

Major SA Foreign Policy Trends and Issues for 2016



INTRODUCTION

This policy brief stems from a multi-stakeholder dialogue hosted by SALO on the 15th of March 2016, to examine South Africa's "Major Foreign Policy Trends and Issues for 2016". Speakers* included, among others, Mr. Aziz Pahad (South Africa's Special Envoy to the Middle East and former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Ambassador Welile Nhlapo, an expert and career diplomat who has served SA's foreign service in several capacities, including state security advisor to former president, Mr. Thabo Mbeki. The dialogue sought to address two main questions namely;

- What are likely to be the key items on SA's Foreign Policy agenda for 2016?
- What are some of the key trends and considerations likely to inform the country's international engagements in 2016?

Below is a summation and analysis of the most important points from the meeting.

ANALYSIS OF KEY ISSUES

The ANC's fundamental values will continue to underpin South Africa's foreign policy

The ANC's core founding values as reflected in the freedom charter, will continue to guide SA's foreign policy, according to Mr. Pahad. This will be shaped of course, by national, regional and international contexts. While this may warrant new tactics, the principles will remain the same. Mr. Pahad explained:

"in 2016 our foreign policy will continue to be progressive, anti-colonialist, anti-neo-colonialist, internationalist and multi-lateralist. Democracy and human rights, understood in the broad sense to include economic and social rights, good governance, anti-racism, anti-tribalism, peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for sovereignty and equality of all states big and small, are all important elements of our foreign policy".

This assertion was echoed by Mrs. Shannon Ebrahim, who while highlighting some of the dilemmas in the actual implementation of SA's foreign policy, maintained that "the concepts [that underpin] South African foreign policy are very good and very solid: those are human rights, good governance, democracy, peace and security. We have the right concepts underpinning our foreign policy".

Africa in general and Southern Africa in particular, will continue to be South Africa's foreign policy priority

All speakers projected that the region (Southern Africa) and wider continent would continue to be the key focus and preoccupation of the South African government. In particular, regional integration was identified as crucial to undoing "the balkanization of Africa since the Berlin Conference of 1884-5" (Mr. Pahad) which continue to hinder Africa's development. Ambassador Nhlapo added to this, by asserting that, "...the priority for us (SA) will be the region of Southern Africa".

African conflicts will be a key South African foreign policy challenge throughout 2016

Conflicts in Africa are a major obstacle to development and prosperity throughout the continent. South Africa has been and will continue to play an active role in addressing conflicts in Burundi, South Sudan, Lesotho, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Central African Republic, Zimbabwe and Madagascar were also key concerns due to the underlying threats to sustainable peace and stability.

There is a tangible link between SA's foreign policy and the domestic context

South Africa's domestic situation has an influence on its foreign policy. Mr Deprose Muchena pointed out that "...foreign policy successes are determined, sometimes, [if not] mostly, by domestic policy... because the credibility of foreign policy [at times] depends on what you do internally". According to Mr. Muchena, it is

therefore important for South Africa to “strengthen its constitutional project, its rule of law credentials, strengthen its tolerance for dialogue with civil society, and jealously guard what it gained in 1994”.

South Africa's engagement and commitments throughout Africa will complement its national interest

South Africa's political relations, as well as mediation and peacekeeping duties with African countries, have a bearing on its economic and national interests. Therefore, South Africa’s economic growth is dependent to some extent on the state of the region and broader continent. South Africa, according to Mr. Muchena,

"...sees Africa as a key part of its foreign policy for political reasons but also for economic reasons... Over the last twenty years, South Africa has invested very heavily on the continent; it makes up forty percent of Africa's GDP... So South Africa has an interest in a stable and peaceful continent for its enlightened self-interest".

RECOMMENDATIONS

South African foreign policy must continue to be guided by ethical ideals and values

South Africa's foreign policy formulation and implementation needs to be consistently underpinned by its historically strong moral values and principles. These will guide and enhance its various mediation, peacekeeping and economic diplomacy initiatives throughout the continent.

South Africa and other African countries need to prioritise and invest in Africa's Peace and Security Architecture

South Africa needs to continue to be a key contributor in terms of augmenting African peacekeeping, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction and human security oriented institutions. This intervention should involve the active participation of other African countries. A key outcome of African states effectively strengthening the institutions mentioned above, will be greater recognition and acknowledgement of African ownership and leadership in resolving conflicts on the continent. Mrs. Ebrahim noted:

“How do we get the [UN] to recognise an African roadmap for peace? Because it seems, they are engaging in the politics of power and politics of completely indifferent to any African roadmap. So I would say those things that could make the case for an African roadmap is to prove that the AU can deal with our African conflicts”.

Also, regional capabilities need to be strengthened to ensure that these bodies can adequately respond to conflict crises. A key aspect of this is the implementing of early warning mechanisms.

South African civil society has a crucial role to play with regards to foreign policy formulation and implementation

South African civil society can make vital contributions to the country’s foreign policy, in terms of advocating for greater accountability and conduct consistent with principles of human rights and justice. The country's civil

society can also make useful recommendations around how South Africa's foreign policy can better relate to the country's pressing domestic priorities such as unemployment, inequality and inclusive economic growth.

South Africa needs to promote initiatives aimed at achieving greater regional economic integration

SADC's economic integration is a priority for South Africa, especially in light of how economic development can enhance long-term peace and stability. Therefore, South Africa needs to promote and emphasise the importance of SADC adhering to the timeframes it has set in respect of initiatives such as the Southern African free trade area, customs union and a common market. To date, the initiatives and processes mentioned above have not materialised, in spite of the set timeframes.

***LIST OF SPEAKERS**

1. Mr. Aziz Pahad - South Africa's Special Envoy to the Middle East and former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
2. Ambassador Welile Nhlapo, first SA ambassador to the OAU, former SA Ambassador to Washington DC, former Special Envoy to the Great Lakes and former National Security Advisor in the Presidency.
3. Mrs. Shannon Ebrahim, Foreign Editor for Independent Media
4. Mr. Deprose Muchena, Regional Director for Southern Africa, Amnesty International.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Brief 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 Policy Brief 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.

