

Building International, Regional and National Consensus

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Forecasting South African Foreign Policy for the next Twenty Years



20th April 2016, Pretoria

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”. Ms Bestie Smith, Chief Director: Policy, Research and Analysis Unit (PRAU), Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), gave the keynote address. Other speakers* included former South African government ministers and advisors, the Irish Ambassador, as well as foreign policy analysts.

The aim of the dialogue was to initiate an informed and representative dialogue on the future trajectory of South African foreign policy over the next twenty years. This dialogue was a contribution to the broader civil society periodic review and assessment of South African foreign policy approaches and processes.

The key outcomes of the discussion include:

- ❖ An acknowledgement that South African foreign policy will continue to be underpinned by pressing domestic imperatives pertaining to socioeconomic development such as job creation, addressing inequality and combatting poverty

- ❖ The esteemed speakers, noted that they had a role to play in terms of the development of an astute and versatile diplomatic corps to formulate and implement South African foreign policy over the next twenty years

The key issues raised related to contemporary concerns and issues that will affect the formulation and implementation of South African foreign policy over the coming twenty years. Below is a summary of key issues and recommendations that came out of the dialogue.

KEY ISSUES

The need for consistent evaluation of South African foreign policy

It is crucial to consistently assess and review foreign policy on “an ongoing basis, to make sure it is relevant, not just to the country’s own needs but in terms of its place in the world”; as noted by Irish Ambassador Liam MacGabhann. This is not only important in terms of ensuring that South African foreign policy is able to adequately respond to trends and changes within the international system; but also to ensure responsiveness to citizen’ needs.

Economic and Social Development will continue to be the key aspects underpinning South African foreign policy

Economic and social development are the key aspects that underpin most countries’ respective foreign policies, including that of South Africa. Therefore, queries such as: “[h]ow do we move our country forward in terms of...prosperity? How do you deal with the economy and how do you sell South Africa as a place for foreign investment in the economy, to create jobs?” are highly pertinent to SA foreign policy, and highlight the fundamental link between the domestic and international context. Ms Smith (DIRCO) stated that South Africa’s ‘triple challenges’ in terms of eradicating poverty, addressing unemployment and reducing inequality are essential and “non-negotiable” imperatives of South Africa’s national interest. Therefore, South Africa’s foreign policy needs to effectively contribute towards addressing the aforementioned domestic ‘triple challenges’. In light of this, South Africa’s foreign policy over the next twenty years is likely to be focused on tackling the domestic ‘triple challenges’.

The importance of North-South engagement

South Africa needs to pragmatically continue to engage both its Northern and Southern partners, especially as Northern partners such as the EU continue to be key economic and development partners; while South Africa’s Southern partnerships are beginning to yield significant gains. In order to continue to maintain constructive relations with both Northern and Southern partners, South Africa’s foreign policy and economic trade decisions will need to be guided by informed pragmatism.

Balance between self-interest and aspirational values

South Africa needs to maintain a poised balance between foreign policy approaches motivated by self-interest, and those underpinned by idealistic and aspirational values. As asserted by one of the main speakers: “[t]he challenge, however, will be to project and implement our values realistically, without yielding to the ruthlessness of *real politik* and power politics, or getting carried away by idealistic mirages”. An example was given pertaining to the promotion of South Africa’s significant arms trade industry, in relation to South Africa’s aspirational goal to promote peace and security throughout the continent (and further afield). This underscores the delicate balance to be maintained between economic interests and ideal based values.

Africa is central to South Africa’s International Relations

Africa is South Africa’s key “area of international engagement”. Therefore, South Africa’s key focus is centered on the region and the broader continent. Some of South Africa’s key foreign policy contributions are related to its peace building, conflict resolution and mediation efforts across the continent.

The need to appraise and examine South Africa’s mediation efforts

Ambassador Nhlapo noted that it was important for South Africa to reevaluate and recalibrate its mediation efforts, as well as peace and security initiatives on the continent, especially in the Great Lakes Region. In contexts such as Burundi, there has been a slide backwards in terms of the progress that had initially been achieved in terms of ensuring stability. In light of this, South Africa needs to seriously consider how it will effectively intervene in such countries, where prior peace agreements and processes are either being reneged on, or simply overlooked.

The issue of self-interest in relation to mediation and peace initiatives

South Africa's peace initiatives are sometimes tied to self-interested objectives. The case of the DRC highlights this, as the Inga Hydropower Project is a key initiative that South Africa (as well as other African countries) has pledged considerable resources towards. The Inga project has been projected to provide significant electrical energy for a number of African countries, including South Africa.

Reform of global governance institutions such as the UN

The issue of the reform of global governance institutions will continue to be a key concern for South African foreign policy over the next twenty years. Ambassador Nhlapo noted that it was important for there to be more civil society representation within the United Nations (UN) system. He stated: "...I think the fundamental issue is, how do we get the [UN] back to the Preamble of the Charter? It says, 'We the people of the United Nations.' it is not saying, 'we the states', or 'we the P5', or anything like that...What is the relationship between the citizens and the [UN]?"

South Africa and the AU

South Africa's relation with the African Union (AU) will also be an important issue for South African policy over the coming 20 years. South Africa will have to be clear about its contributions and commitments to AU initiatives (such as Agenda 2063) and processes. A key test will be whether South Africa can strengthen and enhance African-led solutions and approaches to the various challenges facing the continent.

Global issues such as migration and terrorism will have an impact on South African foreign policy

Universal concerns such as high migration levels and worldwide terrorism will also be important considerations for South African foreign policy, as they will have an effect on the country's foreign policy approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa must effectively project its values externally

South Africa needs to effectively channel, or rather 'export', its domestic values as enshrined through its highly commended and exemplary conventions, including its Constitution. This would mean that South Africa would then be able to augment its promotion of issues such as: socioeconomic rights, freedom of speech, and separation of powers, amongst others.

South Africa needs to clearly express its particular interests through its foreign policy

South Africa needs to be articulate and strategic in terms of how it expresses its normative actor role in relation to its self-interest objectives as underpinned by its own particular values. Therefore, there must be an informed, delicate balance in terms of how on one hand South Africa promotes aspirational normative values, and on the other it actively pursues its interests as guided by its domestic 'triple challenges'. At times, the two roles may not be mutually exclusive, and where there are tensions, these need to be clearly articulated. This will allow for more consistency and clarity in terms of foreign policy implementation.

South Africa has to strengthen ties with key African stakeholders and deepen integration efforts

South Africa asserts that the key focus of its international relations and foreign policy, is Africa. In light of this, it is imperative that South Africa seeks to strengthen its relations and ties to key African actors such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria. These countries will be leading actors within the continent over the coming twenty years, therefore it is important for South Africa to establish close ties with these countries, underpinned by partnership and cooperation. South Africa's prioritisation of the African continent also means that it has to robustly steer greater regional integration within SADC, with the long-term goal of increasing greater intra-African trade.

Esteemed former and senior South African foreign policy makers must be given greater opportunities to impart their lessons learnt from experience and service

Initiatives that ensure that esteemed former and senior South African foreign policy makers – including ministers, diplomats and ministry officials - are able to impart their experience and lessons learned to their junior counterparts, need to be strengthened and strongly promoted. This is to ensure that South African diplomats are well-placed to navigate South Africa's foreign policy challenges for the coming twenty years. This would also ensure that former missteps can be constructively imparted, with the hopes of ensuring that future such mistakes can be avoided in future.

Competency of politically appointed diplomats must be ensured

There is a need to ensure that politically appointed diplomats are competent, qualified and extensively trained by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (and other relevant ministries, such as the Department of Trade and Industry). This is to ensure that South Africa is adequately and effectively represented abroad. It was noted an imbalance that favours politically appointed diplomats over more experienced career diplomats is not ideal.

South Africa's arms trade must not disrupt its peace-making efforts

South Africa needs to meticulously ensure that its arms trade exports do not undermine its mediation and peace efforts throughout the continent and further afield.

***LIST OF SPEAKERS**

1. Ambassador Wellie 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
2. 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
3. Ambassador Liam MacGabhann, Ireland's Ambassador to South Africa
4. 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 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 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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