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# South Africa's Foreign Policy: Tempering Dominance Through Integration

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African perspectives. Global insights.

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## ABSTRACT

Southern Africa has always featured prominently in South Africa's foreign policy. During apartheid, the National Party government saw fit to unleash a destructive agenda on neighbouring countries as an integral part of its strategy to quash support for the liberation movement. Since 1994, under a democratic dispensation, South Africa's foreign policy has aspired towards greater regional integration. This has necessitated a more pacific re-orientation of policy. However, over the past 20 years South Africa's leaders have struggled to rebuild trust because the country's economic and political dominance looms large over its neighbours. The intersection between 'trust-building' and 'dominance' is where South Africa's (sometimes clumsy) foreign policy is to be located. This is why this paper draws on the themes of 'dominance' and 'integration' to explain some of the findings emanating from a perceptions survey that the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) conducted in 2013.\* SAIIA conducted the perceptions survey among foreign policy practitioners in the foreign and diplomatic corps based in South Africa and Ethiopia. This paper focuses on some of the key perceptions emanating from respondents representing countries in Southern Africa and provides insights aimed at a better understanding of how politics in this region unfolds around South Africa. It also offers recommendations drawn from empirical evidence on how South Africa can improve its engagement with Southern Africa in its foreign relations.

*\* In 2012 SAIIA commissioned an independent, global survey company, IPSOS, to conduct a qualitative perceptions survey among foreign policy practitioners in South Africa and Ethiopia. The final sample comprised 60 respondents in both countries (40 in South Africa and 20 in Ethiopia), all of whom either were high-ranking representatives in foreign missions (especially in South Africa) or occupied positions in international governmental organisations, regional organisations and civil society organisations.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BNLS	Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland
DDG	Deputy Director-General
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FTA	free trade area
LDC	least developed country
OAU	Organization of African Unity
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
TFTA	Tripartite Free Trade Agreement

## THE POST-APARTHEID 'STRUGGLE'

Over the past 20 years South Africa's foreign policy has unfolded in a manner that is indicative of a nation undergoing transition. As the country wrestles with the challenges of consolidating its democratic gains, it also experiments with its post-apartheid identity and this is reflected in its foreign policy agenda. 'Transition' also partly explains why a foreign policy steeped in normative values under the Mandela administration was witnessed as morphing into one with a greater pan-African focus under the then-president Thabo Mbeki before it shifted focus into greater global multilateral engagement under President Jacob Zuma. In this amorphous space South Africa's leaders have sought to establish more pacific relationships in the country's external engagements, including in Southern Africa.

From a geopolitical perspective, Southern Africa has always been an important extension of South Africa's foreign policy. In more recent times strong ideological underpinnings have emerged to bolster the geopolitical advantage, thereby cementing the region's importance. The region's prominence in post-apartheid South Africa's foreign policy orientation is partly explained by the strong 'African' focus introduced into government by the ruling ANC when it came into power in 1994. Then-president Nelson Mandela reflected this in 1993 in his article, 'South Africa's future foreign policy',<sup>1</sup> in which he asserted that the country shared a 'destiny' with Africa. Over the years, this idea has gained so much traction that it now resonates in a coherent foreign policy priority, encapsulated in the phrase 'the African Agenda'.

The Southern African region is singled out in South Africa's 2011 draft white paper on foreign policy,<sup>2</sup> and the region's primacy is reiterated in the country's National Development Plan<sup>3</sup> and New Growth Path<sup>4</sup> – the last two are among South Africa's most important development implementation modalities. This sense of 'inexorability' about the fates of countries in Southern Africa is augmented by a protracted history of common culture, language and trade.

However, despite this special, interwoven relationship, South Africa cannot escape the inevitability of its own dominance in relation to its immediate region. Often, its actions are perceived as an attempt to dominate, that is, to be a 'big brother'. The country's dominance finds political, economic and social expression, and is almost always manifest when it is seen to behave unilaterally. In some circumstances its dominance is benign; in others it is more selfish. Therefore, the manner in which South Africa's dominance is wielded, particularly in the face of its desire to create a more integrated region, becomes the key struggle of the post-apartheid dispensation.

In more simplistic terms, South Africa's fundamental foreign policy challenge remains how it can 'fit in' with the Southern African region. The desire for a more integrated region requires South Africa to broach the issue of its dominance with more nuance. What results in the implementation of foreign policy is an interplay between the two themes of dominance and integration. Fundamentally, this reflects the country's imperative to balance its selfish national interests with its more benevolent foreign policy values. Using this argument, this paper draws on opinions solicited from a perceptions survey of foreign policy practitioners that SAIIA conducted in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

Survey research is a commonly used tool for mapping perceptions and opinions. This is particularly so in areas of research that are exploratory in nature. Since South Africa

is a relatively new player on the international scene, perceptions about its foreign policy have not been mapped out before.<sup>6</sup> This survey, being the first of its kind to be conducted on South Africa, also provides a baseline that could be used in future research to develop trends and detect patterns as foreign policy evolves.

Other emerging countries such as Turkey and India have also recently made use of surveys for mapping perceptions of their foreign policies.<sup>7</sup> This kind of research not only provides insights into furthering avenues for academic research but also lends itself to collating insights that may be used to inform policy direction. Both these aims featured prominently in SAIIA's motivation for conducting its research in this manner.

SAIIA's survey was conducted in two stages – in Pretoria and Addis Ababa – and targeted respondents considered to be practitioners of foreign policy. During the South African leg, practitioners were identified as being high-ranking diplomatic representatives to South Africa. Respondents were subjected to a rigorous hour-long interview where they were prompted to provide insights into various aspects of South Africa's foreign policy.

Interviews were conducted with representatives of 10 of the 15 countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), providing a sample that is two-thirds of the regional bloc and thereby making it statistically relevant to generalise some of the main themes that emerged.

The interviews for the survey were granted on the basis of anonymity to facilitate frank discussion. However, this does limit the ability to analyse reasons for particular viewpoints – especially regarding sensitive political posturing – as analysts skirt the risk of revealing the identity of the respondent in the process. This is especially the case in foreign policy, where critique is often based on clashing interests. It becomes difficult in analysis, therefore, to expose a particular criticism while protecting the anonymity of the source.

While the qualitative methodology provides scope for the richness and nuances of responses, this methodology makes it inherently difficult to collate responses and draw comparisons from them. This is because no two responses are ever exactly the same. Nevertheless, it has been possible to loosely gather some conclusions from the survey responses from Southern Africa. Some of the common perceptions that emerged will be interrogated in this paper through the lenses of 'dominance' and 'integration'.

## TEMPERING DOMINANCE THROUGH INTEGRATION

South Africa's destructive apartheid past still looms fresh in its neighbours' memories, stirring distrust and apprehension around its engagements. This enduring sentiment has proved to be difficult for South Africa to assuage. Therefore, the prevailing milieu within which it operates is peppered with a tension in which it is expected to take the lead in resolving crises in the region, but acting too decisively or unilaterally opens it to the accusation that it is reverting to its former role. Arguably, awareness of this has informed South Africa's decision to couch regional political and military engagement in the rubric of consensus-driven regional politics. This approach yields two positive dividends: (i) it allows the South African government to build the trust necessary to engage with African players in the long term, and (ii) it confers a sense of legitimacy on the country's orientation regarding Africa. This necessitates a precarious balancing of interests, ambitions and capabilities that is not always easy to manage.

This balancing act between suppression and assertion forms the basis of scholarly discussions on South African leadership in international affairs, and leads to the predominance of 'hegemony' in discourse about the country's foreign policy. The academic debate on South African hegemony has not yet been able to resolve the issue about its willingness to lead, which is a key determinant of hegemony. According to Adam Habib, this willingness by a country to lead is the expression of agency and distinguishes a 'hegemon' from a 'pivotal state':<sup>8</sup>

Every hegemon is a pivotal state. But it has to be more. Hegemons not only aspire to leadership, are not only endowed with military, economic and other resources. They necessarily have to have political and socio-economic visions about their trans-national environments, and a political willingness to implement those visions . . . it does not mean that it does not have partners in this enterprise. It often does. But it takes responsibility in the last instance to ensure that the features of its vision are operationalised in the region it sees as its sphere of influence.

A second element of hegemony implied in Habib's description is the ability to enforce. Not only should a hegemon be willing to take the lead, it should also be the guarantor of such a vision, bringing into line those who do not follow. For Chris Alden and Garth le Pere this unwillingness to 'enforce' is the reason why it is difficult to categorise South Africa's actions as hegemonic: 'in many respects it is not behaving as a hegemon'.<sup>9</sup> South Africa's response (or lack thereof) to the crisis in Zimbabwe is an important example of when it relinquished the mantle to 'enforce'.

This reluctance to assume hegemony overtly is a political stratagem. Since Mandela assumed office in 1994, his and successive administrations have stressed the South African government's commitment to 'working as a full and equal partner towards the realisation of a better region for all'.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Sidiropoulos<sup>11</sup> argues that this stems from a long commitment from within the ANC to multilateralism. In her discussion of South Africa's emerging soft power, she explains that 'Pretoria's preferred instruments for advancing these priorities [multilateralism] have been consensus building, dialogue, and negotiations, while avoiding resorting to force',<sup>12</sup> which forms a considerable weapon in its soft power arsenal.

This approach is compatible with a region that shares a preference for a particular style of politics that constricts the parameters within which South Africa can conduct its foreign engagements. The perspective is best encapsulated by an African proverb that says: 'If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.' Although this may be apocryphally attributed, the proverb neatly illustrates a dominant discourse in African politics that prioritises 'community', 'compromise' and 'consensus' as central aspects of political longevity for the continent. These values are often absent outside political rhetoric. Nevertheless, the rhetoric plays an important cohesive role for a continent that continues to be plagued by internecine wars. It is, therefore, particularly important for South Africa to be seen by its peers to be consultative. Successive administrations since 1994 have sought to achieve this by actively participating in multilateral forums regionally and internationally. As such, South Africa is not only a major contributing country to the SADC but has also been a strong proponent of the AU – even spearheading the latter's transformation from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2001.

Richard Gibb<sup>13</sup> argues that regionalism channelled through multilateral organisations is considered to be an intuitive remedy for many African policymakers as an effective mechanism to address the political marginalisation and fragmentation that took place under colonialism. Multilateral engagement can, therefore, be interpreted as a stratagem by South Africa to dilute its individual power in favour of a more consensual, inclusive style to drive global reform. This is laudable, but perhaps not consistent. Many respondents in the survey found South Africa's political engagements to be at odds with its economic ones, especially with regard to Southern Africa. In this same vein, Patrick McGowan and Fred Ahwiring-Obeng<sup>14</sup> accuse South Africa of being a 'self-aware, selfish hegemon' in its economic dealings with SADC. For them, South Africa's economic dominance is largely attributed to the structural advantages of relative economic development, which places it in a 'completely different category to its neighbours'.<sup>15</sup> These structural advantages, combined with an untransformed capital class (principally still white businesses), skew the way in which the country interacts with the region.

All these factors ultimately result in a forked approach in foreign policy where South Africa tends to be more subdued on political and military issues, preferring 'quiet diplomacy' solutions involving private negotiations, but is then much more assertive and aggressive in its economic engagements with the region. This is consistent with Adam Habib's position on South African foreign policy where he encourages greater nuance in understanding South Africa's approach.<sup>16</sup> According to him,<sup>17</sup> South Africa's foreign policy pursues more than one strategic orientation simultaneously and in recognising this bifurcation one is better able to understand South African external engagements.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S ECONOMIC DOMINANCE

South Africa's economy is almost 40 times larger than the average sub-Saharan economy.<sup>18</sup> When one juxtaposes this with the fact that SADC is home to eight least developed countries (LDCs), excluding Zimbabwe which refused to be afforded this status in 2013,<sup>19</sup> it becomes possible to understand how South Africa can appear to cast an imposing shadow over its immediate region.

Respondents in the survey believed that fears of economic dominance could be tempered if South Africa were seen to be working harder to ensure that it pegs its economic success more closely to that of the region. For instance, one laudable attempt that was often cited was South Africa's invitation to African leaders to participate in the BRICS Leaders Africa Dialogue Forum, a summit that ran tangential to the 5<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in Durban in March 2013. Respondents received this move as a show of good faith that South Africa intended to leverage its international status in multilateral forums for the development of the continent.

Recognition of the relative sophistication of South Africa's economy is often coupled with the belief that South Africa can still do more to ensure that economic prosperity results in greater opportunities for its neighbours. '[W]hat South Africa[ns] need to realise is that [they] cannot prosper alone . . . They have [a] right to promote their businesses and trade overseas, but . . . they need to take into consideration that they should not do this to the peril of other neighbouring countries.'<sup>20</sup>



In reality, the situation is a little more complex than this. South Africa is cognisant of the implications of its dominance over its neighbours, particularly Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland (also known as the BLNS countries). Together with South Africa, these countries form the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which has established a common tariff and customs union. South African exporters are the major beneficiaries of this agreement, with the country boasting a trade surplus of \$9 billion in relation to the four other SACU member states.<sup>21</sup> To compensate for the flow of South African goods into BLNS countries, the SACU revenue formula gives these countries a disproportionate share of total tariff revenue. In effect, South Africa pays BLNS sums in the regions of \$4 billion (in 2012) in return for duty- and quota-free access to their markets. This sum is increasingly difficult to justify for a country running a large budget deficit, and South Africa has been leading efforts to renegotiate the terms of the SACU revenue-sharing agreement.

South Africa has also consistently driven the reformulation to include a greater developmental component to the disbursement, which would result in a portion of the revenue being set aside for infrastructure and related developmental spending by the recipient country. These negotiations have to be approached with caution, as the BNLS countries rely heavily on this income. South Africa has, therefore, been leading efforts to increase the long-term sustainability of its neighbours, but has to balance this with the immediate concerns around their dependence on SACU revenues.<sup>22</sup>

A similar trade-off between economic self-interest and assuaging fears of regional dominance was at play in the negotiations on the SADC Free Trade Area (FTA). The agreement aims to eliminate barriers to trade among the five SADC countries. While the deal was concluded in 2008 and eased trade barriers in the region, all countries maintain important exceptions, and major regional powers such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Angola do not participate at all. The fear of South African dominance of these markets loomed large in the SADC FTA and remains a concern in negotiations for the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA).

The TFTA is a proposed FTA encompassing the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, SADC and the East African Community. This undertaking seeks to liberalise intraregional trade, increase investment and promote the development of cross-regional infrastructure. It is a central feature of South Africa's economic diplomacy strategy. Yet according to survey respondents in Southern Africa, there is a perception that negotiations are being delayed by South Africa because it is intent on seeking ways to maximise its gains over the other 23 countries. Respondents accuse South African trade negotiators of being mercantilist, and the country of being too protectionist. The counter-argument, however, is that South Africa (along with Kenya and Egypt, to a lesser extent) has a considerably more sophisticated economy that requires more careful scrutiny before any agreements are ratified.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of whether or not these perceptions are accurate, South Africa can ill afford to ignore them. The FTA that is envisaged would not only spur domestic industrialisation and manufacturing but would also unlock a huge market – an estimated 600 million people<sup>24</sup> – to South African goods. South Africa ought to address these concerns in a manner that protects its domestic interests while allaying the fears of the region.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL DOMINANCE

The ANC-led government is cognisant of the acrimony that perceived political dominance can elicit from the region. African censure of Mandela's public disapproval of Nigeria over the assassination of Ken Saro Wiwa in November 1995 is often cited as a game-changer for South African foreign policy implementation on the continent. Through this experience, South Africa learnt that it could not be too vocal about sensitive political issues if it wanted to solicit regional approval to fulfil its broader political agenda.<sup>25</sup> Despite these changes and a palpable sensitivity to these concerns, survey respondents still cautioned that South Africa should be more wary of its tendency to behave like a 'big brother'.<sup>26</sup>

A commonly cited example of this in the survey was the candidature of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for the position of AU Chairperson of the AU Commission in 2012. While all the respondents seemed to agree with the principle that the fielding of a 'Southern African' candidate was appropriate because the region had never been represented in either the OAU or the AU, some did raise objections to the way in which South Africa had canvassed for Dlamini-Zuma.

Although there was strong consensus that she was the most qualified candidate – her competence and experience are highly regarded by all the respondents in the survey – Southern African countries revealed in the survey that they felt strong-armed into supporting her candidacy and expressed a desire for South Africa to have been more consultative before it had taken the initiative to propose her. 'They [South Africa] need to consult more. They fall short on that. Even when they were presenting Dlamini-Zuma as a candidate, they pushed her without consulting so we had to say, "Hey, ... that is not the way to do it"'.<sup>27</sup> Linked to this is the region's sense of South African arrogance. As one respondent put it: South Africa's behaviour on the candidature for the AU Chairmanship 'perpetuates the feeling that we [SADC] are not taken seriously. We are just there to rubber stamp South Africa's decisions rather than being part of the whole issue'.<sup>28</sup>

The issue of Dlamini-Zuma's candidature is illustrative of a rupture in perceptions about Southern African politics. It refutes the frequently held perception that consensus-driven politics is without clashes and affirms the notion that in dealing with 'outsiders', the region does close ranks. SADC publically and unequivocally supported her candidature,<sup>29</sup> yet the survey reveals clear disgruntlement over the manner in which South Africa had handled the situation.

This may also explain another outcome of the survey, which shows that Southern Africa is ambivalent about South Africa's ability to represent the continent. The aggregate of responses from the region on whether South Africa can be considered to be a credible representative of Africa surprisingly revealed a contested outcome.<sup>30</sup> The most commonly cited reason for this was the level of corruption and the continued ineffectiveness of the government's policies to address the socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Many respondents were of the opinion that these 'failures' abrogated any right South Africa may have had to determine an 'African Agenda'. This sentiment is shared by many scholars; for example, Ian Taylor<sup>31</sup> warns that it is a mistake to conflate the country's economic supremacy with political dominion. For him, the inconsistency of shared values in the region, coupled with its resistance to being dominated by South African capital, 'mean[s] that the acceptance of South Africa as a regional leader and thus in a position to implement any political and socioeconomic vision across the region is highly constrained'.<sup>32</sup> Laurie

Nathan's seminal book *Community of Insecurity*<sup>33</sup> explains at length the negative impact that a lack of shared values has on regional cohesion in SADC.

Spontaneous responses from respondents in the survey also reveal that South Africa's support for the call for a no-fly zone over Libya in UN Security Council Resolution 1973<sup>34</sup> further compromised confidence in the country's ability to lead. Not being perceived as being consultative meant that South Africa took a decision on this issue that did not necessarily reflect the views of other African countries, thereby affecting its credibility to represent and lead. Some respondents saw South Africa's so-called bungling of Resolution 1973 as a reflection of the fact that the country's foreign policy suffers from a lack of prioritisation:<sup>35</sup>

If the priorities were quite clear, it would build a system in which it would sit in agreement before you come to an important matter that needs to be considered at the Security Council. You will have to secure, even if you don't have a formal structure, the key countries [on] the continent ... and then when you go to the Security Council to discuss any matter which is vital for Africa, at least you have the backing of most.

To counter the argument with the fact that Nigeria also supported Resolution 1973 is to lose sight of the essence of the critique. Rather, this perspective highlights the fact that South Africa is not considered to be sufficiently consultative in decision-making processes. A second, and perhaps more important, issue is that there is a gap between perceptions and the reality as it pertains to some of the country's external engagements.

The region echoes these warnings to South Africa for not being inclusive in its decision-making. The support of the immediate region is crucial for South Africa's broader continental and global ambitions, as this contributes greatly to its perceived legitimacy to lead. South Africa can do more to deepen political support in this regard.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S SECURITY DOMINANCE

South Africa has a multi-faceted approach to securing peace outside its borders. This is informed by a 'human security' approach to peacebuilding, which incorporates recognition of the need to guarantee human rights and basic needs as important elements of security.<sup>36</sup> The 'human security' paradigm, which is elucidated in South Africa's foreign policy white paper, indicates that the country adopts an expanded understanding of security threats and, therefore, also warrants an expanded repertoire of responses that includes political and military solutions.

Owing to the successes of its own democratic transition, South Africa has consistently expressed a preference for a negotiated settlement of disputes. This has resulted in its involvement in mediating the conflicts in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, the DRC and the Comoros in the Southern African region. Despite this preference for political solutions, South Africa has not shied away from embarking on military interventions where it was deemed necessary. The country's defence forces also provide critical assistance to its neighbours in disaster relief. Mozambique, for instance, frequently makes use of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) for flood relief efforts<sup>37</sup> and engagements such as these are consistent with the paradigm of 'human security'.

In March 2014 the South African government completed its defence review,<sup>38</sup> which not only reflects on its past engagements but also suggests a strategic focus for the future. A main pillar of the proposed strategy revolves around the role that South Africa should play in providing peace support to the continent via contributions to the UN, AU and SADC.<sup>39</sup>

Respondents in the SAIIA survey consistently remarked on South Africa's peacekeeping presence on the continent as being 'impressive' or 'laudable', drawing on its past successes, particularly in countries such as Burundi. However, often this was a precursor to the opinion that South Africa could 'do more'. Of those who felt that South Africa could be doing more, many were of the opinion that the country was not proactive enough, or did not have a big enough presence in peacekeeping efforts.

South Africa is one of the largest contributors of troops to the UN.<sup>40</sup> However, as has been highlighted in the aforementioned defence review, the country's military is currently underfunded by 24%, and suffers serious capacity constraints in terms of appropriate equipment and sufficiently trained personnel.<sup>41</sup> These are severe constraints on the SANDF, but an understanding of this appears to be absent among Southern African respondents, who think that<sup>42</sup>

South Africa can play a very important role in building and promoting structures that can improve the level of security in Africa. South Africa can do a lot in helping other countries militarily ... I think South Africa can play an important role in that because it has a big Defence Force ... well-equipped army ... [it has a] well trained police service which can help build capacity in other countries.

The country's preference for negotiated settlements has meant that it has been actively engaged in mediating conflicts in Southern Africa. Of these interventions, two of the most pressing in respondents' memories were those in Zimbabwe and Madagascar – both of which are also relatively recent. In 2009 SADC mandated former Mozambican president Joachim Chissano to mediate the conflict in Madagascar but South Africa's commitment to providing peacebuilding support did not go unrecognised.<sup>43</sup>

[As regards] the crisis in Madagascar, for example, South Africa wanted to be the first SADC country to help Madagascar find a lasting solution for this crisis and it is not only for Madagascar but all the problems in the southern African countries.

South Africa has come under widespread international scrutiny for how it managed the mediation of the conflict in Zimbabwe. The political and economic crisis in that country, which spiralled out of control following a government-sanctioned 'fast track land reform' in 2001, led to South Africa being appointed by SADC to mediate the conflict in 2008.<sup>44</sup> The country's mediation efforts led to the installation of a government of national unity and the formulation of a roadmap to multiparty elections that, despite serious challenges, were ultimately held in July 2013. The Southern African leg of the SAIIA survey, which was completed before the elections were held, saw an expression of support for South Africa's efforts in Zimbabwe. Criticism, where present, was mild and often prefaced with an acknowledgement of South Africa's efforts. While this could be construed as a consequence of the strong solidarity among the region's political leaders, it could also

be viewed as an endorsement, as the region was more acutely aware of the political complexity of the situation in Zimbabwe.

## TOWARDS A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING

From the sample of perspectives garnered from Southern Africa, it becomes clear that one of the biggest challenges South Africa faces in its external engagements is bridging the gap between perceptions and reality; for instance, South Africa is perceived to be a big player and is therefore expected to play a greater role in peacekeeping. However, this view is not complemented with an understanding of the funding and capacity constraints of its military. This inconsistency is repeated over South Africa's affirmation of Resolution 1973 on Libya. The dominant perception is that the country's vote did not reflect the wishes of Africa, yet ignores the reality that South Africa voted in congruence with another significant African player – Nigeria. The region's blind spot between perception and reality is probably fuelled by the tendency to view South African external engagements through a single, perhaps conflated, lens. South Africa's economic dominance frequently puts it at odds with others, fuelling the perception that it is domineering. To address this gap, the South African government should endeavour to engage more closely with the African diplomatic corps in South Africa, so as to explain the rationale and processes that it undertakes in pursuing particular outcomes.

One of the major findings of the SAIIA survey is that while South Africa's dominance is unquestioned, its leadership frequently is. Circumspection about its motivation to act in its own region sometimes forces it to be more muted when dealing with the region. This context finds natural expression in multilateralism – which is South Africa's preferred method of engaging in international affairs.

As long as decisions are channelled through multilateral organisations, the assumption is that the country will be exempt from accusations of hegemonic behaviour. However, the overall dissatisfaction of SADC countries with South Africa's handling of the Dlamini-Zuma candidature for the AU Commission chair should serve as a warning to officials that this presumption can be dangerous. To engage successfully in a multilateral context, South Africa must be more consultative. This would also infer greater legitimacy to South Africa's aspirations to be more representative of African interests on the world stage.

One way that greater consultation could be facilitated would be to elevate the position of SADC to Deputy Director-General (DDG) level within the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). A DDG with the power to convene inter-ministerial committees to co-ordinate the country's economic diplomacy with its political objectives would be a concrete and practical solution to enhancing the strategic relationship.

The findings from the SAIIA survey tells an interesting story about how scholars and practitioners of foreign policy ought to digest politics in the region. Surveys such as this help develop a more nuanced orientation of South Africa's foreign policy as it captures contemporary sentiments, which allows analysts to track changes in perception over time. In a young and evolving country such as South Africa, surveys of this nature can be invaluable in shaping interactions and furthering its developmental agenda.

South Africa's foreign policy will continue to evolve as the country changes and adapts to changes in its external milieu. Regardless of what these changes may bring, it is clear

that Southern Africa will remain an inextricable component of its foreign policy. It is the source of the country's economic and leadership ambitions, and it holds the key to unlocking its developmental challenges – which is why cordial and prosperous relations must be sought at all times – and also why striking a balance of power between country and region is fundamental.

## ENDNOTES

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