

Forecasting South Africa's Foreign Policy in the Next 20 years



20 April 2016

Executive Summary

On the 20th April 2016, SALO facilitated a dialogue in Cape Town entitled: “Forecasting South African Foreign Policy for the Next Twenty Years”. This dialogue took place in the context of South Africa’s Foreign Policy having been both appreciated and criticised in the past few years, with constant calls for clarity and pressure against SA to take stronger stances on global issues. Indeed, the audience articulated the fact that SA’s foreign policy plays a huge role in terms of the country’s future prospects for progress and prosperity. As such, an engagement on what could be the key objectives of this foreign policy for the next 20 years is crucial, and highly relevant. In his opening, the chair of the dialogue, Mr Tawanda Sachikonye (SALO Researcher), pointed out that the dialogue would focus on the following relevant questions:

- The influence of the domestic context and imperatives on South African foreign policy;
- The question of whether economic development is South Africa’s over-arching national interest priority;
- South Africa’s role regionally and continentally, and lastly;

- South Africa’s engagement with the global North – specifically the European Union - and the global South, including BRICS partners - China in particular

Ms Bestie Smith, Chief Director: Policy, Mediation Support, Policy Research and Analysis Unit (MSPRAU), Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) was the key note speaker, among other speakers* from the panel and floor

Summary of Presentations

Ambassador Laim MacGobhann, Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland to South Africa



The Ambassador pointed out that it is vital for a country within the global community, such as South Africa, to have a foreign policy. Despite the many challenges that it faces, SA needs to remember that it has had a good and strong relationship, both historically and currently, with the countries in the North. These relationships continue to be vital, and are mostly informed and expressed in South Africa’s foreign policy documents. The Ambassador pointed out that it is important, therefore to remember that SA has the backing of the Western countries. H.E MacGobhann asserted that in revisiting its foreign policy, SA needs to focus on the question of development and prosperity - both domestically and continentally - as well as the vitality of its role in regional, continental and global politics. He also highlighted the importance of SA’s citizens abroad, including

their role in promoting and protecting the foreign policy of SA. In light of current uncertainties, there are growing concerns in the global North about SA’s foreign policy, the ambassador noted. There is a seemingly cold relationship towards the North, while engagements between SA and Southern partners including China, Brazil, India and Russia appear to be developing rapidly and with more enthusiasm. This, he said, is concerning for the EU partner countries.

Ms Bestie Smith, Acting Chief Director: MSPRAU, DIRCO

In her opening remarks, Ms Smith pointed out that Africa is South Africa’s key area of international engagement. She located SA’s foreign policy within the context of cooperation and partnership. According to her, this is informed and validated by the important role that the country plays in global governance institutions. Citing an observation that the world is becoming more complicated by the hour, Ms Smith called for SA’s foreign policy to best serve its national interests, while contributing towards the creation of a better Africa, in a better world.



Regarding SA’s national interests, Ms Smith raised SA’s ‘triple challenges’ as non-negotiable foreign policy imperatives: the eradication of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Ms Smith put forward that in the next

twenty years, SA's Foreign Policy will continue to be guided by its existing values, together with its national interests, to address the aforementioned domestic challenges. SA's foreign policy should also aim to improve the quality of the country's education system, health services, and infrastructure. This has always been at the centre of SA's approach in the region, the continent and internationally.

In achieving these objectives for the next 20 years, SA's foreign policy will rely heavily on the quality of its diplomats, according to Ms Smith. She further noted that the intelligence services and government in general will have a bearing on how successful SA will be in reaching these objectives. Therefore, a correct balance between multilateral and bilateral engagement will be crucial, as SA traverses the trend of big countries entering into multi-country agreements. Accordingly, Ms Smith reminded the audience that foreign policy is not an end in itself; "powerful states have it at their disposal to bulldoze other countries under the banner of national security". For SA, what has been crucial in its influence is its sharing of experience in conflict resolution and mediation. According to Ms Smith, the tenacity of SA negotiators has served the country well in multilateral diplomacy such as the G77; the UN; the AU and SADC.

The fact that SA is known for having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, and a strong and vibrant democracy, has been an advantage to SA within the global community, Ms Smith further pointed out. She noted that this needs to be taken into account as an integral part of foreign policy evaluation and objectives for the next 20 years. Ms Smith pointed out that there are key issues that South Africa needs to prioritise as vital to its foreign policy; these include Africa, and the economic setting of the global community today. She maintained that these will inform the country's engagement and relations with both the North and South. She reminded the audience that the EU and US remain central to South Africa's strive towards sustainable growth and development. The nature of global politics poses a number of threats to SA's national interests.

In concluding, Ms Smith pointed out that there remain major questions to be asked. One of which is, "in a case where SA's national interests are threatened, will the existing methods of foreign policy persuasion be enough?" She pointed out that these methods of persuasion include, the country's values, experience during and after Apartheid, stable democracy and soft power approaches.

Ambassador Welile Nhlapo: First SA ambassador to the OAU (now African Union), former SA Ambassador to Washington DC, former Special Envoy to the Great Lakes and former National Security Advisor in the Presidency (President J Zuma)

Ambassador Nhlapo took a slightly different approach in addressing the dialogue. He argued that people need to look at South Africa's foreign policy in the next 20 years through the lens of what has happened in the past 20 years. He pointed out that this will inform us as to whether the country is still going in the right direction in terms of its foreign policy approach. Furthermore, this will be vital in looking at the new challenges that

SA is facing, and how it should respond to these challenges. According to ambassador Nhlapo, it is important to acknowledge that post-1994 SA emerged into a new world order. Therefore, some of the policies that the ruling African National Congress had set for the country in the early 90's had had to change drastically due to the global context. As such, the foreign policy objectives of SA had to be adjusted and defined in terms of the new global environment.



Emphasising the fact that Africa, too, was changing, he articulated that SA did not enter the continental bodies to change Africa or to ‘teach’ Africa about human rights. Rather, SA entered into the continent at a time when Africa was having to adjust into these new global complexities. In highlighting the importance that SA places on its relations with SADC and Africa as a whole, Ambassador Nhlapo argued that regional cooperation was one of the major features of the 90’s. As such, it was vital to remember that SA is part of Southern Africa, Africa and part of the global village. It is from this viewpoint that these areas will always remain vital in the country’s Foreign Policy, and will always be prioritised as Ms Smith highlighted.

According to Ambassador Nhlapo, key to SA’s foreign policy is the consolidation of its democracy, since the two are interlinked. Challenges to SA’s democratic institutions and slips in the manner in which the country manages its politics should be avoided. Ambassador Nhlapo pointed out that domestic stability is paramount, as it represents the expression of Foreign Policy as defined by domestic imperatives. In terms of Africa, Ambassador Nhlapo argued that SA should take note that conflicts are not going to end; instead they are going to take on new shape and form. Highlighting the current situation, Ambassador Nhlapo raised the issues of persisting violence, conflict and governance issues. He argued that the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Burundi and Zimbabwe should be of importance for SA’s Foreign Policy objectives and role. He argued that Lesotho and Zimbabwe have a direct impact on what happens in South Africa, in that both countries are the immediate neighbours of the country. Therefore, SA’s Foreign Policy in SADC for the next twenty years will be very much tested on these cases, among others. The question therefore, should be, what is the role of SA in moving SADC and Africa towards a sustainable development path?

Ambassador Nhlapo’s presentation also touched on how the global dynamics will affect South Africa’s foreign policy prospects; especially in light of the situation in Europe- in terms of changes in the EU, with Britain’s looming referendum. Closely linked to the unity and integration of European countries, Ambassador Nhlapo argued that the aforementioned needs to be put into perspective; any shift in the EU would have an effect on SA’s foreign policy.

According to Ambassador Nhlapo, for the next twenty years and beyond, SA will continue to push for the reform of global institutions- especially the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). He argued that the continued call for the reform of the UNSC bears in it the very question regarding the relationship between the UN and the global ‘people’; not states. SA must analyse the last twenty years of its foreign policy, to gain insight regarding areas where it has failed in this quest. In his conclusion, the Ambassador pointed out that as SA moves forward after two decades as an important player in global politics, the country should ask itself how it can evaluate its mediation efforts in terms of foreign policy. This, he observed, is even more critical when one looks at the “one step forward, two steps back” situation in countries such as Burundi. He argued that these continuing governance and violence issues raise major questions in terms of mediation efforts and sustainable peace.

Sanusha Naidu, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD)



Opening her presentation, Ms Naidu pointed out that when it comes to foreign policy, it is imperative to note that the more the world globalises; the more it creates interdependencies and complications. Ms Naidu highlighted some of the interesting issues that emerged from the 2012 publication entitled *Global Trends 2025*. According to Ms Naidu, this publication mapped out what could be the major global issues in 2025. She pointed out that one of the issues was the tension between economic growth and the emerging groupings such as BRICS. Fuelled by the rise of emerging powers such as China and India, these groupings are used to push the economic growth model trajectory. Ms Naidu observed that the whole process of fuelling an economic growth trajectory is at the same time increasing tensions around the triple helix challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

In terms of the current global dynamics, Ms Naidu pointed out the existing contradictions in terms of the model of governance. She argued that the shift towards democratisation has been met by many issues. Through the manipulation of elections, especially in African countries, the process has become a minimalist democratic process. As a result of this, there is an issue of legitimacy crisis, which fuels post-election violence and conflict. Ms Naidu commented that new conflicts and new areas of what constitutes conflict did not only cover the context of the traditional security dynamic. Instead, they also touched on human security dimensions of conflict, especially with regards to climate change. She argued that this has been vital when it comes to the challenges faced by humanity today, especially in developing countries.

In terms of the next 20 years, Ms Naidu reminded the audience that domestic economic policy is tied to SA's foreign policy. Therefore, she pointed out, it is essential for South Africa to have a viable method to respond to a very adverse and unfavourable global economic system. According to Ms Naidu, it is important to balance the domestic economy, while simultaneously opening up to global markets and external actors. She maintained that this is a difficult task; yet SA will have to deal with this complex navigation.

In terms of global governance, Ms Naidu argued that SA foreign policy in the next twenty years needs to reflect on things that need to be changed in the global governance architecture. The country needs to be clear about the role it must play in that change. Highlighting the central tenets that should embody SA's foreign policy moving forward, she argued that pragmatism should be essential. According to Ms Naidu, this must be very much linked to the reality of the international system, and clear national interests. She pointed out the difficulties of having normative impulses in a global system where most countries act on self-interest. Accordingly, Ms Naidu pointed out that in this context, SA needs to be clear about how it promotes its soft power approach that is based on its commendable democratic system and constitutionalism.

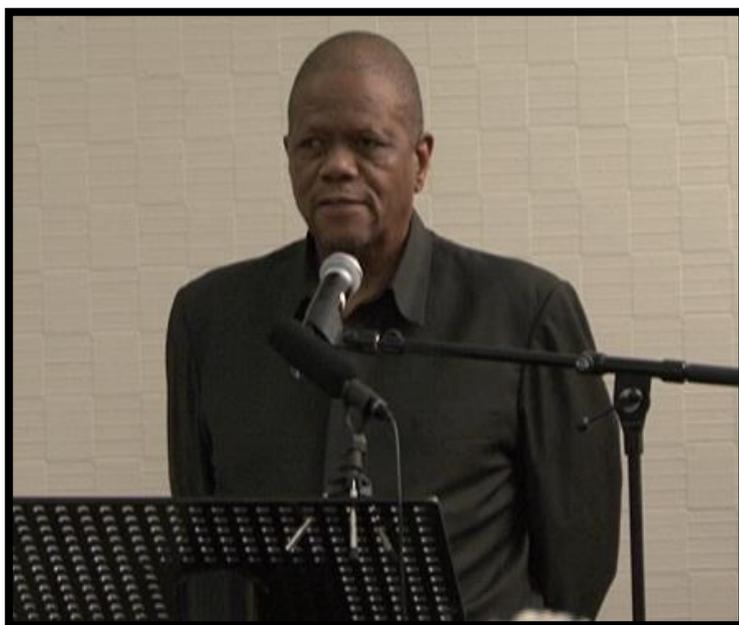
In touching on the realities of SA's foreign policy today, Ms Naidu argued that the country has not lost its normative value in the global community. She argued that SA needs to distinguish this normative value, and try to defend its actions regarding its national interests. The country should not be apologetic about what it wants; and needs to protect and defend this position. Therefore, the idea of soft power must be looked at in order to continue being vital in the global progress of peace, security and mediation, Ms Naidu pointed out.

Progressing with her presentation, Ms Naidu agreed with the previous speaker - that Africa is the real core of SA's foreign policy. As such, she advised that it is essential for the country to engage with, not just Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia, but other equally important states such as Angola. Concluding her presentation, Ms Naidu highlighted three points that are critical for SA's foreign policy for the next twenty years:

- In revising its foreign policy, SA needs to be coherent and pragmatic. The country needs to set its strategic orientation and strategic imperatives
- SA needs to be clear about the kind of a development partner it wants to be, within the SADC region, the African continent and globally
- It is also essential for SA to further professionalise its foreign policy practitioners. This is due to the fact that diplomats need to have a thorough understanding of economic diplomacy and how the world operates

Ambassador George Nene: South Africa's first High Commissioner to Nigeria, former Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations in Geneva; former Deputy Director- General Multilateral (DIRCO), and former Advisor to the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Hon. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane.

Contributing from the floor, Ambassador Nene pointed out that foreign policy is not shaped only by one factor, or by regional or national interest exclusively; he argued that it is shaped by many factors. Importantly, it arises out of domestic imperatives, and is influenced by everything taking place globally. Ambassador Nene argued that many have criticised SA of being constantly caught in a conflict between values and national interests in its foreign policy. Yet it is imperative to remind ourselves that if foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, for SA, domestic values are an integral part of SA's foreign policy objective. As such, together with national interests, these values are expressed within the global community.



Ambassador Nene reminded the audience that the world is not static, and that as such, SA's foreign policy has to change in order to respond adequately to the challenges of the day, both domestically and internationally. If it fails to do so, it will become irrelevant to South Africa first, before it becomes irrelevant to the international community. Highlighting why the SA government established the Association of former Ambassadors, former High Commissioners and former Chief Representatives, Ambassador Nene argued that it was to "plough back" what the country invested in former diplomats (such as himself). He argued that it is vital in the process of helping to create the new South African diplomat- "the one we would like to see in twenty years". Ambassador Nene emphasised that this is an essential initiative that will also serve to enhance public discourse.

In his conclusion, Ambassador Nene asserted that SA has been unable to live up to its high expectations, because of the huge challenges that it has faced. He argued that from the beginning of SA's democracy,

there were unreasonably high expectations- both domestically and internationally. As such, Ambassador Nene argued that the role of the UN towards the people of developing countries needs to be realised and practised by all states.

Contributions from the floor

Among many questions from the floor, the audience wanted to know about the role of compromise in SA's quest to be a leading player in regional, continental and global politics. This related to the question of how SA manages the realities that it faces with the expectations of other countries. **Webster Zambara** from the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation asked about the DIRCO's aim to establish a Mediation Support Unit. He asked if this will also work with the Mediation Support Unit at SADC, and what its targets will be in terms of training mediators (SA only, or SADC?). Among the diplomats who attended the dialogue workshop, **HE Phillip Jada Natana ambassador of South Sudan** commented on the role that SA is playing with regards to issues of global leadership. He insisted that SA needs to be an integral part of human rights leadership in the global community. **COSAS** (Congress of South African Students) participants in the audience asked about the important role of the youth in national, regional and continental bodies. While **Louise Asmal** concluded the questions from the floor by commenting on the role of SA in adhering to the Convention on Arms Control. She asked whether the country still supplies guns to other African countries.

Responses

In responding to the questions posed by the audience, **Ambassador Nhlapo** argued that there must be clear guidelines as to where SA wants to focus in terms of its national interest. **Ms Bestie Smith** responded to the question around the Mediation Support Unit, saying that the Mediation Support Unit was established to develop trained mediators; and that SADC is an integral part of this unit. Ms Smith argued that it is not only geared towards international participation, or participation in international mediation; but that it is for people in South Africa as well. She pointed out that a major focus will be placed on the involvement of women. **Ambassador MacGabhann** appreciated the fact that the presenters articulated the pivotal parts of SA's foreign policy. He argued that it is important that the global North and South avoid tensions, and focus on improving the lives of global citizens. Pointing out how the discussion had been valuable, he said that it is vital for SA to appreciate its history with its Northern counterparts. **Ms Niadu** added that in terms of professionalising the diplomatic corps; these are the eyes, the voices, and the ears of what a country actually wants. In terms of the role of the South African Association of former Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Chief Representatives, Ambassador Nene articulated that their role is to equip upcoming diplomats with skills. This will enable them to "go and do what they are supposed to do in the interests of SA's domestic policies".

Conclusion

In concluding the dialogue workshop, Mr Sachikonye thanked the panellists for a very rich discussion. In summary, he pointed out that from the discussion of the day, it seemed that economic progress is at the heart of South Africa's national interest. As such, foreign policy must prioritise economic development, especially in light of the triple domestic challenges that the country faces. The question then, as Mr. Sachikonye put it, is to what extent can South Africa have a developmental foreign policy? In terms of SADC, the challenge that remains is the clear articulation of a meaningful regional integration policy.

*Ambassador Welile Nhlapo, first SA ambassador to the OAU (now African Union), former SA Ambassador to Washington DC, former Special Envoy to the Great Lakes and former National Security Advisor in the Presidency (President J Zuma); Ambassador George Nene, South Africa's first High Commissioner to Nigeria, former Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations in

Geneva; former Deputy Director- General Multilateral (DIRCO), and former Advisor to the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Hon. Maite Nkoana–Mashabane; Ambassador Liam MacGabhann, Ireland’s Ambassador to South Africa; Ms Sanusha Naidu, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD). The dialogue was enhanced by the participation of a representative and involved grouping of participants including members of civil society, policy makers including a number of African and Northern diplomats (notably Ambassador Philip Jada Nata, South Sudan’s Ambassador to South Africa) as well as academics and members of the public.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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