war was one of aggression) and deciding to contribute South African troops to the UN peacekeeping forces in the DRC. The argument was that "South Africa cannot be seen to be making peace while showing a disinclination to keep the very peace that it so eagerly brokers" (Landsberg, 2002: 178).

This period of the Congolese conflict saw increased involvement of and stronger pressure from international and regional bodies (Weiss, 2000). Although SA strongly supported the process, it was particularly through the efforts of the SADC, the AU and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the UN that the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement saw the light of day in July

1999. This agreement was the initial step towards the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) and eventually the elections in 2006.

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue

Like previous peace agreements, the Lusaka Agreement was repeatedly violated. Moreover, apart from the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to monitor the ceasefire, the rest of the agreement was implemented at a snail's pace. For instance, the ICD, an important component of the agreement, did not begin until 2002, about two years after the agreement was signed (Curtis, 2007). The main reason for this delay appears to have been Laurent Kabila's obstructionism (Rogier, 2004: 27–28) and his refusal to hold talks with the rebels (key informant). However, critics of the Lusaka Agreement claim that the main reasons for its slow implementation were its complexity and the fact that it was basically imposed on belligerents and signatories by external actors (Weiss, 2000).

Progress was made only when Laurent Kabila's son, Joseph Kabila, came into power after his father was assassinated in his office in Kinshasa on January 16th 2001. Joseph Kabila realised that Congo would gain little if it were seen as the main obstacle to peace and he agreed to take part in the ICD. After unsuccessful preliminary sessions in 2001, first in Gaborone and then in Addis Ababa, a new attempt to get the dialogue started was made at the Sun City resort near Pretoria from February 25th to April 19th 2002. During this period, SA's involvement and commitment increased (Curtis, 2007: 264). SA was not only hosting the ICD, but also investing money and human resources in the process. With such investment, success became crucial. In a way, the ICD was the ultimate test of SA's role as peacemaker on the continent, and the feeling was that its reputation as peacemaker depended on a successful resolution to the Congo crisis (Rogier, 2004).

However, success was not easily achieved. The complexity of the conflict and the multitude of belligerents (360 delegates) combined with the 'soft' and minimalistic approach of the ICD facilitator, former president of Botswana Ketumile Masire, made progress very difficult. At a crucial moment when the talks were seriously struggling, President Mbeki managed to redirect and push forward the process. Mbeki presented two power-sharing plans, "Mbeki I" and "Mbeki II". The first was rejected by the rebel group Rally for Congolese Democracy – Goma (RCD-Goma) and the Congolese party of Étienne Tshisekedi (Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS)) as too pro-Kabila and the second was rejected by Kabila as too pro-RCD-Goma. Kabila then entered single-handedly into an agreement with Jean-Pierre Bemba and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) and left the negotiation table (Mangu, 2003).

The failure of Mbeki's initiative diminished to some extent SA's chances of playing a prominent role in the later dialogues, the Sun City II talks, but still SA remained highly committed to the process. "This time the South African

government made the most of its privileged relationship with Kigali to try to convince the RCD-Goma and its sponsors to reach a deal" (Rogier, 2004: 33). The Mbeki plans were amended and a new version was presented to and accepted by the Congolese parties. Based on this, the ICD resumed in October 2002, this time with Moustapha Niasse, a Senegalese politician appointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to be his special envoy to the DRC, as mediator. Eventually, in December 2002, an all-inclusive agreement, the so-called Sun City Agreement, was reached in Pretoria. Later, in 2003, the agreement and a transitional constitution were signed. However, as emphasised by one of the key informants, although the ICD included a broad range of stakeholders, the Mai-Mai groups (Congolese national defence groups) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) were more or less ignored during the process and in the final peace agreement.

SA continued to play an important role in the International Committee in Support of the Transition (*Comité International d'Accompagnement de la Transition*), particularly through the involvement of President Mbeki, who is described by Kabemba (2007: 537) as being "omnipresent throughout the transition, jetting into the DRC every time peace [was] threatened and taking part in all the important events".

The 2006 and 2011 elections

In addition to SA's role in facilitating the progress of the Sun City Agreement, two other important developments happened before Congo's first democratic election took place in 2006. First, the South African National Defence Force, having contributed a limited number of troops in previous years, scaled up its military contribution to MONUC/MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo) in 2003. Second, in 2004 SA and the DRC signed a General Cooperation Agreement in which the bilateral relations between the two countries were formalised through the Bi-National Commission.

Having contributed much to the whole process of reaching and implementing the peace agreement, SA had high expectations of getting something in return after Kabila was elected in 2006 (SAFPI, 2012). However, "instead of doing business with South Africa, who had helped us to find peace, Joseph Kabila turned to China" (key informant). It may seem as if "South Africa quickly withdrew" (key informant) from the Congolese scene. Whether its apparent withdrawal was linked to the DRC's move towards China or simply a planned retreat or scaling down after fulfilling its peacemaking role is difficult to say. Nevertheless, in the years following the 2006 elections the relationship between the DRC and SA appeared "more unclear and distant" (key informant). Although still contributing troops to MONUC/MONUSCO's peacekeeping force, SA's role as peacemaker was not so visible in these years. For instance, SA was not involved when the peace deal between the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) and the Congolese government was brokered in 2009.

However, when yet another election year approached, Congo again looked to SA for help. The West, which had contributed 80% of the cost of the 2006 election, showed more reluctance in 2011 and ended up halving its contribution. President Zuma, having been elected in 2009, and the South African government allocated ZAR 126 million (about \$15 million) to assist with the cost of holding the elections, mainly contributing to the printing of ballot papers and their transportation by air to different voting locations. SA's contribution is generally viewed as critical: "If South Africa had not intervened, the elections would not have taken place" (key informant). Although the contribution is seen by most Congolese key informants as one African brother helping another, it should be noted that around the time of the elections a number of bilateral contracts were signed between the two countries. For instance, in June 2010 the Lake Albert Oil Blocks 1 and 2 were allocated to CapriCat and Foxwell, two companies linked to President Zuma's nephew, Khulubuse Zuma (Moneyweb, 2010). In addition, right after the 2011 elections important deals were signed, most notably a memorandum of understanding on the Inga dam project (African Business, 2012). Because of such contracts, "many people were raising concerns that if the elections went wrong, South Africa would not be harsh on the sitting President" (key informant). Later, when Tshisekedi and his supporters claimed that the election had been fraudulent, even claiming that SA had participated in rigging the vote, SA stood, as expected, by Kabila's side, recognising him as the democratically re-elected president of the DRC (Daily Maverick, 2011).

SA's contribution to the elections, as well as its loyalty to Kabila, deepened the relationship between the two countries. The amelioration of the SA–DRC relationship can also be seen in relation to the deterioration of the SA–Rwanda relationship, which occurred mainly because SA, in 2010, granted asylum to Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, former chief of staff of the Rwandan army and former head of Rwandan intelligence. Later the same year, there was an attempted assassination of Nyamwasa, for which Kigali, allegedly, was responsible (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010). Apparently, this brought Zuma yet closer to the Kinshasa camp.

The M23 rebellion

After years of internal conflicts and disgruntled soldiers in the Congolese national army (FARDC), the 2009 integration of the CNDP eventually collapsed in April 2012 with a mutiny and the creation of the rebel group M23. In the fighting that followed, M23 expanded its territory and in November 2012, to the humiliation of MONUSCO and FARDC troops, it seized control of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu. A UN Group of Experts report of November 15th 2012 eventually confirmed a long-lasting suspicion that Rwanda and Uganda were supporting M23. These accusations have been repeated in successive reports (UN Group of Experts, 2013; Reuters, 2013).

Two conflict resolution processes, unconnected but nonetheless related to each other, were then taking place.

One was the Kampala peace talks between M23 and the Congolese government and the other was the peace negotiation in Addis Ababa, involving a much larger set of stakeholders. The Kampala talks were mediated by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, in his role as chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). After stalling time and time again, the talks finally broke down in October 2013. The Addis Ababa negotiation was more successful, leading to the signing of the most recent Congolese peace agreement, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (February 24th 2013). The agreement was to be signed on January 28th, but the event was cancelled at the very last minute. The need to discuss further some procedural issues was the official reason, but exactly what caused the postponement is not clear. A disagreement on the definition of 'the Great Lakes region' is one issue that has been mentioned (*The East African*, 2013). Some suspected Rwanda and Uganda of stalling the process (Agence France-Presse, 2013), while one key informant claims that it was SA that had walked out, "furious because they thought the UN had presented them with a text they actually hadn't contributed to" (key informant). Whether this is true or false remains unclear. What is certain, however, is that the Addis Ababa agreement is largely a UN-drafted framework.

Several key informants expressed the view that SA's involvement in the Addis Ababa negotiations was crucial for the DRC, particularly as Kabila is not seen as having the necessary political weight to deal on an equal footing with presidents such as Museveni and Kagame. In that sense, "South Africa brought in the political support that Kabila needs by creating more of a balance within the parties to the negotiation but also by standing in the way of the bullying that could have taken place from the Rwandan side" (key informant). Eleven African countries signed the agreement – the DRC, Angola, the Republic of Congo, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, the Central African Republic, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Zambia – and four international and regional entities – the UN, the AU, the ICGLR and the SADC – signed as guarantors. This was the first time the SA had been a signatory to a peace agreement on Congo. As a signatory, as a member of the technical subcommittee which is drafting the details of how to implement and monitor the Addis Ababa agreement and because it has a relatively strong position in the AU and the SADC, SA is currently deeply engaged in the implementation of the peace agreement. The tripartite mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between SA, Angola and the DRC, initiated just a few weeks after the signing of the agreement, further indicates the three countries' commitment to honouring their responsibilities to resolve the conflict in Congo.

To some extent departing from SA's own peace model based on a non-violent conflict resolution approach, in 2013 the Zuma administration advocated a brigade that would *enforce* peace through the neutralisation of armed groups operating in the DRC. Although the idea of the

brigade originated from the ICGLR, which was seen as too closely involved in the conflict, it was picked up by the SADC and the AU and later brought to the UN Security Council. Not only did “SA play a very important role in arriving at the UN Security Council resolution 2098” (key informant), the resolution which authorises the UN’s “first-ever ‘offensive’ combat force” (UN Security Council, 2013), but South African soldiers are also “the backbone” of the intervention brigade, with SA providing 1,345 of the 3,069 troops (*Mail & Guardian*, 2013) and the rest being deployed by two other SADC countries, Tanzania and Malawi.

It is worth noting that SA has also recently shown support for Kabila in its own territory. In February 2013, 19 Congolese men and their leader were arrested in Limpopo, accused of planning a *coup d’état* in the DRC. This may be seen as Kabila playing a clever game to consolidate his power and test South African loyalty, or as the Zuma administration running errands for Kabila in order to secure its good relationship with Kinshasa. It may also have to do with SA putting pressure on the DRC by emphasising the potential power of the huge Congolese diaspora in SA, a diaspora which is largely anti-Kabila and furious after the 2011 election; SA may be saying, “Look, we can either stop them or let them use our territory to plan seizing power in Congo” (key informant).

When fighting resumed in North Kivu after the breakdown of the Kampala talks in October 2013, the UN intervention brigade was central in assisting FARDC’s victory over M23. At the same time as South African soldiers helped achieve a rare victory in the east, President Zuma was visiting Kinshasa, bringing with him a delegation of ministers and businesspeople. During his visit, which could not have been timed better, Zuma and Kabila signed a crucial treaty on the Grand Inga Hydropower Project (Grand Inga 3), the world’s largest hydropower dam. Inga will not only resolve SA’s energy crisis but has the capacity to power almost half of the continent, and therefore also presents enormous investment opportunities for South African companies (*Mail & Guardian*, 2013).

In a recent interview, Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane stressed the importance of the DRC and the Great Lakes region to SA’s foreign policy and economic development prospects, emphasising that if “Africa were a body, the real heartbeat at the centre of that body would be the Great Lakes. The region is endowed with minerals, has fertile land for agricultural purposes and holds immense potential to set Africa on a higher trajectory” (Mataboge, 2013).

To sum up, since the beginning of post-apartheid SA, the country has remained engaged and committed to peace in the DRC and the Great Lakes region. The years of the ICD and the period of the transitional government that followed it are perceived as the period when SA played its most prominent role in the DRC’s peace process, but its present role is also of major importance. This is the case not only

owing to SA’s direct contributions but also because the current relationship between the two heads of state involves more trust and common interests than in the 1990s and early 2000s. Distrustfulness of other actors may also have an impact on SA’s role. As noted by one key informant: “At this particular moment SA appears to be the only country with some kind of influence on the regime in Kinshasa and this is quite important because all avenues appear closed for other key actors, let it be the EU or the US or anyone. None of those actors have any influence on Joseph Kabila any more.”

Conclusions: Africa’s pre-eminent peacemaker?

This report shows that SA has played and still plays an important role within conflict resolution and peacemaking on the African continent, not least in conflicts such as that in the DRC. However, SA is not acting on its own; it is supported by and operating within the parameters of the SADC and the AU. Moreover, many of SA’s peacemaking efforts, for instance in relation to the DRC, including its peacekeeping contributions to MONUC/MONUSCO and, more recently, the UN Intervention Brigade, are undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations. The country’s status as an emerging power, its relatively strong economy, its technology and know-how, its past experience of a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy, and, linked to the latter, the respect and high esteem in which SA is held by other African countries, particularly with regard to the Mandela legacy, are all characteristics that equip SA to play the role of a continental peacemaker. It is therefore mainly because of its own history and moral authority that SA is perceived as having the crucial experience to contribute to national reconciliation, state- and institution-building and economic development of other conflict-ridden African countries.

On the other hand, SA has “on frequent occasions defaulted on its commitment in upholding its own once-deeply coveted norms and human rights-driven foreign policy in favour of defending state security (the de facto security of elites) at the expense of human security (the security of ordinary citizens)” (Solomon, 2010: 133). Its staunch defence of Mugabe’s regime in Zimbabwe, despite the countless acts of human rights violations, is a case in point. SA also attempted to speak out against the International Criminal Court’s arrest warrants against President Al-Bashir of Sudan, for crimes committed in Darfur, and against Gaddafi during the conflict in Libya. According to Solomon, SA may therefore in some cases be seen as “an obstacle to peace and security on the African continent” (Solomon, 2010: 133).

Its own internal socioeconomic problems, fuelling violent reactions, alongside economic challenges of late, are recent domestic developments that may diminish SA’s capacity, both perceived and true, to be a ‘firefighter’ on the continent. Public support for peace missions on the

continent is also fragile. Although the top level of the ANC may genuinely have a sense of solidarity and closeness to other African countries, as expressed by Zuma in his speech to the Congolese parliament (2013), average South Africans find themselves more detached from the rest of the continent. This is mainly because of SA's perceived 'differentness' and isolation during the apartheid regime. Public support declined even further with the incident in the Central African Republic in which 13 South African soldiers were killed on March 23rd 2013. SA's bilateral decision to deploy soldiers to CAR "without taking into consideration regional mechanisms and international norms" (key informant) may easily be seen as an expression of South African arrogance.

Although SA has attempted to dispel notions of its perceived hegemonic status on the African continent, it has not succeeded in eradicating all fears and suspicions amongst fellow African member states about its true intentions. Many African states have also expressed (albeit not always openly) their resentment at Pretoria's presumptuous foreign policy posture. These suspicions of SA's intentions do not seem to have been reduced over the years. Despite a certain continuity of the main pillars of SA's foreign policy and peace diplomacy established by Mandela – peaceful conflict resolution through dialogue and inclusiveness – each successive president has left his footprints, Mbeki through taking a stronger stand on peacekeeping and expanding SA's contribution to such missions, and Zuma, taking a step further, by calling for and participating in peace enforcement. It could be argued that while Mbeki was deeply committed to peace diplomacy, Zuma appears to give greater priority to South African economic interests. As noted by Daniel and Lutchman (2005: 507), "the ANC has in the last decade moved a long way from its condemnation of the execution in Nigeria in 1995 of the anti-oil campaigner", to the point where it now seems prepared to deal with the most abusive and corrupt regimes in Africa, particularly when oil and energy are concerned (Daniel and Lutchman, 2005: 507). However, while critics have accused SA of putting economics before peace in, for instance, the conflict in eastern Congo, several voices have recently drawn attention to the small peace dividend gained for SA (SAFPI, 2012; *Mail & Guardian*, 2013). The bottom line is that there is nothing wrong with SA benefiting from its involvement in the peace process, but it may be dangerous if economic interests are the driving force for the engagement.

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