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Powers and Principles:  
International Leadership in a Shrinking World

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## **South Africa: From Beacon of Hope to Rogue Democracy?**

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**With a reaction by Khehla Shubane**

## About the Contributors

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**Princeton N. Lyman** is Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is also Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and Professorial lecturer at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Ambassador Lyman's career in government included assignments as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Ambassador to Nigeria, Director of Refugee Programs, Ambassador to South Africa, and Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. He has published works on foreign policy, African affairs, economic development, HIV/AIDS, UN reform, and peacekeeping.

**Khehla Shubane** worked as a researcher for the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) for 10 years. He then helped Nelson Mandela to establish the Nelson Mandela Foundation as an institutional base from which the former president of South Africa could continue his work. Shubane's most recent position was with the BusinessMap Foundation, a small research and monitoring organization dedicated to black economic empowerment and tracking foreign direct investment. Shubane now works as a development consultant with a focus on low-income housing and local government issues.

## About the Project

The aim of the Stanley Foundation's project on **Powers and Principles: International Leadership in a Shrinking World** is to identify plausible actions and trends for the next ten years by which the international community could become more unified. The foundation asked contributing authors to describe the paths by which nine powerful nations, a regional union of 27 states, and a multinational corporation could all emerge as constructive stakeholders in a strengthened rules-based international order. For each case, the writers discuss how their given country might deal with the internal and external challenges posed by international norms for the global economy, domestic governance and society, and global and regional security.

Each essay in the series represents an assessment of what is politically possible (and impossible), supported by a description of the associated pressures and incentives. Unlike other future-oriented projects, there were no calculations of probability; we were interested in a particular global future—an international community with broad respect and support for norms—and how it might take shape. Authors were expected to address the particular challenges, pressures both for change and continuity, as well as natural leadership roles pertinent to their actor's geostrategic position, economy, society, history, and political system and culture.

The project did not apply a checklist or rating system to the question of stakeholdership. A responsible stakeholder can be an upholder, critic, and shaper of the rules-based order all at the same time. But while stakeholdership is not a matter of accepting the entire set of norms, if a powerful nation opts out of too many rules, it will undermine rather than uphold the order. To provide a perspective from the inside and counterweight to each essay, a commentator from the given country (or other actor) has been enlisted to provide critical reactions to the coauthors' piece.

South Africa's extraordinary negotiated transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was hailed as a supreme example of statesmanship, commitment to democracy, and the triumph of human rights and political reconciliation. Nelson Mandela, whose own struggle for freedom included 27 years in prison, dazzled South Africa and the world by guiding the country back from the brink of a race war with a spirit of reconciliation and a firm commitment to multiracial democracy.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the world looked to South Africa as a beacon of democracy and champion of human rights—a “rainbow nation,” to use Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words—that would embrace all of its black, white, mixed race and Asian peoples equally and guarantee their individual rights under the law. Women were given real political power, with quotas in party lists for parliamentary representation. In sum, post-apartheid South Africa was expected to be a principled leader in international affairs, a country whose moral authority would enable it to “punch above its weight,” not only in Africa, but globally. Indeed, Mandela himself encouraged such expectations. On the eve of the 1994 elections, he declared “human rights will be the light that guides our foreign policy.”<sup>1</sup>

Nor was human rights the only area in which South Africa was expected to play a significant and positive role. Endowed with relatively high levels of industrialization and infrastructure, South Africa was a natural engine of growth for Sub-Saharan Africa. The pragmatic, market-oriented economic policies adopted by the country's post-apartheid African National Congress (ANC) rulers were strikingly far-sighted, given the ANC's longstanding espousal of socialist philosophy, enshrined for fifty years in the party's Freedom Charter. South African economic policy was thus presented as a model to other African countries, whose statist policies over the previous decades had left them impoverished and debt-ridden. Finally, South Africa, even prior to Mandela's election, had given up its nuclear weapons and submitted to close international inspection of its peaceful nuclear facilities. South Africa thus gained credibility as both a model and a strong advocate of nonproliferation.

South Africa set out almost immediately to play a leading and largely reformist role in multilateral institutions—including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) where it soon took over the presidency, the Non-Aligned Movement which it led from 1998 to 2003, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), later converted into the African Union (AU). Both Nelson Mandela and the South African leadership became deeply engaged in efforts to end several deadly and protracted conflicts in the region, including those in Burundi, Congo, and Sudan. In the 1995 negotiations for permanent renewal of the Non-proliferation Treaty (a major objective of US policy), South Africa was credited with overcoming staunch African resistance by brokering compromises that led to a unanimous supportive vote in the United Nations.

Relations with the United States were also expected to be positive. The United States played an influential role in the international ostracism of the apartheid regime when Congress enacted comprehensive economic sanctions against the apartheid government over the veto of a popular president, Ronald Reagan. There were also strong ties between US and South African civil society groups, from the African-American community to churches, labor unions, universities, local governments and corporate shareholders, all of which were actively engaged in the fight against apartheid. Many US companies had unilaterally pulled out of South Africa, as the ANC advocated. In the expectation that these historical ties and political affinity would open doors to American businesses and pave the way generally for cooperation, the Clinton administration set

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Alden and Gareth le Pere, *South Africa's Post-Apartheid Policy—From Reconciliation to Revival?* Adelphi Paper 32, Institute of Security Studies, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 12.

up a bilateral commission with South Africa and designated it one of ten top “emerging markets” for US interests. There was little question that South Africa would become a natural ally of the United States, and assume its role as a responsible global stakeholder, on a number of issues. As will be explained below, some of these assumptions were unrealistic, but at the time they seemed entirely reasonable and were regularly reinforced by both sides in high-level visits and official statements.<sup>2</sup>

Fast forward to 2008. A *Washington Post* op-ed in March of that year castigated South Africa for turning its back on all these principles, ticking off a litany of “sins.”

South Africa has actively blocked United Nations discussions about human rights in Zimbabwe—and in Belarus, Cuba, North Korea, and Uzbekistan. South Africa was the only real democracy to vote against a resolution demanding that the Burmese junta stop ethnic cleansing and free dissident Aung San Suu Kyi. When Iranian nuclear proliferation was debated in the Security Council, South Africa dragged out discussions and demanded watered-down language in the resolution. South Africa opposed a resolution condemning rape and attacks on civilians in Darfur and rolled out the red carpet for a visit from Sudan’s genocidal leader. In the General Assembly, South Africa fought against a resolution condemning the use of rape as a weapon of war because the resolution was not sufficiently anti-American.

The author proposed a new foreign policy category to describe South Africa: a “rogue democracy.”<sup>3</sup> Another *Washington Post* editor writing at the same time dismissed South Africa as the “ever-reliable voting partner” of Russia and China in resisting the UN Security Council’s efforts to implement the responsibility to protect, a norm that urges outside intervention when a state cannot, or will not its own people from grievous human rights violations.<sup>4</sup> South African Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu lamented that South Africa seemed to have lost its moral compass.

South Africa had for years also been the subject of wide criticism for its stance on HIV/AIDS—with the government first questioning matters of widely accepted science and then dragging its feet on antiviral treatment and prevention programs, despite having one of the highest infection rates in the world.<sup>5</sup> The government’s stance toward Zimbabwe was another target of mounting international criticism. As Zimbabwe’s situation worsened steadily after 2003 from political repression and economic collapse, South African President Thabo Mbeki was appointed by SADC as a mediator, but his “quiet diplomacy” failed to avert steady economic and political deterioration under the increasingly despotic rule in its northern neighbor. Many observers did not view Mbeki as a neutral negotiator, as he shielded Robert Mugabe from external pressures. In 2005, President Bush said that the United States would follow South Africa’s lead on Zimbabwe. But by July 2008, after President Mugabe was using violence to thwart the opposition during a runoff presidential election, and South Africa led resistance in the United Nations to sanctions, a

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<sup>2</sup> For example during Mandela’s triumphal visit to the United States in 1993 and his state visit in October 1994. Nevertheless, seeds of differences that would arise in later years emerged even in this period of high expectations. Princeton Lyman, *Partner to History: The U.S. Role in South Africa’s Transition to Democracy*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace, pp. 225-261.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gerson, “The Despots’ Democracy,” *The Washington Post*, May 28, 2008, p. A13.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Hiatt, “In Burma, a U.N. Promise Not Kept,” *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2008, p. A19.

<sup>5</sup> South Africa has 5.5 million people infected by the HIV virus, the highest number of any country in the world. Over 1.8 million South Africans have died from the epidemic since it began. UNAIDS 2008 Epidemic Update.

US ambassador at the United Nations drew a stinging parallel: charging that while Mugabe had used violence to fragment the opposition, Mbeki had used diplomacy to do the same thing.<sup>6</sup>

How could this turnaround happen in less than fifteen years? Has South Africa consciously abandoned the lofty principles it had held dear, becoming narrowly protective of its national interests, its leaders' personal views, and the ruling party's political survival? Should the international community have expected South Africa to become "more normal, less special"? Or has South Africa instead merely arrived at hard conclusions as it moves from liberation to governance? What are its real comparative advantages on the international stage, especially given the burdens of the historical legacy of apartheid and huge domestic challenges? There is actually some truth in all these interpretations for, overall, South Africa faces hard realities, both on at home and internationally. In the coming decade, pragmatic factors, not abstract principles, will shape South Africa's performance, whatever global objectives South Africa chooses to pursue.

### **The Identity Crisis**

While apartheid has been excised from the laws and statutes, the country's post-apartheid transition is far from complete, and the strains of the process have begun to show. South Africa is, in fact, in the grips of a post-liberation identity crisis, somewhat akin to Turkey's ambivalence over its Muslim identity and its secularist traditions. In South Africa, though, the conflicting pressures are even more complex.

At one and the same time, the country is struggling to:

1. Overcome widespread poverty (apartheid's most enduring legacy) while preserving the market-based economy it has nurtured since the advent of majority rule.
2. Mitigate extraordinary income inequality based mostly, but not entirely, on racial lines, while respecting business interests and preserving technical skills.
3. Balance the relatively conservative fiscal and monetary policies that have put it on a sound economic footing since the transition against growing, and well organized, populist demands for more aggressive state action on the needs of the poor.
4. Compete economically against powerful emerging market rivals globally while dealing with powerful unions and high labor costs domestically.
5. Bear the burden of leading, however tentatively, a continent in distress that is, at the same time, suspicious of potential South African hegemony.
6. Stabilize democracy as the political system transitions from first-generation liberation leaders, most of whom were in jail or exile during the apartheid period and who presided over a one-party dominant political system to a younger and more diverse generation. Could this transition process, over the next decade, unravel the dominance of the ANC and create rival power centers?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Colum Lynch, "U.N. Zimbabwe Measure Vetoed by Russia, China," *The Washington Post*, July 12, 2008, p. A09

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the forced resignation of President Thabo Mbeki in September 2008 (see below) was a reflection of the deepening splits within the ANC. Some top party leaders resigned from the ANC to form a new center-right party, the Congress of the People (COPE), led by Mosiuoa Lekota, the

South Africa's identity crisis thus involves a clash of the two worlds that uneasily coexist within the country. There is a developed and a developing South Africa—the former consisting of a minority of wealthy blacks, whites, and Indians population who enjoy the fruits of the developed world, and the latter consisting of the vast majority population, mostly blacks and mixed race or “colored,” who are still mired in the poverty of the developing world. Awareness of this widening gap between rich and poor is rising at a moment of leadership transition and uncertainty.

At the same time, South Africa still pursues its ambitions to become both a regional and a global leader in international affairs. It wants a seat on the UN Security Council, and in claiming that right will continue to champion African independence of action against perceived western or, for that matter, eastern pressure.<sup>8</sup> It will assert its right to define international leadership and “global responsibility” on its own terms. In this vein, for both practical and principled reasons, it has given greater priority to “sovereign democracy,” a term which reflects South Africa's self-image as a champion of the collective voice of the “south” than of individual human rights and democratic governance. Thus, here too, there is tension between two identities: one pulls South Africa toward aligning with western interests and playing a constructive global role in international organizations, while the other pulls it toward solidarity with the causes of the Third World in opposition to perceived western hegemony.

These seeming paradoxes between mounting domestic pressures, a continuing adherence to democratic governance at home, and somewhat split personality on international goals will not necessarily cripple South Africa's ability to serve as a responsible stakeholder, but they will likely make South African foreign policy far less predictable. Pretoria will have to factor a number of variables into its policies—domestic demands, party fissures and the broader emergence of factionalized elites within the political class, closer relations with the G-77 and other African nations, as well as short-term national interests. It might be extreme to describe it as a “rogue democracy,” but we anticipate that South Africa will often confound western expectations and wishes—sometimes seeming headstrong, recalcitrant or inconsistent, as it picks and chooses its way in international politics.

### **Internal Strengths**

In the first years of the post-apartheid era, South Africa confounded predictions as well, but in the other direction. Even sympathetic observers believed that the combination of nearly unchecked electoral power, accumulated resentment, and pent-up demands among its constituents, would propel the ANC into autocracy, and reckless economic policies.<sup>9</sup> Neither prediction proved true.

South Africa's post-apartheid leaders produced one of the strongest and most liberal democratic constitutions in the world. It provides for an independent constitutional court, guarantees of a free press and other civil and political rights regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. The constitution established a Human Rights Commission to investigate violations, independent (or relatively so) audit and investigative bodies to check corruption, an elected parliament, and a substantial set of economic rights, such as access to housing and health care. Even more remarkable, the negotiations prior to the landmark elections of 1994 affirmed a set of principles that are

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former Defense Minister and ANC chairman, and his deputy, Mbhazima Shilowa, the former premier of Gauteng Province, the richest in the country.

<sup>8</sup> South Africa has expressed concern over the potential “neo-colonialism” of Chinese investment in Africa.

<sup>9</sup> See Princeton N. Lyman, “South Africa in Retrospect,” in Princeton N. Lyman and Patricia Dorff, eds. *Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know About Africa and Why It Matters*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2007, pp. 47-51.

immutable and beyond the reach of any subsequent legislative changes. These principles include protection of minority rights, a federal system of government, and a Constitutional Court charged not only with upholding the constitution, but also the pre-constitutional immutable principles. This political innovation was instrumental in easing the transition and averting internal conflict, and it has no parallel in any other republic. As a demonstration of its embrace of diversity, South Africa has eleven official languages, with all national laws and the parliamentary debates translated into each one.

Since the adoption of the new constitution, these institutions have remained viable and, in many ways, robust. There have been instances of suppressed investigations of corruption, and some attempts to politically influence the judiciary and other purportedly independent bodies. Under previously enforced ANC discipline, the Parliament has not acted as a significant check on executive power. Nevertheless, as a credit to the independence and durability of the Constitutional Court, both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations lost cases before it and bowed to its directives. Mandela even praised the independence of the judiciary when it ruled some of his decisions unconstitutional. The extended court struggles of former South African Deputy President (and subsequently ANC president) Jacob Zuma, and a judicial finding that his corruption charges stemmed at least partly from the politicized interests of the Mbeki presidency, prompted verbal assaults on the judicial system from many quarters. Even so, the judicial system has thus far withstood those pressures and remains a respected pillar of the rule of law. The press remains free and dynamic. Opposition parties are free to operate, raise issues in parliament, and compete for provincial government despite the ANC's dominance.

The Mandela-Mbeki administrations also stuck with conservative economic policies, much to the unhappiness of the labor and communist constituencies within the ANC. Determined to avoid the mistakes of other debt-ridden African countries, the ANC was fiscally responsible in the extreme. It thus rejected offers of both concessional loans from The World Bank and higher interest credits from Japan and other donors. In the first five years after Mandela's election, the government had reduced its short-term debt by 80%, brought inflation from 15% to 6%, and in 2001 achieved South Africa's first budget surplus in decades. Economic growth has been steady if not spectacular since 1994: between 4% and 5% annually.

Fiscal prudence since the transition to majority rule did not impede investment and progress in broadly shared development and growing social expenditures. Electricity has been extended to 3.5 million homes, including many in the shantytowns surrounding the country's major cities. Free water is provided to 3.9 million households and water infrastructure now reaches nearly 90% of the population. More than 1,300 clinics have been built and 2,300 upgraded. Free medical services are provided to pregnant women and children, with health services receiving 101 million patient visits a year. Perhaps most significant in providing an economic safety net, social security and social assistance grants have been the fastest-growing spending category—reaching \$10 billion in 2006, with ten million beneficiaries (fully one quarter of the population) and constituting 3.4 % of gross domestic product (GDP).

As a result of these policies, financial institutions have remained strong, and the Johannesburg stock exchange has attracted substantial foreign investment. South Africa thus escaped much of the fall-out from the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. It has not, however, been immune to the 2008 global financial crisis that originated in the United States and spread worldwide. However, while the global recession is hitting South Africa at a time of political uncertainty, steady stewardship of the economy has made it less vulnerable. Good economic management and banking supervision have thus far protected South Africa's banks from the risk of bankruptcy that has gripped banks elsewhere in the world. South Africa was hit with an early 20% drop in the

stock exchange and a depreciation of the rand, but no banks have failed and, at this writing, financial institutions seem stable. The country could face deeper economic challenges from a possible drop in the price of gold and other commodities, such as platinum and coal, to which the rand's performance is closely tied. There could also be a shortfall in capital flows; by November 2008, "foreigners sold a net 48 billion rand (\$6.1 billion) in local stocks, compared with a net buy of 62 billion rand the same time a year before."<sup>10</sup>

Any exodus of investors and professionals skittish about future leadership and policy changes could also be hurtful. Investors will watch the evolving leadership transition to detect sharp swings in economic policies. The public will also feel the sting of higher rates for loans and mortgages, as repossession of homes and automobiles rises.

### **Economic Challenges**

Notwithstanding this impressive record of economic growth and social expenditures, and its ability thus far to ride out global economic crises, South Africa still faces structural challenges in overcoming the immense economic and social legacies of apartheid. And this is beginning to take a toll on its political stability. Even with steady growth, South Africa by 2006 merely returned to its per capita GDP level of 1980 (the country had poor economic growth during the final fourteen years of apartheid). Growth would have had to reach 6%-7% annually to make a dent in the country's unemployment. Instead, black unemployment remains between 27%-40%; income inequality is much greater than in most countries, and the education system remains inadequate to promote real social mobility. For a long time, these problems were tolerated by the population out of gratitude to the ANC for political liberation and satisfaction with political freedom. Moreover, before the ANC leadership split, there was no viable alternative to the dominance of the ANC. It is unclear whether a breakaway faction could generate significant support in the short run (i.e., by the 2009 election), but it is a feasible scenario in the long-run.

As the wheels of the ANC train have started to wobble, South Africans and others wonder about the direction of future leaders, and the nation's ability to manage its heavy burdens. The confluence of several recent events cast doubt over the stability and harmony South Africa achieved for more than a decade after liberation—the rise of a privileged black elite of multimillionaires, indictments of high ranking ANC officials for corruption, extremely high rates of violent crime, the influx of refugees and economic migrants from other African countries, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, a large bulge in youth unemployment, and an increasingly restive poor population—all of which are breeding popular discontent that is being expressed in violent ways and factionalism in the political class.

The growth of a black middle class is a good example of the dilemmas South Africa faces, and the strains that are coming to the surface. The number of blacks in the middle class has risen dramatically, from 300,000 in 2004 to 2.6 million in 2007. In one sense, this is one of the most remarkable successes of the government's economic policies. Indeed, it is singled out as one of the goals of the government's affirmative action program, Black Economic Empowerment.<sup>11</sup> This program is also credited with stimulating the consumer economy and bringing diversity to the upper echelons of corporate boardrooms.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Economist*, November 1-7, 2008, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Wiseman Khuzwayo, "BEE comes of age with phase of two codes," *Business Report*, Johannesburg, December 22, 2007. "South Africa's booming black middle class," *People*, 24 May 2007, [www.southafrica.info/about/people/blackdiamonds-230507.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/blackdiamonds-230507.htm).

But even Mbeki himself was troubled by the excesses of the so-called “black bourgeoisie” and its seeming single-minded focus on self-enrichment.<sup>12</sup> Others have joined the chorus, brandishing the list of new (and often ANC-linked) billionaires across the front pages of the newspapers. Public resentment has been inflamed by the extravagant lifestyles of the wealthy, and their fast growth as a class has spurred suspicions about rising levels of corruption. There is an issue, moreover, about whether this development is truly deep-rooted—whether it represents corporate window dressing and special favoritism, co-opting blacks rather than structural change in the economy. Some black-owned companies are doing quite well, but they still are proportionally much fewer than white-owned business. In all, black-owned firms comprise less than 3% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

Another major source of controversy, both within South Africa and abroad, was Mbeki’s sustained downplaying of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the country, even though South Africa has one of world’s largest AIDS-inflected populations. The roots of Mbeki’s attitude toward HIV/AIDS are explored later in this essay because it illuminates one of the threads of South Africa’s foreign policy. Suffice it to say that the policy severely damaged South Africa’s reputation abroad and dismayed South Africans trying to wrestle with this national catastrophe. Only because of strong civil society protests, and the decisions handed down by the Constitutional Court, did the Mbeki administration finally adopt significant treatment programs. However, even with substantial budgets now allocated to the disease, more than R4.5 billion in 2007, the government had not aggressively tackled the problem. Mbeki remained stubbornly loyal to his discredited Minister of Health, who insisted on native foods as treatment and who resisted many of the most important advances in treatment until forced to accept them. One of the first acts the post-Mbeki administration of interim president, Kgalema Motlanthe instituted was to replace the Health Minister, a widely applauded result of the recent political turmoil.

A direct foreign policy consequence of the HIV/AIDS crisis is its impact on the security services. South Africa’s contribution to peace processes in its region stems in part from its ability to deploy well-trained and well-equipped peacekeepers, for instance in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But because South Africa will not deploy service personnel abroad who are HIV positive, the country’s personnel pool has been limited to 3,000 peacekeepers. Having maxed out its available pool in ongoing peacekeeping operations, future foreign policy initiatives will be limited.

Another blow to Mbeki’s legacy, but even more to South Africa’s vaunted economic prowess, has been a severe electricity shortage that erupted in 2008, revealing a lack of forward thinking and needed investment. An administration that had previously been regarded as technocratically competent and administratively sophisticated, was revealed as dismissive of expert admonitions and heedless of warnings of the consequences of the increased demands for power after a decade of economic growth. The power outages also fed criticism of South Africa’s Black Economic Empowerment policies (affirmation action decisions for employment and contracts favoring blacks) with some critics tracing the problem to the replacement of skilled white technicians by less qualified black ones. The power company, Eskom, has tacitly acknowledged this criticism by beginning to hire back recent white retirees. Meanwhile, the power crisis, along with the changing political leadership within the ANC, sent white applications for emigration visas soaring, further undermining confidence in governance. Any continued pattern of crises and mismanagement could risk further brain drain, both black and white.

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<sup>12</sup> “Nelson Mandela Memorial Lecture by President Thabo Mbeki,” University of Witwatersrand, July 29, 2006, p. 13.

The power shortage may reflect deeper economic problems and energy insecurity—potentially burdening South Africa financially for several years, lowering growth rates, and requiring massive investment. South Africa has relied on domestic coal supplies for power, but these may no longer be sufficient. One reason for South Africa’s ambivalence about Iran’s nuclear program is its own contemplation of a major investment in nuclear energy, drawing on the extensive experience and infrastructure associated with its earlier weapons program and its present modest nuclear power facilities.

If all these developments were not enough, popular frustration over lack of jobs and advancement reached a boiling point in 2008, in the form of surprise attacks on African immigrants accused of taking South African jobs. This was a significant eruption of spontaneous mass violence by a frustrated population looking for scapegoats. Caught off guard by the worst outbreak of internal conflict since apartheid, the government was initially paralyzed. Resentment toward the estimated three million Zimbabwean refugees and other migrants had been building up for some time, and xenophobic riots erupted across the country. To quell the unrest, the government had to call in the military, the first use of the military to clamp down on public demonstrations in the post-apartheid era. Though deaths were, thankfully, limited to only sixty-five, hundreds were injured; tens of thousands were driven from their homes, many of whom fled back across neighboring borders. This was a sudden eruption of mass rage by the poor and unemployed. Despite Mbeki’s denunciation of the violence and apologies to affected African governments, South Africa’s pan-African credentials were sorely damaged, along with its reputation for stability. Contributing to the embarrassment, the fleeing migrants came from many countries that during apartheid had offered safe haven to South African exiles.

### **ANC Leadership Transition**

Finally, there is the instability that emanates from former Deputy President Jacob Zuma’s tumultuous rise to power. Mbeki had dismissed Zuma from the number two position in 2005 for alleged corruption, but Zuma fought the charges and built a strong challenge to Mbeki, culminating in Mbeki’s defeat in December 2007 for a third term as ANC president. Events moved even more dramatically after a judicial showdown over Zuma’s corruption indictment, when his supporters within the party forced Mbeki to resign the presidency of the country. As the new ANC president, Zuma became the presumed frontrunner in South Africa’s 2009 presidential elections.

Jacob Zuma’s labor and radical supporters within the ANC had for some time been sharply critical of Mbeki’s market-oriented and fiscally conservative economic policies. In effect, this was a generational revolt, marked more by ideology than by age, with the “populists” displacing the “liberators, especially those who had been in exile during the anti-apartheid struggle and who were perceived as more sympathetic to the black bourgeoisie than responsive to the needs of the underprivileged.

The party split also prompted a great deal of uncertainty about South Africa’s future economic policies and its commitment to the rule of law. On economic policy, Zuma has sought to reassure business as well as the public on economic policy. The retention of Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, a mainstay of the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, as part of interim President Kgalema Motlanthe’s cabinet was helpful in that regard. Of special concern, nevertheless, have been the threats made against the judiciary by the leader of the militant ANC Youth League, which though refuted by Zuma, raised worries about the independence of the judiciary under a Zuma presidency. And if the indictment against Zuma is eventually quashed due to political pressure from his supporters, who argue for a political rather than a judicial resolution of the corruption allegations, then many would rightly ask what that would mean for accountability for

South African leaders. The Zuma wing of the ANC has also successfully pushed for the dissolution of the Scorpions, the anti-corruption police unit that has fiercely pursued its mission, including investigating Zuma's corruption charges. Further concern has been sparked by the call of the ANC Secretary General for changing South Africa's land reform process from "willing buyer and willing seller" to one in which the government could presumably allocate land for distribution and set the terms of compensation.

Zuma himself has worked to allay these worries, pointing out that that the longtime presence in the ANC of the South African Communist Party and the ANC Youth League never derailed its pragmatic economic policies in the past. He also expressed faith in the ANC's decision making process—in which policy proposals are put forward, distributed widely and debated with the ANC as a whole before making ultimate decisions—claiming that these will, on the whole, be more pragmatic.<sup>13</sup> But if the moderates in the ANC are sidelined, or leave to form another party, then more radical elements could end up having control over the party.

Indeed, the degree to which the old guard was being purged—most of Mbeki's cabinet resigned with him, and provincial premiers were forced to resign in favor of pro-Zuma ones—suggests a new political era is emerging that will see the first serious black party competition to the ANC and wider multi-party politics in South Africa. The process, however, could be messy, lengthy, and itself potentially destabilizing in the short-run.

It would be a mistake, however, to view these events as indicators of a steady downward trend. The country still has exceptional infrastructure and strong political institutions. It plays a major role—as discussed below—in the economy of the rest of the continent. It boasts many skilled people, first-class universities, a vibrant free press, religious tolerance, a strong civil society, diverse cultural heritages, and major achievements in a variety of fields from health to literature. Moreover, the extraordinary political changes of the past year were all carried out under constitutional procedures, a point that Zuma supporters took pains to highlight. The country will indeed be challenged in the coming years, but there is much to admire in South Africa—and grounds for confidence and optimism for the future. It retains a wealth of assets to deal with these domestic challenges and to assume a major role as a responsible global stakeholder. However, the next group of leaders will likely be compelled to balance such aspirations against the imperatives of internal needs, limiting the country's ability to play a prominent role on the international scene.

### **The Evolution of Foreign Policy**

Despite the lamentations on the part of South Africa's current critics, the country's foreign policy was, in fact, never as purely principled as some of the early rhetoric suggested. While Mandela spoke of his commitment to human rights everywhere, he also maintained strong loyalty to rulers and regimes that had supported the ANC in its anti-apartheid struggle, regardless of their poor human rights records. Under Mandela's presidency, South Africa retained close relationships with Indonesia's Suharto, Libya's Qadhafi, Cuba's Castro and after 1996 with China. South Africa opposed resolutions in the UN Human Rights Commission against any of these regimes.

Post-apartheid South Africa also saw its arms industry (the world's tenth largest) as an attractive source of foreign exchange earnings and political leverage. Despite an oversight committee set up to regulate arms sales according to principles of conflict prevention and human rights, post-apartheid South Africa sold arms to Chad, Indonesia, Rwanda, both sides in Sudan's civil war,

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<sup>13</sup> "A Conversation with Jacob Zuma," presentation at the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington DC, October 21, 2008.

Angola, and Algeria. Only strong pressure from the United States led South Africa to cancel a sales agreement with Syria.<sup>14</sup>

Together, these factors made for a foreign policy more complex, and more serving of national and political/economic interests than idealists had hoped. For example, in spite of long standing ANC sympathy for the liberation movement in East Timor, Mandela pledged to sell arms to Indonesia on a state visit there in 1997, and South Africa abstained on Human Rights Commission resolutions regarding Indonesian violence against the Timorese in 1997 and 1998. Soon after assuming power, Mandela also set a pattern that has been a constant in South Africa's posture on the global scene: a strong preference for adherence to a form of multilateralism that tilts in favor of the "south," both as a principle of policy and as a justification for not acting more forthrightly in defense of human rights issues abroad.

Mandela articulated the basis of this approach during his first tour of Southeast Asia in 1997. Questioned about the dubious human rights records of some of the countries he was visiting, Mandela stated that:

South Africa would not be influenced by the differences which exist between internal policies of a particular country and ourselves.... There are countries where there are human rights violations, but these countries have been accepted by the United Nations, by the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Why should we let ourselves depart from what international organizations are doing?<sup>15</sup>

On this tour, Mandela expressed no qualms over the decision of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to admit Burma as a member, nor—astonishingly—did he speak out on behalf of the detained and fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, whose years of detention in the struggle for democracy bore obvious parallels with his own experience. Subsequently, the leader of Burma's military regime attended Mbeki's inauguration in 1999.

### **Critical Early Setbacks**<sup>16</sup>

Three early foreign policy setbacks also played a role in tempering South Africa's view of its global role, narrowing the purposes for which it would use its vaunted global moral position and its regional economic and military strength. The first came in 1995 in Nigeria, which was then under the military dictatorship of Sani Abacha.

When Abacha arrested the prominent political dissident, environmental activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, Mandela believed he had secured Abacha's commitment not to execute Saro-Wiwa

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<sup>14</sup> The South Africa government was prepared to allow a transshipment of Chinese arms to Zimbabwe, as that country was undergoing one of its worst and most violent instances of government crackdown on dissent. The refusal of dockworkers to unload the shipment, the outcry from churches and other representatives of civil society, and a court order prevented the ship from unloading.

<sup>15</sup> Chris Alden and Garth le Pere, *South Africa's Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy—From Reconciliation to Revival?* Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 19-20. The ANC had in fact much earlier distinguished its struggle from that of universal human rights. The ANC rejected Jimmy Carter's associating the anti-apartheid struggle with that for human rights elsewhere. The ANC argued that their struggle was one against institutionalized racism, and against colonialism. They feared that their struggle would be "drowned" in the larger struggle. Padraig O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa*, New York, Penguin Books, 2008, p. 193-194.

<sup>16</sup> This section is drawn from the description of these setbacks in Alden and le Pere, *op cit*, pp. 21-24.

and other activists from the Niger Delta region who protested poverty and opposed the government. But when Abacha did just that, Mandela was outraged and called for an oil embargo against Nigeria. He warned Abacha that he was “sitting on a volcano and I am going to explode it under him.” Mandela soon found South Africa quite alone among African countries in its stance on the Nigeria problem. Indeed the OAU publicly castigated the South African position on sanctions, and no other African country even withdrew diplomatic representation in Lagos or protested the executions. South Africa was accused of breaking African solidarity, being hoodwinked by the United States and the United Kingdom, and acting “pro-western.” South Africa soon backtracked, bowing to a SADC decision to, in effect, take no action against Nigeria. Twelve years later, a South African official would tell a group of interested academics that South Africa had vowed “never again” to allow itself to be positioned outside (and presumably embarrassed by) “the African consensus.”

The second setback was the military intervention in Lesotho in 1998. Acting ostensibly under a SADC mandate, South Africa, along with Botswana, sent troops into the small neighboring country to restore order and reverse an attempted coup. Although the intervention succeeded in its objective, it was accompanied by looting, destruction of property, and several deaths that led to a strong anti-South African backlash. Mandela had sought to broaden the remit of SADC beyond economic matters to the collective support of democracy and stability in the region. The Lesotho episode was a painful reminder that South Africa’s apartheid-era history of encroaching on its neighbors continued to linger in the minds of other African nations, regardless of South Africa’s new democracy.

The third setback came with the collapse in the late 1990s of the Mobutu government in Zaire (later renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC). As a strong rebel force was moving across the country, Mandela sought to bring about a transition government with a “soft landing” for Mobutu. Since Uganda and Rwanda as well as SADC member Angola were already heavily engaged in helping the rebel forces of Laurent to overthrow Mobutu, Mandela’s efforts failed. When Joseph Kabila’s government a few years later was itself threatened by a rebellion (again supported by Rwanda and Uganda), Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe came to Kabila’s aid with forces he sent on his supposed authority as head of SADC’s newly created Peace and Stability Organ. Mandela had opposed any SADC military intervention but was forced to live with the decision. While South Africa would subsequently emerge as a major negotiator of peace in the DRC, with a sizable contribution of peacekeepers, it had learned the limits of its diplomatic ability to set the policies and actions of its closest neighbors and of its primary regional organization, the SADC, despite its overwhelming economic leverage.

### **Redefining South African Foreign Policy**

When Thabo Mbeki acceded to the presidency in 1999 he set about reshaping South Africa’s foreign policy. One guiding principle was that South Africa would act as much as possible within the African consensus. Beyond Africa, South Africa would link with other influential members of the global South—fellow “advanced” developing countries (such as China and India), that were already players in the global economy but shared the view that the system was still rigged both against them and against the poorer countries. South Africa would henceforth walk a fine line, asserting its influence through both its relative economic and military power, and as a natural “bridge” between the industrialized west and the less developed African majority. At the same time it would remain acutely sensitive to charges from countries in the Non-Aligned Movement that, whether in talking of democracy or negotiating compacts with the G-8, it was essentially acting as a neo-colonial power and a stalking horse for the interests of the West. One way to meet this problem was to reformulate South Africa’s “mission” to the world from human rights to sovereign democracy, serving as a champion of the larger majority of developing countries in

international institutions and in the workings of the global economy. Mbeki has, for example, proposed a “G-8 of the South,” a strategic partnership that could bargain effectively with the industrialized powers.

Mbeki laid out this new formulation at a conference of the Department of Foreign Affairs shortly after his inaugural. He set out four priorities: restructuring the OAU/African Union and SADC; reforming international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank, and the Commonwealth; hosting major international conferences (presumably for South Africa to help shape the priorities of the sponsoring organizations); and peace and security in Africa and the Middle East.

South Africa’s controversial vote in the UN Security Council on Burma can be better understood in this context. Officially, South Africa said that the Security Council was exceeding its mandate and interfering with the ongoing UN negotiations with the Burmese government. But a South African government spokesman explained that the purpose was to send a message that the United States and its western allies could no longer set a selective agenda for the Security Council, picking which countries to criticize and which issues constitute a threat to international peace and security. The vote also signaled the importance South Africa was giving to its alignment with China on international governance issues. Critics did not miss the irony of this position, since the ANC had called for similar censure of the apartheid government on human rights grounds when it was out of power. Much to the chagrin of anti-apartheid activists worldwide who had fought to promote human rights in South Africa before 1994, Pretoria’s international advocacy on behalf of human rights was simply subordinated to other imperatives after the ANC came to power.

But Mbeki’s own approach to such issues is even more complex than this strategic formulation suggests. A closer look at the bundle of inner feelings, contradictions, intellectual brilliance, and economic sophistication that were all part of his approach to leadership helps explain some of the seemingly bizarre positions he had taken, for example with regard to HIV/AIDS, and to the deepening political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. It also provides insight into his singular foreign policy initiative, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

This paper does not permit a detailed analysis of Mbeki’s personality, history, and experiences.<sup>17</sup> Suffice it to say that Mbeki’s parents, especially his father, were prominent in the South African Communist Party and militant in the anti-apartheid struggle. Yet they also, especially his mother, spent years working to increase the sophistication and economic capacity of their poverty-stricken rural neighbors—without much success.

Mbeki shared this ambivalence, with a deep desire to see Africa itself reform and adopt sounder governance, policies of economic modernization, and more effective regional and sub-regional institutions – reforms he saw as essential for Africa to take advantage of the globalization process and overcome some of the continent’s problems of poverty and conflict. Yet Mbeki also carried a deep resentment of what he perceived to be western, primarily white, condescension toward blacks. So conflicted was he that even his belief in the importance of cooperation with the West for development was tinged with suspicion that whites, whether in their policy recommendations or offers of assistance, simply do not believe Africans can run things.

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<sup>17</sup> For a fuller analysis of Mbeki’s background and approach to policy, see Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007; William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC*, South Africa, Zebra Press, 2005.

Mbeki saw malicious intentions behind the association of HIV/AIDS with sexual behavior and its being traced to origins in Africa. These ideas were, as Mbeki saw it, clearly part of a western attempt to demean Africans as sexually promiscuous and irresponsible. Even Africans who advocate more attention to the disease were portrayed by Mbeki as bolstering such prejudices. Instead, Mbeki portrayed the disease as just one manifestation of the conditions of poverty and malnutrition, which should be the real priority of both African nations and donors. In the same vein, he saw efforts to spread treatment and newly developed drugs as forcing Africa into dependency on western-manufactured pharmaceuticals, similarly diverting resources from the fundamental problems of poverty.<sup>18</sup>

The same suspicion of western motives influenced his approach to Zimbabwe, a policy second only to HIV/AIDS as a source of criticism for South Africa, and particularly of Mbeki. Here, too, it appeared to critics, both within and outside South Africa, that South Africa had turned its back on its commitment to human rights and democracy. Mbeki, however, saw it differently. His perspective was rooted, in part, in his disdain for the Zimbabwean Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party, which he and Mugabe both saw as a tool of white interests and as a challenge to the rightful rule of liberation movements, no matter what their mismanagement. Perhaps, as some suggest, he saw parallels between these challenges to Mugabe's ZANU government and the criticisms he was receiving from the labor base of the ANC. Or he might have feared that the same manipulation of the land issue that fueled the conflict in Zimbabwe could erupt in South Africa.

Whatever the reasons, the Mbeki government bristled at western calls for South Africa to use its significant leverage in Zimbabwe—for example, its control over of Zimbabwe's electrical power lines, and transportation links to bring down the Mugabe government. To South Africa, such overt attempts at regime change against a fellow African country would clearly invite charges that South Africa is aggressive and throwing its weight around on the continent, just as the predecessor apartheid government did. In addition, Mbeki noted that the electricity grid supplied not only Zimbabwe, but also other countries in the region and he could not single out one country without hurting others. Finally, Mbeki was convinced that, whatever the hardships associated with Mugabe's misrule, a violent collapse of the country—with millions more migrants and other economic fall-out—would fall principally upon South Africa, not on those who criticized his policy. Given the harm that he felt would result from stronger sanctions, diplomacy was, as Mbeki saw it, the only recourse.

Add to this, finally, Mbeki's instinctive reaction against western criticism of Africans. In an apparently emotional letter to President George W. Bush, Mbeki denounced US criticism of the government in Zimbabwe and its call for stronger action by Zimbabwe's neighbors, as yet another example of white insinuation that black Africans cannot manage their own affairs. To Mbeki, the Zimbabwe drama called for patience and trust and Africans would eventually solve it on their own terms—notwithstanding the toll this position had on his own country, Zimbabwe's population, the region, African solidarity and western confidence in South Africa's leadership.<sup>19</sup>

## **NEPAD**

If Africa is the cornerstone of South African foreign policy, as that country's leaders often proclaim, then the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) might be its most important policy initiative. Launched jointly by Mbeki, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, and Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika,

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<sup>18</sup> Amy S. Patterson, *The Politics of AIDS in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2006, pp. 34-44.

<sup>19</sup> Gerson, *op cit*.

NEPAD was founded in 2001 as a grand bargain of African commitment to good governance, sound economic management, corporate governance, and regional and sub-regional development paired with the G-8's commitment to increased aid, debt relief, and trade reform. NEPAD was presented to the G-8 at the summit of 2002, where it was warmly praised, and led to the formulation of the G-8 Africa Action Plan, which in turn served as the basis of ongoing G-8 Africa dialogue. NEPAD has many facets, but among the most innovative is a program of peer review, whereby African countries submit themselves to review by a panel of Africans from other countries who assess the country's performance under NEPAD principles, with the resulting report debated at the Africa Union summit.

Even with NEPAD, South Africa found itself uncomfortably caught in the continuing tension and mistrust between Africa and the west. Critics in Africa find the NEPAD principles too close to the Washington Consensus prescriptions for economic policy, demanding that Africans hew to a western agenda of "responsible stakeholderism." As a result, while the AU did eventually adopt NEPAD, it first changed the peer review system to be voluntary, and its support for the whole program remains tepid.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, African countries have to invite NEPAD review; no country can be subjected to peer evaluation without its consent, a loophole that dilutes the impact of the initiative.

Nor has South Africa's relative initial success with the G-8 built the confidence and partnership that was envisioned. The G-8 in 2005 agreed to double aid to Africa by 2010 and has provided sweeping debt relief to most of Africa's poorest countries, as well as to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The G-8 also agreed to support the build-up of five African peacekeeping brigades. Western increases in economic and military assistance have been substantial but uneven among its members and it is not clear whether the 2010 target will be met. Despite increased military assistance, moreover, the world has witnessed the ineffective performance of still undermanned and under-equipped AU peacekeeping units sent to Darfur and Somalia.

The area of greatest frustration, however, has been in trade reform, where Africans had hoped for the kind of reductions in European Union (EU) and US agricultural subsidies and the opening of markets that would make the ongoing Doha round a true "development round." But the collapse of the Doha round in 2008 further undermined fulfillment of the "grand bargain." Furthermore, although the aid commitments are significant, and there is openness to more donor investment in infrastructure, one of NEPAD's priorities, few of NEPAD's infrastructure project proposals have yet received funding.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to attribute South African foreign policy solely to Mbeki or to assume it will change radically under a new government in or after 2009. Presumptive ANC presidential candidate Jacob Zuma backed away from his earlier harsh criticism of Mbeki's policy toward Mugabe and defended South Africa's "quiet diplomacy" in the face of the mounting western condemnations of Mugabe. Zuma instead calls for more action by Africans. At times, Zuma accused western pressure of undermining South Africa's ability to deal with the situation. In a somewhat surprising move, the Motlanthe government asked Mbeki to continue as the mediator in Zimbabwe, suggesting either Zuma desires to continue the policy or merely wants to alleviate some of the humiliation that Mbeki endured when he was run out of office.

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<sup>20</sup> For a highly critical assessment of NEPAD, see Ian Taylor, *NEPAD: Toward Africa's Development or another False Start?* Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2005. For a more balanced assessment, see Gumede, *op cit*, pp. 204-213.

More fundamentally, an anti-American undercurrent runs throughout the ANC and its allies in the government. Rooted in years of training in the Soviet Union during the anti-apartheid struggle, the sentiment is so pervasive that the United States was slow to support that struggle—indeed, only did so as the Cold War faded and in the face of American popular demands. Many within the ANC view the US government as the embodiment of imperialism and the country as a bastion of exploitative capitalism. This negative view of the United States was somewhat ameliorated after Congress enacted sanctions against the South African government in 1986 and President Clinton vigorously courted South Africa. But anti-American sentiment gained new currency in South Africa during the George W. Bush administration, whose actions reinforced South Africa's view that the principal threat to a rules-based international system did not come from non-western countries but from the US "exceptionalist" policies that seek to absolve Washington from playing by the same rules that it demands of others.

The result has been a significant decline in relations with the United States despite a number of overtures from Washington. The Bush administration more than doubled aid to Africa and pioneered the widely praised \$15 billion, five-year President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and lent support to other African programs in health and education. South Africa is also the largest beneficiary under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which allows nearly all African-sourced goods into the US market duty free. To many in the United States, South Africa has pocketed the benefits of its relationship with the United States without giving much back in return.

For example, South Africa has been the most vocal opponent of the US government's new Africa Command, or AFRICOM. Pretoria saw it as an audacious attempt to gain a military foothold in Africa to fight terrorism and protect oil supplies. When the South African Defense Minister publicly commented on the proposal, he said that his government opposed AFRICOM anywhere in Africa, not just in his own country. Moreover, his response was not just "No," but an unequivocal "Hell No."

In another example, South Africa was conspicuously silent on Russia's 2008 attack on Georgia, even though it raised some of the most fundamental issues concerning sovereign rights that South Africa purports to champion in its foreign policy. On the one hand, South Africa is an ardent supporter of the right of countries to defend their territorial boundaries and put down internal political disturbances. On the other hand, South Africa might be sympathetic to Russia's charges that Washington is encircling Moscow.

### **The Pillars of South African Policy**

Looking ahead, several themes, some of which are contradictory, will shape South Africa's foreign policy in the coming decade:

- Focusing on Africa, especially the general issues of poverty and conflict, that can impinge on South Africa.
- Striking a careful balance between asserting leadership in Africa through its relative economic and military weight, while remaining squarely within "the African consensus" even though this African consensus is showing signs of unraveling.
- Wanting to be at the center of the modern, globalizing process, but, paradoxically, also arguing that it is tilted against the interests of the global South.

- Shifting its moral mission toward reform of the international system in terms of sovereign democracy and inclusive multilateralism, rather than an emphasis on liberal democracy and individual human rights, even though these values are upheld domestically.
- Aligning increasingly with other “middle level” and rapidly advancing developing countries, such as India, Brazil, and Malaysia, even if (as will be discussed below) this sometimes leads to stances that are not necessarily in the interest of Africa and that favor its own economic competitors.
- A continuing undercurrent of suspicion of the United States, unbridled capitalism, and “neo-colonialism” reflected in its diplomacy and rhetoric, notwithstanding the fact that this brings it into potential conflict with the US and western objectives. These currents could be strengthened if the South African Communist Party (SACP) or other radical elements play a more prominent role in a Zuma foreign policy.

Emerging constraints stemming from domestic economic and political crises, as well as uncertainties associated with the upcoming leadership change in South Africa.

- With these factors in mind, here are the major mileposts that will define South Africa’s role as a stakeholder in the international system.

### **New Administrations in the United States and South Africa**

The 2008 and 2009 elections in both countries may present uncertainties, but the associated reassessment could also be a chance to rediscover common bonds and aspirations. As the focus on the Iraq war fades, and as new leaders in both countries determine their priorities, there may be a window of opportunity to establish greater trust and cooperation. Common interests of the two countries—conflict resolution in Africa, overcoming poverty, climate change, trade and investment, and perhaps new approaches to the peaceful uses of nuclear power—could all provide the basis for renewed closeness and a more cooperative partnership in international affairs. A resolution of the Zimbabwe situation, if it comes, could defuse that sharp disagreement. The end of South Africa’s term on the UN Security Council, and with it the stream of controversies and disagreements, should also allow for a lowering of tensions.

**South Africa’s Election.** The 2009 South African election will be a watershed. It is the end of the Mandela-Mbeki era—the liberal phase of the historical transition from apartheid to democracy. Staffing within the government and the party, and alliances in the parliament started to be reshaped soon after the ANC chose Jacob Zuma over Thabo Mbeki as party leader. But there is great uncertainty about the direction the country will follow whether Zuma takes over, or alternatively, is reindicted and convicted. Some observers fear that the new leadership will embark on state-led economic policies and deficit spending as demanded by the left, damaging South Africa’s credit standing. Others predict that the new leaders will be more practical, making only tactical adjustments by shifting resources to public works and employment generating programs and slowing privatization. Another factor will be whether the new leadership can maintain ANC party unity, or whether the factionalization triggered by Mbeki’s resignation will escalate, leading to governmental paralysis, widespread patronage, or creeping corruption in the public sector.

In foreign policy, the new leaders will be less seasoned and less familiar to the G-8 and other international circles. Any concerted push to make NEPAD more operational and influential would be one indication of their priorities. South Africa will remain concerned with Zimbabwe and the DRC—not least because of the mineral interests in both and the potential hydropower in

the latter—and active in those places where South African peacekeepers are present, like Burundi and Darfur. With an eye to strengthening the SADC, Zuma has already reached out to Angola to improve a relationship that was quite chilly under Mbeki. But it is questionable that South Africa will take on many more peacekeeping burdens in other African conflicts, such as Somalia, Guinea, the DRC or Chad. (See the section on Africa below.)

The changes confronting South Africa in the decade ahead will go beyond just this election. For South Africa to assume a larger role in responsible stakeholdership, it will have to deal with its deeper identity issues. In particular, it will have to absorb challenges to the entrenched one-party and one-generation domination of political leadership, by allowing new forces to bubble up in society. It will have to respond to growing domestic pressure for more growth and poverty alleviation—relieving the pain of the “third world” living conditions of the majority while maintaining the productivity of the “first world” economy of whites and an expanding black elites. At the same time it will have to transcend ideology in addressing the future transnational issues, such as migration, climate change, unaccountable leaders, human rights violators, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation that will, inevitably, affect South Africa along with others.

As noted earlier, the ANC is fragmenting into two or more parties. While this would disrupt the political status quo, thereby demanding development of a new order to replace it, a renewal of the political system could follow, allowing more debate, and more leadership, on both domestic and foreign policy issues. One prominent scenario anticipates a new centrist party with roots in the black community, leaving the rump of the ANC to carry the banner of the left. Greater competition also holds the possibility of new alliances and coalitions, including across racial, ethnic, geographical and demographic lines, with an end to one-party dominance and the potential for more accountability and transparency in government.

**The US Response.** Whatever the outcome of South Africa’s leadership transition, the Obama administration that takes office in 2009 can offer new ideas and areas of cooperation. Progress on world trade, closing the deep divide over agricultural policies and subsidies, could open the door to US-South African collaboration to bring about a green revolution of agricultural productivity in Africa. Mutual concern over building African peacekeeping capacity, along with intensified US involvement in conflict resolution across the continent, could also deepen ties and help overcome initial South African opposition to AFRICOM. South Africa already cooperates on counterterrorism, especially within Southern Africa, and this could be enhanced. The United States should also engage South Africa on the role of emerging powers in Africa (e.g., China, India, Malaysia, and Brazil) including discussion of how to manage foreign competition, maximize benefits for Africa, and uphold standards for corporate responsibility, transparency, accountability, the rule of law and open societies. Finally, the United States should consider working with South Africa as a potential model for how peaceful development of nuclear power can be achieved. This issue would respond to one of South Africa’s critical needs, the supply of energy necessary for development, while making progress on one of the United States’ top foreign policy priorities.

As part of a wider diplomatic frame to work with rising powers, the United States should also push to broaden international consultations beyond the G-8, and perhaps find creative ways to expand, if not the membership, then the outreach of the UN Security Council to give middle-income countries like South Africa a greater voice, and thus a greater stake, in the stability and effectiveness of the international system. The recent prominence given to the G-20, in light of the worldwide economic crisis, is one step in this direction; South Africa is the only African member. South Africa will continue to emphasize sovereign democracy as long as the international system

is seen as discriminatory and working against the interests of the majority. These opportunities are discussed below in relation to the major issues and events that will face South Africa in the next decade.

## **Africa**

South Africa will continue to exert leadership in Africa even as it takes great care not to be seen as acting as a hegemon managing rivalries with other African aspiring leaders, such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Angola, and Kenya. This will take several forms that have implications for South Africa's role in supporting a rules-based international system.

**Economic.** South Africa's private sector is the largest financial investor in sub-Saharan Africa. Companies have moved beyond mining into banking, telecoms, retail, tourism and other sectors. The South African government has facilitated this investment by reducing foreign exchange restrictions at home and through regional and bilateral agreements and public investments (e.g., in the Johannesburg-Maputo corridor). South Africa's prowess has attracted other investors. For example, China's largest investment in Africa is in South Africa's Standard Bank, which offers China a way to extend its economic position on the continent. However, China may soon outpace South African investors with its tendency to offer low-cost loans, major infrastructure projects, and financial support for leaders' pet projects, such as sports stadiums and presidential mansions.

Along with this economic high profile go charges of a "neo-colonial" agenda, even for South Africa. South African companies have already been accused of being "predatory" and displacing local investment, reducing local employment, and impinging on local sovereignty.<sup>21</sup>

Yet even as South Africa faces greater economic problems at home, the trend of investment and commerce is likely to continue and give South Africa not just a stake in the continent but particularly in a rules-based structure for international business and finance. In this regard, the United States should work with South Africa and the economic players in the region (in addition to outside powers China, India, Brazil, Russia, the EU) to devise guidelines that build on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, which the newer players and many Africans were not involved in crafting. Initiatives along these lines would also help the United States navigate the new "scramble for Africa," by outside actors, such as China, India, and Brazil.

**Conflict Resolution.** South Africa has played a major role in this area, in Burundi, Congo, Sudan, and elsewhere. It has been an important contributor to peacekeeping, both on its own and as part of UN peacekeeping operations. But South Africa is reaching the limits of its ability—the high level of HIV/AIDS being one major constraint, as noted earlier. South Africa has thus declined to contribute to Somalia and will unlikely be able to sustain further peacekeeping contributions to Darfur. It would also be constrained if such forces were needed in Zimbabwe, although the imperatives of reacting to the eruption of violence in such a close neighbor are difficult to ignore. South Africa's conflict resolution role is more likely to focus on the diplomatic realm. Economic problems at home and the change from Mbeki's personal focus on international matters, moreover, will limit the country's new leaders' appetite for international initiatives, with inevitable ramifications for their regional leadership role.

**African Union.** The pressure of domestic demands, along with African leadership transitions, not only in South Africa but also in Nigeria since Outgun Obasanjo left office, could undercut the

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<sup>21</sup> Bridget Kenny and Charles Mather, "Milking the Region? South African Capital and Zambia's Dairy Industry," *At Issue ENZINE*, Volume 8, May-September 2008, No.2, June 2008.

African Union's response in addressing African conflicts and its stance on democracy. Smaller powers, such as Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, or Rwanda may seek to fill the gap, but none has the weight of either South Africa or Nigeria, and not all are committed to democracy themselves. Except for West Africa, Nigeria's future leadership role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution may not be politically sustainable. Any decline in AU readiness and willingness has serious implications for US support of African and UN peacekeeping. As noted earlier, overcoming South African antipathy to AFRICOM will be necessary to build the type of cooperation that is essential for keeping African peacekeeping ability from regressing even further. Indeed, if AFRICOM were to focus more narrowly on goals in tune with African needs—peacekeeping training, military medical programs especially regarding HIV/AIDS, maritime security, and humanitarian emergency and disaster relief—some of the suspicion generated by its earlier grandiose goals would be tempered.

### **Trade Policy**

During the Doha Round, South Africa took the lead as the representative of fellow African nations. Above all, South Africa aligned itself ideologically with Brazil, India, China, and the ASEAN countries, even to the detriment of Africa's interests on some issues. Even though these countries' markets are as closed to African goods as they are to those from Europe and the United States, South Africa led the rest of the continent in joining an ideologically united resistance to liberalization of Asian and Latin American markets as part of an overall deal. But two wrongs do not make a right. Defending South-South solidarity against Europe and the United States may make a strong political point, but it is hardly good for Africa not to position itself to demand greater access to Asian and Latin American markets where its export potential may be substantial indeed. Of equal concern is the general perception that South African policy on these issues is purely ideological, rather than substantive or open to negotiation. It is unclear how long South Africa can sustain such positions, in the name of South-South solidarity, when they pose a sizable obstacle to Africa's global economic performance.

It should be stressed, though, that moving South Africa away from its current positions will not be possible unless and until there is progress on other major issues in Doha, in particular EU and US agricultural subsidies. But once there is the beginning of agreement on those issues that focus on the real interests of Africa, it should be a priority of US diplomacy to encourage South Africa to see the potential benefits of working more closely together on trade. This will not be an easy sell, because of South Africa's general approach to North-South issues, its suspicion of US motives, and its desire to remain in step with its Asian and Latin American allies. These attitudes are so deeply entrenched that South Africa measures its leadership success, in part, by how well it stands up to the West. The gap can only be bridged by patiently working with a new generation of South African leaders, and other African countries, in a way that demonstrates the benefits of this cooperation, and of the US positions, to the South African people and to Africa at large.

### **Climate Change**

Many studies of the effects of climate change predict severe impact on Africa. One consequence will be vastly increased migration, both within Africa and beyond. For a country already straining under the burden of sizable refugee and economic migrant populations, this creates tremendous challenges. South Africa could therefore be expected to serve as a strong ally in any international program to address this issue. To gain its wholehearted cooperation, however, there must be, from South Africa's vantage point, real equity in any international agreement—which means a serious US commitment to curb its own emissions and a system of considerable financial support to African countries that are experiencing the trauma of displacement and depletion of agricultural capacity.

The food crisis that squeezed poor countries in 2008 is a harbinger of what may come. And while South Africa's natural and technical resources give it great potential as a food exporter, any major disruptions to African agriculture could trigger an overwhelming flood of immigrants. This gives South Africa a natural interest in international agreements regarding current and future food crises, and make it a potentially valuable ally to the United States in spreading "green revolution" technologies.

### **Nuclear Proliferation**

The former apartheid government voluntarily dismantled the country's nuclear weapons arsenal before the 1994 transition and welcomed strict international inspection thereafter. South Africa remains solidly opposed to the spread of weapons of mass destruction—including any ambitions of Iran in this regard—and is forswearing nuclear weapon capacity for itself. But South Africa is embittered by the failure of the nuclear powers to honor the compromises that it negotiated with the United States in the diplomatic deal for permanent renewal of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The nuclear powers have moved no closer to nuclear disarmament; indeed, the United States has recently taken steps to improve its nuclear arsenal. The nonnuclear countries were also promised more consultation and a greater role in the implementation of the NPT, but there has not been any real change in how the treaty functions.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, South Africa is facing major power shortages and is reviewing its nuclear options. In addressing the Iran issue, South Africa will staunchly defend the right of countries to develop and process nuclear fuel for peaceful purposes. Finally, after the Iraq war, South Africa will firmly resist any rush to judgment meant to hasten military action against Iran by the United States or Israel. South Africa will remain a key player on this issue as a member of the IAEA and with its moral authority for having relinquished its own nuclear weapons.

South Africa's ambitions for nuclear power pose an opportunity to fine-tune international safeguards to avoid any confrontation and establish a model for peaceful nuclear programs. If the United States were to take an initiative along these lines with South Africa, it would not only respond to one of South Africa's major domestic needs, but reestablish a constructive leadership role and participate in setting the terms for responsible nuclear development.

### **The United Nations and other International Organizations**

As long as South Africa sees itself as a prime candidate for a permanent seat on an expanded UN Security Council, Pretoria will continue to flaunt its independence from the West. This is another reason to expect votes such as those on Burma or Zimbabwe, or South African solidarity with other African countries on the Human Rights Commission, no matter how that undermines its own human rights credentials. Until there is some progress on UN Security Council reform—even a half-way measure such as creating a new advisory committee—South Africa will not be open to working closely with the United States and other major western powers on many of the critical issues in the United Nations. However, a more determined respect for multilateralism by the United States would lay the foundation for more cooperation. Outside the United Nations, the US' recent recognition of an enhanced role for the G-20 and talk of changes in the governorship and policies of the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) are important steps in this direction.

### **Bridging the North-South Divide**

South Africa will be neither a fearless critic of human rights abusers nor a compliant member of any western-dominated League or Community of Democracies. On the contrary, its strategy for extending influence and power emphasizes alliances with the global South's other industrialized

powers and being a natural, even if somewhat off-putting, leader of Africa. But its mounting internal economic problems, domestic political splits, and social fissures will preoccupy the leadership—diminishing their international activism and prominence in the near-term, and prompting possible soul-searching and identity struggles about what South Africa stands for in today’s world and what direction it should take as a leader.

The question is not whether South Africa should be a leader at all; that is a given. But the scope and direction of that leadership is not yet well defined, nor has it yet, even with the political changes under way, fully moved beyond the liberation mentality characteristic of newly independent states. What has emerged recently is a more populist lens that will shape perceptions on many issues. South Africa is not, technically speaking, a newly independent state, but it is a state reborn, newly legitimized and empowered on the world stage after decades as a pariah.

Developments in the sub-region, especially the trajectory of Zimbabwe, and elsewhere on the continent will have a major bearing on the direction of South African foreign policy. Persistent strains from migration (potentially intensified by the effects of climate change) and a lack of progress on African poverty, unemployment, and internal conflicts could prompt South African policy either to turn become confrontational, perhaps even militant, on the one hand, or more constrained and isolationist, on the other.

To enable a more positive scenario, the United States as a world leader must show that a rules-based international system will indeed respond to issues that speak to South Africa’s political core, and that such a system will open doors to those countries that are most disadvantaged by the present global economic and trading arrangements. For their part, the new leaders emerging in South Africa must prove that they are ready to position their country as a unique and effective bridge between the rich and the poor, and the North and the South, both internally and internationally. No other country possesses the kind of credibility needed to span these widely disparate worlds. South Africa could reshape its influence on the world scene by building power as a “conciliator” rather than as a “combatant.” It can be a “rainbow nation” in a much more profound sense, fulfilling many of the hopes of its inspirational rebirth on a global scale as a responsible democracy.

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## **Khehla Shubane's Reaction**

South Africa's foreign policy is indeed framed in noble terms and rooted in human rights. Respect for human rights was at the very core of the ANC government's policy soon after it assumed office in 1994. The constitution reflects the high standards the government set for itself. To this day, political leaders are fond of pointing to the lofty human rights ideals enshrined in the constitution.

As the essay by Lyman and Baker points out, though, there has been a gap between the ideals and the practice of foreign policy. In its actions, the government has not always hewed to these declared ideals. The government has supported regimes with appalling human rights records. The Sudan government with its shameful human rights record in Darfur has received the South African government's support in resisting the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against President Basheer. Mugabe has received rather mild criticism even as he orchestrated the systematic destruction of his country's economy and legal system and inflicted brutal violence upon his political opponents.

Yet this failure to live up to ideals is not a matter of willful deceit by political leaders. Rather, it reflects the naiveté of the new South African policy makers regarding the workings of their own party and the wider world. The country's practice of foreign policy is more in line with the real world in which interests are a driving force in international relations, and countries orient policies around their interests.

It also reflects an expectation in South Africa policymaking circles for the industrialized global North to adopt more benevolent policies. Often government leaders appeal to the moral sense of their peers elsewhere in the hope that merely pointing out the shortcomings will persuade them to do the right thing. Thus, for example, President Mbeki is wont to highlight the precedent of the Marshall Plan as the model and standard for US foreign aid. More recently, the EU has transferred capital to the former East Bloc to develop the economies of countries emerging from communist rule. The point is that the world should do the same to help Africa solve its economic problems.

### **Foreign Policy's Domestic Roots**

Foreign policy in South Africa is indeed shaped by a multiplicity of factors. The preferences of the ruling elite, the strength of the country, the economic resources that it has to underwrite its policy choices and the public's appetite for engagement with the outside world are among the most important.

An immediate factor impinging on foreign policy in South Africa, however, is the very nature of the country's governing political party. The ruling ANC looks set to consolidate its dominant political position for the foreseeable future—a dominance stemming from its roots as a liberation movement, coupled with the association in many people's minds of opposition parties with apartheid. Historically, liberation movements have tended to be multiclass and multiethnic, with greater or lesser success over time. But in virtually every country with a strong liberation movement, that movement has produced a legendary personality who dominates politics in the country. Mandela in South Africa and Samora Machel in Mozambique, to take two examples, are immensely popular political leaders with almost Messianic standing. It is very difficult to oppose the political legacy of such leaders.

Having taken the lead in ending apartheid, the ANC has cast itself as the only party capable of resolving persistent problems such as the poverty that dogs the majority of the population. In doing this the party regularly invokes its past as a premier champion of liberation. It also cites the

apartheid-era role played by its current competitor parties to undermine any claim that they can solve any of the problems they ostensibly helped create. Thus far these arguments have been sufficient to win the support of voters in steadily increasing numbers. Indeed, this political pattern is being repeated throughout most of Southern Africa. The success of liberation movements in monopolizing power on the same basis has delegitimized the very notion of opposition parties and competitive politics. Consequently, an opposition party must compete not only against incumbent parties but also with perceptions that have taken root in the population. In the few countries where opposition groups have gained power, their hold on power remains tenuous, as in Zambia.

This basic political power structure in the region explains the difficulties that political leaders have in criticizing their counterparts. When, for example, Mugabe became overtly undemocratic, other leaders with a background similar to his invoke ties of solidarity forged in their common struggles for national liberation. Further, back when they were liberation movements, these parties campaigned to be the sole legitimate representatives of their people. Thus, in closing ranks and fending off challenges from opposition parties, they are merely remaining true to their original political objective.

Until former liberation movements' firm grip on power is loosened and it becomes accepted that there is nothing unpatriotic in competing for political office, democracy will elude the region. For democracy to take root, it is critical for all citizens of a country to see themselves as free to join the parties of their choice and, through them, eligible to rise to the highest office in the land.

### **South Africa's Global and Regional Roles**

Back in its days of resistance to minority rule, and faced with a militarily strong government, international diplomacy was an important tool in the ANC's struggle—and one of its most effective, especially in mobilizing Western public opinion against apartheid. Arguably, it was the combination of political mobilization inside South Africa and the ANC's diplomatic success in casting apartheid as an affront to all people that finally convinced the South African government to negotiate the transfer of power. Up to that point, the apartheid government had presented itself as the bulwark against communism in southern Africa and consequently rallied Western powers against the ANC as a pawn of the Soviet Union in the Cold War competition. This was accompanied by the generally complacent posture of the world community as a whole. Quite soon after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the race-based oppression in South Africa suddenly became a major issue against which people in Western countries united.

Once in power as the nation's president, longtime ANC leader Thabo Mbeki presided over a distinct shift in foreign policy vision—from a world governed by rules and the emergence of a global liberal international order emphasizing human rights to a realist framework in which South Africa refrains from trying to change the way countries govern themselves. After this shift the ANC government's policy was to support its friends on all issues. The posture toward, say, China or Russia has little to do with respect for human rights but friendship (i.e. the extent of the country's support to South Africa or other developing countries, especially in Africa).

Hence, in its dealings with Zimbabwe, South Africa has emphasized the importance of Zimbabweans themselves in breaking the impasse in their country. South Africa has even worked to keep the question of Zimbabwe off the agenda of the UN Security Council, arguing that the matter posed no threat to world peace. According to this view, sovereignty rests with the people of Zimbabwe, and when their nation confronts serious problems, the outside world should help them find their own solutions rather than invite itself to become more involved.

In an ironic twist for the notions of international leadership and responsible stakeholdership, South Africa's ambition to be added to the UN Security Council as a new permanent member is a major reason for its fulsome defense of sovereignty. Gaining a seat at the world's most influential intergovernmental table is a classically realist, self-interested objective. And as the country seeks to serve as the representative of African countries, South Africa's leaders have concluded there is little sense in alienating any of them.

Yet South Africa has certainly also played a positive role in Africa. The country has facilitated negotiated settlements in several countries around the continent. It has tackled the longstanding severe Hutu-Tutsi divide in Burundi, which is among Africa's most entrenched, polarized, and violent conflicts. The Democratic Republic of Congo, a profoundly dysfunctional country also benefitted from South African assistance—which has provided a basis for much-needed reform and reasonably credible elections. The DRC government is poised to make further improvements that would have been impossible without South Africa's critical initial participation.

### **Neither Loyal nor Hostile to the West**

President Mbeki is personally quite passionate about what he calls Africa's renaissance. A core premise of this reawakening is that Africans themselves should take a lead in rebuilding the continent. Mbeki has put his money where his mouth is by playing the role of peacemaker in several conflicts in Africa.

Undoubtedly there is a benefit to South Africa in an Africa that works. With Sub-Saharan Africa's most advanced economy, South Africa is mindful of its links both to the regional and global economy, and to the connection between the two. The investments and technology transfer immanent in foreign investments are of considerable advantage to South Africa's economy. Thus Mbeki's work in helping resolve problems in Africa is, in part, an effort to foster the kind of regional stability that will encourage more investment into South Africa.

Although South Africa has not always shown the support for US initiatives that the US foreign policy community might have expected, it can hardly be described as hostile to the US. To cite one dramatic example, one of the suspects who was subsequently convicted and sentenced in the US in connection with the attack of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania had been captured in South Africa, where he hoped to escape prosecution. On finding him, in South Africa the authorities immediately repatriated him, despite a law prohibiting the government from repatriating individuals to countries where they might face the death penalty without assurances that the suspect would not be sentenced to death. Pretoria did not even seek this assurance; it was only given retrospectively and after the constitutional court had issued a judgment that was highly unflattering to the government. The court in the US took the judgment of the court in South Africa into account in passing sentence. In another instance, the government incurred the wrath of human rights groups by repatriating an illegal militant Islamist immigrant back to Pakistan where, it was argued, he was certain to be handed over to US authorities.

And in an apt symbol of globalization and financial interdependence, the Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE) was recently shut down for almost the entire day because of a systems problem in London. The JSE is linked to an operating system in London which if it crashes, makes it impossible for the market in South Africa to operate. This operational link renders the South African market completely dependent on a western country for a critical function—not a link that would be countenanced by a government harboring deep anti-Western sentiment. But as with the rest of its foreign policy, there are political realities at work, in this case regional. Southern Africa is steeped in anti-US and -Western sentiment; if South Africa seeks a leading role in the sub-region and in Africa more widely, asserting a measure of independence from US hegemony is important for its credibility.