

Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policies of the Mbeki and Zuma Governments

There is a commonly held view in foreign policy analysis circles that in the transition from the Mandela to the Mbeki government, continuity was the order of the day, while from Mbeki to Zuma it purportedly suggested change. Was this the case? We are interested in establishing whether Mbeki introduced important nuances, refinements and changes in foreign policy that might reveal some discontinuities, and whether the foreign policy directions and strategies of the Zuma presidency resembled a fundamental break from those pursued by Mbeki. In terms of the latter, the leadership tensions in the African National Congress (ANC) which brought about the Zuma presidency were said to be accompanied by changes in policy. Could it be that this rupture in the ruling ANC and the government was ironically characterised by policy continuities?

Chris Landsberg

Chris Landsberg is Professor of International Relations at the University of Johannesburg.

Introduction

Paradoxical though it may sound, the foreign policy of South Africa, like that of all other states, is a story essentially of both continuity and change. In political and foreign policy analysis, change and continuity depend on several explanatory factors, including institutional, environmental and personality dynamics.¹ Here should be added aspects such as routines in decision making, beliefs, socialisation, and human and financial resources, which all have a bearing on whether a government's foreign policy is the product of continuity or a subject of change.² Let us remember that it is in the nature of governments, especially bureaucracies, not to favour change over continuity. South African foreign policy theorist Costa Georghiou argues that 'persistence and change coexist uneasily, and it is this mixture that makes the future so uncertain. The twin forces of integration and disintegration, **continuity and change**, creates a mood of both confidence and disorientation in international politics'.³

In this article we seek to understand the paradox inherent in South Africa's foreign policy by examining its avowed macro-agendas within a world increasingly realigning itself in powerful economic groupings. It is given as read that statements made by policymakers

may assume different forms when delivered to different audiences – for instance for the consumption of domestic voters or for the global media – yet it is precisely this schizophrenia, the legacy of decades of hounding by a vehemently critical world, that has informed the new Republic's political discourse over the last 12 years or so.

This policy article tests the commonly held view that, in the transition from the Mandela to the Mbeki government, continuity was the order of the day, while from Mbeki to Zuma it purportedly suggested change. We are interested in establishing whether Mbeki introduced important nuances, refinements and changes in foreign policy that might reveal some discontinuities, and whether the foreign policy directions and strategies of the Zuma presidency resembled a fundamental break from those pursued by Mbeki. In terms of the latter, we consider whether the leadership tensions in the ANC which brought about the Zuma presidency were accompanied by changes in policy, or whether this rupture was ironically characterised by policy continuities. More interestingly, we consider whether stated policy by the Zuma government was in line with practice followed or whether there were deviations.

1999–2008: Mbeki's Change trumping Continuity

On the face of it, Thabo Mbeki's vision was more internationalist than that of Nelson Mandela, perhaps reflecting his exposure to international affairs during the ANC's decades in exile, including his years attending university in England and political training in Russia. Certainly, when he replaced Mandela as president in June 1999, the impetus of his diplomacy was first to overhaul foreign policy and make it

more strategic. He came to advance the course of a highly ambitious transformational and developmental foreign policy programme and, in many respects, he modified and refined many of the foreign policy directives of the Mandela government, of which he was a key member.

Where Mandela's government had spoken of domestic and continental African interests and of 'universality', Mbeki would seek, somewhat ambitiously perhaps, to put these words into actual policy. He would come to herald the Republic as an 'active agent of progressive change'⁴ as he pursued a foreign policy of redress and development. He was determined to see South Africa become a pivotal state on the continent, as a reliable global player following a predictable foreign policy in pursuit of a progressive agenda. To do this he would come to rely heavily on negotiations, diplomacy and what became known as 'soft power'.

Mandela had struggled to articulate an effective national interest paradigm and settled for a foreign policy that sought in part to realise the goals of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), notably job creation, addressing inequalities and accelerating economic growth. Mbeki however thought he could realise his predecessor's wish to infuse into foreign policy the notion of national interest. To do so, he set out to use domestic sources for foreign policy and address the dichotomy of the country's domestic and internationalist roles by anchoring foreign relations, in the eyes of voters at least, on domestic goals. A strategic 2005 foreign affairs document stated that 'domestic priorities guide the Department's policies and underpin its activities'.⁵ It further stated that 'South Africa's interaction with the international community must necessarily reflect its national imperatives, including such critical issues as job creation and poverty alleviation'.⁶

Eradicating poverty, unemployment and inequality were not merely ends in their own right – they were also means to boosting the economy in a cyclical process that Mbeki championed under the rubric of a 'developmental state'. In his modernisation project, emphasis was constantly placed on creating a macro-economic environment that could boost growth and create opportunities for sharing it. Domestic and foreign policy was informed by his understanding that South Africa was characterised by a context of 'Two Nations' and 'Two Economies'. One was largely poor and black, living mainly in conditions of poverty and ranked around 135 on the Human Development Index. The other was largely wealthy and white, and ranked around 28th.

These two economies, belonging to both the developed global 'First World' and developing 'Third World', led the Mbeki government to identify six broad strategic goals that domestic and foreign policy should have in order to narrow the gap: eradicating poverty; reducing unemployment and creating jobs; fighting crime; building the capacity of state; bringing about a better Africa; and bringing about a better world. The last two aims reveal explicitly a line of thinking also evident in a 2005 strategic Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) document – that 'the context of South Africa's foreign policy is firmly rooted in Africa and the South, and its national interest is, therefore, defined in terms of achieving the challenges of the second economy'.⁷

As part of a new 'continentalism', Mbeki sought to influence the inter-African system, not in the direction of supra-nationalism or explicit federalism, but towards functionalism and a rules-based continental order – if anything, a kind of confederalism or loose cooperation that falls short of binding structural reform.⁸ As the *Fifteen Year Review* put

it, 'the regeneration of Africa is the main pillar of South Africa's foreign policy objectives. It is central to ensuring a better life for all in South Africa and on the continent'.⁹ The fact that in 2008 South Africa had diplomatic relations with 47 of the continent's states, compared to just one at the height of apartheid, was testimony to its 'Africa first' policy.

The Mbeki administration endeavoured to remain faithful to the idea of never going it alone in Africa, but preferred to build strategic partnerships as it sought to consolidate its agenda. As Mbeki engaged Africans as partners, he shunned hegemonic ambitions. Therefore, while many commentators overstated Pretoria's leverage and labelled it a 'hegemon' demanding leadership and dominance, Pretoria-Tshwane chose the part of partnership and equality with African states.

Mbeki advocated a New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a modernisation and pro-growth plan aimed at soliciting Western investment, aid, market access and assistance for Africa's development and peace operations, in exchange for Africans holding themselves accountable politically and economically. If Mbeki's much vaunted 'African Renaissance' served the purpose of the vision, then NEPAD became the policy strategy to realise that vision. NEPAD was a modernisation and reconstruction programme aimed at stimulating Africa's development after decades of failures that were the legacies of colonialism, as well as the Cold War, bad governance, unsound economic policies and management, and destructive conflicts.¹⁰ It was a strategy of engagement which promoted intra- and extra-African partnerships.

Major achievements in the African strategy came through multilateralism: the restructuring of the South African Development Community (SADC) and transformation from

the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU). Pretoria played a strategic role as champion of new values and principles in Africa, emphasising the construction of sub-regional and continental institutions and mechanisms in defence of democratisation and a new interventionism against gross violations of human rights, genocide, unconstitutional changes of government (read *coups d'état*) and instability in one country, threatening broader regional instability.¹¹

Perhaps as wary as Mandela of grand continental arrangements, Mbeki saw building a continental union in Africa – a new continentalism but not as a United States of Africa – as the most rational way to proceed in transforming the African order. Mbeki challenged the then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's United States of Africa (USAf) as not palatable, and preferred instead an institutionalised, functionalist approach to continental affairs. South Africa's preference for a looser confederation was instrumental in the establishment of the AU and institutions such as the Peace and Security Council, the strengthening of the AU Commission, and the establishment of an African Court of Human and People's Rights. South Africa was also a key promoter of the idea that Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Sub-regional Economic Communities (SECs) could be the building blocks of continental development and integration.¹²

How far this proliferation of partnerships would make any difference to domestic transformation remained a key concern, but as important were the military conflicts that have turned the continent into a volatile region. Under Mbeki's leadership, South Africa made a significant shift by adopting a pro-peacekeeping posture, not just a stance in favour of peacemaking. Peacemaking involved the

thankless negotiations in Burundi, coordinating the Comores' peace effort, mediating in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), facilitation in Lesotho and dialogue with Angola, on top of dispatching observers in Ethiopia/Eritrea and supporting the UN-led process in Western Sahara. In peacekeeping it actively helped in Burundi, the DRC and Liberia. Mbeki in fact continued with the Mandela government's tactic of 'quiet diplomacy', this time towards Zimbabwe from 1999 onwards.

While Mandela had committed himself to non-alignment, Mbeki subscribed to a more elaborate scheme of South–South cooperation as he set out to reinvigorate political and economic links between Asia, South America and Africa, and emphasised developmental goals linked to the expansion of trade, poverty reduction through growth, and modernisation through infrastructure development and technical cooperation. To quote the *Fifteen Year Review*, 'the value of South–South co-operation [had to] be visible in increased market access, trade and investment benefits for all countries of the South and material support for NEPAD projects'.¹³ A key goal of Mbeki's tri-continental strategies was to engage leaders of the three continents so that they could organise themselves better, speak with one voice and utilise multilateral forums in order to extract greater political and development commitments from the North and/or West.

Membership of strategic partnerships with like-minded states continued to proliferate. Pretoria-Tshwane formed ad hoc coalitions, and created regional and sub-regional platforms to attain its goals. It had played a role in redefining forums like the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), as well as being pivotal in the creation of new platforms such as the G20+; the India-Brazil-South Africa Trilateral Forum (IBSA); the New Africa-Asia Strategic Partnership (NAASP),

which was established at the Bandung revival, the 50th anniversary commemoration in April 2005 co-hosted by South Africa and Indonesia¹⁴ during the Asia-Africa Sub-regional Organisations Conference (AASROC); and the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) bloc within the context of EU–ACP relations. As one foreign affairs official said, 'in relating to Asian states, we sought to pursue Africa's interests'.¹⁵

Mbeki had introduced a new, more complex and dispersed dimension to North–South dialogue, which in essence sought to reformulate development as a universal and strategic challenge facing the international community. This reconfigured or modernised notion had as its aim a challenge to the international economic balance of power, and extraction of significant financial resource commitments from the North in areas of aid, trade, debt relief and eradication, and market access.¹⁶

Mbeki and his government approached the industrialised powers with much self-assurance and boldness. Indeed, if the chief goal of South–South strategies were to turn the South into a more cohesive bloc that could engage the North more effectively, then the goals of the North–South strategies were just as bold: the Mbeki government took it upon itself to bargain for more favourable concessions in the areas of political governance, the global financial architecture, financing for development and a voice for the South in global forums. Mbeki's foreign policy strategists had long held the view that 'engagement with developed countries is premised on the notion of forging partnerships for peace, security and development'.¹⁷ Foreign policy came to stress a new priority: 'fundamentally' altering 'the relationship between Africa and the North, while strengthening the relationship between Africa and the South'.¹⁸ The goal was to bring about international political and economic redress by

playing a bridging role between these divided blocs with the aim of extracting political and financial commitments from the North.

Transformation of global power and economic relations featured as major goals of the Mbeki government, and as such they built on and added to Mandela's notion of commitment to multilateralism and international law. His executive collective came to promote 'global governance' that would influence the balance of power in a West-dominated world. On the political front, modernised policies campaigned for the reform of the global political architecture, while on the socio-economic front South Africa was concerned with the transformation of the global financial systems, as well as with extracting finances for development commitments from multilateral bodies.¹⁹ While political policy stressed the need to restore the centrality of the United Nations (UN) in global affairs and the need for a strong disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation global regime, socio-economic policy pushed for restructuring of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The defence of multilateralism strongly emerged as a priority. As the *Fifteen Year Review* stated, 'a commitment to multilateralism is at the heart of South Africa's foreign policy. Since 1994, the country has sought to contribute to a transparent and rules-based international political and economic order that advances the interests of developing countries'.²⁰

In a subtle way, Mbeki had taken up Mandela's mantle of domestic change and reform, and had skilfully introduced a transformational agenda at home and aligned it with a proactive role in foreign diplomacy. The West needed South Africa as much as South Africa needed the West, and that had profound implications for Mbeki's leverage on the continent and in multilateral organisations. It gave him a strong bargaining hand, and at times

he was forceful in his criticism of the West, as was evidenced by his government's response to the September 11 events. However, it was still not clear how this increased voice, without substantive pooling of sovereignty, could be anything more than talk – or such at least was the growing concern of many within the ranks of the ANC.

2008 and Beyond: Continuity with Practical Deviations trumping Change

From 2003 an internecine *broedertwis* (fraternal squabble) pervaded the ANC, which became increasingly bitter. This fallout resulted first in the deputy president Jacob Zuma being relieved of his duties in 2005, followed by a change in ANC leadership at Polokwane in December 2007, plus the forced recalling by the party of Thabo Mbeki as head of state in September 2008, and ultimately Zuma's election as president. This led many an observer to believe that there would be radical changes in domestic and foreign policy. During Zuma's election campaign hustings, for example, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), one of Zuma's staunchest defenders, vowed that 'everything must change', a sentiment echoed by the South African Communist Party (SACP) who vowed that 'things are going to have to change'.²¹

However, Mbeki's critics and Zuma's supporters appeared oblivious to the fact that the fight between Zuma and Mbeki within the ANC was largely about style and personality, and not over policy substance. Zuma's allies appeared to have misinterpreted the policy mood in ANC quarters as they confused anger with Mbeki over his style with differences over policy. The change in leadership in the ANC, sadly

for them, would not result in a radical change in policy, certainly not in foreign policy and definitely not in terms of stated policy on paper. Instead of the change that many of Mbeki's detractors had hoped for, we would rather see a high degree of the embrace of policies of Mbeki as articulated in key foreign policy statements and documents associated with the new Zuma government. Many of the Mbeki critics who yearned for widespread change did not even realise that the motto of the Zuma government during the election campaign was 'continuity and change'. Elsewhere the author has argued that '...since Zuma's emergence as president there has, on paper at least, been more continuity than change in South African foreign policy'.²² He went further to argue that 'such changes as have occurred have been changes in style and refinements here and there, while as regards stated policy, continuity has prevailed'.²³ This should not have come as a surprise to seasoned observers of South African foreign policy, with the stress here on policy, which should not be confused with the analysis of second-hand punditry.

On the eve of Jacob Zuma's assuming office, the president-to-be hinted at continuity when all the talk was reconciliatory: '[W]e have said that ... foreign policy will not change. There will be continuity'. Indeed, Zuma was signalling anything but radical change, and markers were being laid down that promised more of the same. In spite of the bitter infighting of the previous five years, in his presidential inaugural address on 9 May 2009 Zuma lauded his predecessor's achievements in foreign policy and diplomacy: '[H]e took the country forward as a true statesman. He made a remarkable contribution towards strengthening our democracy, and laid a firm foundation for economic growth and development'.²⁴ As newly elected president, Zuma proceeded to opine

about Mbeki's contribution to foreign policy in particular: '[H]e made our country an integral part of the continent and worked tirelessly for an African rebirth'.²⁵ 'Through his leadership', continued Zuma, 'South Africa's stature grew in the continent and globally'.²⁶

So if continuity, at least in terms of stated policy, was to be the order of the day, what about the 'change' that opponents consistently promised? The foundation for the foreign policy agenda of the next government was laid by the dramatic 52nd ANC Conference in the northern city of Polokwane in December 2007, which not only witnessed a shift in support from Thabo Mbeki to Jacob Zuma, but also adopted a number of resolutions, including those on international relations and foreign policy.²⁷

The Motlanthe Months: Continuity all the Way

Kgalema Motlanthe, South Africa's caretaker president after the dramatic recalling of Mbeki on 20 September 2008, made plain that the main goal of his seven-month stint to April 2009 would be to see out the Mbeki period. As such, he gave notice that his intension was not to introduce new policies but to ensure that the mandate of the Mbeki government was brought to a successful conclusion. On 28 September 2009, Motlanthe gave his first live television address to the nation and described the week in which Mbeki was recalled as president as 'one of the most difficult weeks in the history of our young democracy ... it has been a week of uncertainty and doubt, hurt and anger'.²⁸ Motlanthe vowed to 'draw on the example set by my immediate predecessor, President Thabo Mbeki' and expressed indebtedness to his predecessor for his 'leadership' and 'his vision' in promoting progress in Africa and

the advancement of the global community.²⁹ Motlanthe reminded South Africans that his task was to see out the mandate of the Mbeki years; the priorities he identified for his own government were the same as those articulated by President Mbeki in 2004.

In his first and only State of the Nation Address on 6 February 2009, Motlanthe made it known that his was 'a responsibility, within a matter of a few months, to lead the national Executive in completing the mandate accorded to the ANC in the 2004 elections, and in laying the foundation for the post-election administration to hit the ground running'. With this, Motlanthe signalled continuity, as well as making an explicit link between the previous Mbeki administration and a future post-2009 election government.

According to the caretaker president, 'both in the G20 meetings and other multilateral institutions, our government has argued for appropriate and urgent interventions particularly in the developed countries whence the crisis originated and where it is most severe'.³⁰ Motlanthe made specific reference to Mbeki's role as SADC facilitator in Zimbabwe, and said that his government would assist in efforts to help reconstruct Zimbabwe and urgently assist in dealing with the humanitarian crisis in that country. Over Zimbabwe policy there would be continuity. In spite of the continued political and refugee crisis in the troublesome northern neighbour, Motlanthe did not deviate from the Mbeki's government's stance in favour of engagement in it, stressing the need for a negotiated settlement and full implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) brokered by Mbeki in 2008. On the wider continent, too, Motlanthe welcomed the political dialogue between the leaders of the DRC and Rwanda, and stated that his government would continue to support the AU in pursuit of the same strategy

of political dialogue in Burundi, Sudan, Western Sahara, Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, and elsewhere.

Whereas Mbeki had emphasised a functionalist approach to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the continent, Motlanthe stressed that his government would 'use the privilege of chairing SADC to strengthen this regional institution, with a particular emphasis on implementing Summit resolutions and cementing regional strategic cohesion'.³¹ Just how this strengthening would take place was not spelled out. Instead, the Motlanthe government turned its attention to improving SADC's interaction with the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), another worthy cause for trade but hardly underpinned by firm commitments to direct integration and peace-making or peacekeeping.

In terms of South–South cooperation, the message in Motlanthe's State of the Nation address was similar to that articulated by Mbeki. He insisted that South Africa would continue to foster strong ties with China in the belief that there was 'much mutual benefit to be gained from our partnership', and affirmed his government's 'commitment to close relations that we have forged with Brazil and India through IBSA', the trilateral cooperation initiated by Mbeki in 2003. He also preferred a 'strengthening of bonds that our country has been forging with Russia, and countries in Asia, the Middle East, as well as Latin and North America'.³²

Even as pertains global governance strategies, Motlanthe made known that South Africa would join other countries from the South and 'continue to pursue the cause of the restructuring of the UN, the IMF and other multilateral institutions so they reflect the changed and changing global reality and operate in a democratic, equitable and transparent manner'. In short, the change from Mbeki to Motlanthe heralded continuity, not change.

Enter Zuma: Continuity amidst Diffusion

Turning to the new Jacob Zuma-led government which was elected into office in April 2009 and inaugurated in May of that year, it articulated policies which read like carbon copies of Mbeki's. In August 2009, the new Zuma administration finalised their *Medium-term Strategic Framework (MTSF) to Guide Government's Programme for the Electoral Mandate Period 2009–2014*, revealing that the Zuma administration would champion its foreign policy under the broad goal of 'Pursuing African Advancement and Enhanced Co-operation'.³³

The developmental agenda was in turn to be based on the existing 'key pillars of our foreign policy', under a series of sub-goals or sub-categories, namely³⁴ (1) closing the gap between domestic and foreign policy; (2) continued prioritisation of the African continent; (3) strengthening of South–South relations; (4) relations with strategic formations of the North; (5) strengthening political and economic relations; and (6) participating in the global system of governance. All these were familiar themes and suggested continuity, not change. While the wording had been adapted here and there, in reality it meant more of the same.

When Deputy Minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, told parliament in June 2009 that South Africa's approach to foreign relations over the next five years would 'be driven by the need to deliver to the masses of our people, which is at the core of our national interest', he was not stating something novel or original, nor was Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim's commitment to the pursuit of a 'progressive internationalism',³⁵ echoing as it did Mbeki's commitment to

see the Republic 'becoming an active agent of progressive change'.³⁶

One of the first moves announced by Minister Nkoana-Mashabane was that the name of the department responsible for the management and coordination of the Republic's diplomacy and foreign policy would change from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to that of DIRCO. According to the new minister, the idea was to emphasise that foreign policy would be 'based upon and is indeed an advancement of our domestic priorities at an international level'. This did not come as much of a surprise, and signalled government's intention to introduce a new style and approach to the conduct of foreign affairs, namely to emphasise issues of collaboration and non-hegemonic soft-balancing as opposed to dominance, hegemonic intentions and power-seeking realist approaches to its relations with other states and international entities. Nkoana-Mashabane announced that the name had been changed 'to help clarify the mandate of the Department... The name should reflect the new focus that our government wishes to place on partnerships and co-operation for development'.^{37, 38}

However, while talks of fundamental change were being dished up for popular consumption, in reality many actors hinted at stability and predictability. More significantly, they did not wish to end those of Mbeki's policies that were proving successful. One such example communicated by the new Zuma-led government was that it would build on the work of the Mbeki government in the area of development cooperation and proceed to establish a development agency for South Africa. The new government publicly committed itself to establishing the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), with the aim of promoting developmental partnerships. According to Nkoana-Mashabane, the new government intended

to 'streamline the work that is currently done by different departments on development co-operation into a coherent and systematic framework'.³⁹ In August 2009, she confirmed that 'work towards the establishment of SADPA is currently underway ... This agency... will be tasked with the management of South Africa's developmental assistance to contribute to capacity and institutional building, as well as support socio-economic and human resource development'.⁴⁰

In terms of the Zuma administration's 'Africa prioritisation' strategies, there emerged two broad thematic areas: Africa continental; and improving political and economic integration of the SADC. Even though the government set out to pursue its Africa strategies under the label of 'African advancement', its policy borrowed heavily from the Mbeki government's notion of the 'African agenda', even retaining the very labelling.⁴¹ Indeed, Deputy Minister of International Co-operation, Ebrahim Ebrahim's declaration that the 'consolidation of the African agenda' would be the main priority in South Africa's foreign policy,⁴² corroborates this view of continuity in Africa strategy. In line with the Mbeki posture in Africa, the new Zuma government vowed to contribute to the promotion of peace, security and stability by sustaining involvement in peacekeeping operations in Africa.⁴³ Policy further stated that the Republic would continue with reconstruction and development efforts on the continent, especially in post-conflict situations in countries such as the DRC, Sudan, Burundi, Western Sahara and Zimbabwe.⁴⁴

Whereas the Mbeki government had expanded on the Mandela administration's idea of pursuing a non-aligned foreign policy posture and expansion of a South–South cooperation strategy, the Zuma government's policy of 'strengthening South–South relations' marked

a direct continuation of Mbeki's South–South cooperation and 'agenda of the South' strategies. As with the Mbeki government, the main rationale which underscores the South–South cooperation strategies of the Zuma government would be to 'ensure the creation of political, economic and social spheres necessary for the fight against poverty, underdevelopment and marginalization of the South'. Nkoana-Mashabane stressed that

'South Africa will continue to build relations based on solidarity and co-operation with regional and sub-regional groups in the South such as the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC), Africa-India Forum, G77 plus China, the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum, and the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP) in pursuit of the consolidation of the African Agenda.'⁴⁵

Nkoana-Mashabane's refrain that South Africa as a developing country would maintain 'natural partnerships with other countries of the South with whom we share similar challenges and constraints', was a familiar theme which came to the fore during the Mbeki years.⁴⁶ Ebrahim's pledge that South Africa's South–South cooperation would focus on its 'strategic alliance' with India, China and Brazil⁴⁷ was a direct continuation of Mbeki's strategies towards IBSA and the G-77 Plus China. Zuma was present at what might turn out to have been the founding meeting of another South–South partnership, that between Africa and South America.⁴⁸

Engaging the Northern industrialised powers and their associations is another pillar of the new Zuma administration's foreign policy that echoes Mbeki's international plans. At its core is the pursuit of a 'developmental

agenda both on the continent and the developing world', as Nkoana-Mashabane explained, and to pursue a 'dynamic partnership for development and co-operation'.⁴⁹ Here it should be remembered that the Mbeki government's relations with developed countries were concerned with peace, security and development.⁵⁰

The rationale behind Zuma's stated policy in favour of engaging the industrialised powers was advanced by Nkoana-Mashabane, when she stated that 'countries of the North are undeniably an economic power base of the world and remain essential to the economic well-being of the developing world'.⁵¹ Given these economic considerations, South Africa set out to 'forge partnerships with these countries within the context of trade, development and co-operation'.⁵² Engaging the North, policy stated, would furthermore be 'done to advance South Africa, the continent and the rest of the South's developmental agenda'. In the medium term, policy toward the North would see the Zuma government continue to pursue a developmental and investment-oriented approach to engagements with the North, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Group of Eight (G8).

The final pillar of the Zuma government's evolving foreign policy is that of 'participating in the global system of governance', and the preference for 'robust engagement' in multilateral fora, including championing the reform of the UN Security Council. These are themes, it will be recalled, that were championed by Mbeki's bifurcated strategy of politico-security global governance and socio-economic global governance. The very phrase was lifted directly from the 2008 DFA Strategic Plan.⁵³ In the early part of this treatise, dealing with the foreign policy strategies of the Mbeki government, the point was made that the South African

government from 1999 to 2008 essentially followed a transformational and developmental foreign policy. This was especially true in relation to the global governance strategies of the Mbeki government. President Zuma has attempted to borrow from this dimension of Mbeki's diplomacy too as he and his government endorsed the notions of transformation and developmentalism in their future foreign policy.

It should also be remembered here that the voice and participation of Africa and the broader South were key rationales behind Mbeki's transformational global governance positions. If more evidence is required, Nkoana-Mashabane's declaration soon after the April 2009 polls, that 'we believe that the transformation of the international system will not only give Africa a bigger voice, but will put us in a better position to address the developmental plight of our continent',⁵⁴ marked a direct continuation of Mbeki's position. When she also vowed that 'we will continue to work with other nations and progressive non-state actors', as well as 'for the reform of the UN, including the Bretton Woods Institutions', she borrowed directly from the Mbeki script. Just as the Minister insisted that 'we cannot achieve our objective of a better world when the current configuration of the Security Council of the UN is informed by the geo-politics and security concerns of the 1950s when most of Africa was under colonial rule',⁵⁵ she was again identifying directly with the Mbeki position in favour of 'rules-based multilateral approaches to problems of international peace and security', as well as 'proposals for addressing the shortcomings in the UN system'.

Thus, in spite of COSATU's call on the eve of the Zuma government taking office that 'everything must change', in terms of foreign

policy, very little has changed on paper and in terms of articulated foreign policy. In the *Inroads* article of 2011, titled *Transformation, continuity and diffusion: South African foreign policy under Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma*, the author argued that, instead of any farfetched change, 'the Zuma government opted for a tactic of merely sticking different labels on policy without changing the policy itself ... At the same time however', its journey without a map has rendered South Africa's foreign policy 'unpredictable and erratic'.⁵⁶ The question about the Zuma government's foreign policy in relation to continuity and change was not so much whether there was change from Mbeki to Zuma, because we have established that on paper it was sturdiness. In terms of stipulated policy there was continuity. Instead the issue was an apparent disjuncture between Zuma's stated policy and the actions of the government in practice.

This divergence between stated policy and action came about because of a number of reasons and explanatory factors, but because of the weaknesses in the institutional apparatus in the Zuma government, many deviations from the government's own stated policies crept in, and we had what has been called elsewhere a 'diffused' foreign policy in practice. Stated policy on paper did not correspond neatly with actual policy in practice.

Zuma's first state visit since becoming president was to Angola in 2009, a mission undertaken to patch up the relationship with President Dos Santos and his government, which had deteriorated between the two countries during the Mbeki era. Again, this was not so much a change in policy as an attempt to ease the frosty relations between Luanda and Pretoria-Tshwane, which came about more as a result of a personality clash between Dos

Santos and Mbeki. Again, practical considerations and differences should not be confused with policy differences.

Certainly, Luanda took umbrage at South Africa's growing influence in Africa under Mbeki's leadership, and there was an element of jealousy and envy. South Africa tried on numerous occasions to patch up the relationship, but Luanda chose to keep the Mbeki government at arm's length. Zuma, who enjoyed closer personal ties with Dos Santos, set out to restore the relationship.

Another example to consider here is the furore caused by South Africa's vote on the UN Security Council pertaining to Libya. During the debates in the UN Security Council over what to do with the recalcitrant and tyrannical President Gaddafi of Libya, in March 2011 South Africa voted in favour of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 (which imposed sanctions and a no-fly zone over Libya) but abstained on a vote in November of that year (which condemned the Syrian government's excesses against its own people). However, the Mbeki government followed a more consistent line of voting in the Security Council on issues such as Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Iran and Iraq. The Mbeki government's rationale was that, unless a government or state 'poses a threat to international peace and security', it would refer such an issue to another UN body, notably the Human Rights Council. Thus the hallmark of the Mbeki government's behaviour on the Council during the period January 2007 to December 2008 was consistency, and the principled position adopted was that those issues which were not dubbed 'threats to international peace and security', and which could be resolved through peaceful and negotiated means did not belong in the Security Council.

The Zuma government's behaviour on the Council during the period January 2011 until

approximately December of that year revealed not just inconsistency but confusion. What is even more interesting about the Zuma government's voting behaviour in terms of the Libyan debacle is that it appeared to have taken many of its original positions in apparent isolation of the AU, which nominated South Africa to serve for a second term as a non-permanent member on the Council. The AU's position rejected '...any foreign military intervention, whatever its form'.⁵⁷ Much confusion emerged because South Africa voted in favour of resolutions 1970 and 1973, together with two other African members, Gabon and Nigeria, and soon after, when it became apparent that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was using the resolutions for 'regime change' purposes and to bring about a resource war in that country, South Africa criticised the very resolutions it had voted for. Again, South Africa's vote showed confusion and diffusion. South Africa took these votes in apparent isolation of the AU, the continental body which nominated it to serve on the Council for another two years from January 2011 to December 2012, after its original stint of January 2007 until December 2008.

While many commentators have tried to rationalise South Africa's Libya vote in favour of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 as having been motivated by ethical and moralistic considerations *a la* the Nelson Mandela attempts at a moralistic and values-driven foreign policy orientation between 1994 and 1999, no sooner had South Africa adopted this apparent moralistic position – and stung by widespread criticism against its handling of the Libya issue, including its prevarication and backtracking after NATO's abuse of the UN mandate given to it to execute resolutions 1970 and 1973 – in October 2011 South Africa decided to abstain on a crucial vote in the UN Security Council condemning Syria's violations of human

rights.⁵⁸ Part of its motivation was fear that the UN resolution would be used by NATO and the Western powers as a pretext for military intervention against a regime change in Damascus, as they did against Libya.

In November, when the Syrian issue was moved to the General Assembly for a vote condemning Syria's excesses, 122 countries voted in favour, 13 against and 41 abstained, including South Africa.⁵⁹ China and Russia vetoed the resolution, while fellow BRICs member, Brazil, abstained along with South Africa. After the failure to secure a unanimous vote in the Security Council, the Syria issue became a victim of both South Africa's burning of its fingers regarding Libya and the Western powers' blatant abuse of the issue for ulterior regime change and resource war motives. On 23 November 2011, South Africa decided not to support a resolution condemning the human rights violations and threatening punitive measures against the Bashar al-Assad regime; the South African mission in New York opted to abstain on the vote.⁶⁰ Scarcely three months later we witnessed the continuation of a new disturbing trend in foreign policy as government again prevaricated. In February 2012 it voted in favour of a resolution calling on President Al-Assad to step down from power.⁶¹ After Russia and China had vetoed the UN planned resolution, South Africa emerged with yet another position as it came out against military intervention in Syria and called on the Syrian people to be allowed the opportunity and space to determine their own future.⁶²

In a statement explaining its decision, the representatives to South Africa's mission in New York said that the Syria issue needed to be discussed in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, not in the UN Security Council.⁶³ It should be remembered that this was a rationale often invoked by the Mbeki government, and as

pertains Syria, the Zuma government's position was much in line with the position of its predecessor's views. What is less obvious to explain is the inconsistencies between South Africa's Libya and Syria positions, and the apparent wavering in its decision-making approaches.

In its response to the crisis surrounding the 2010 presidential election in Cote d'Ivoire, we witnessed a great deal of prevarication and what Kiru Naidoo had called 'vacillation' by the Zuma government. Zuma first toyed with the idea of backing the Angolan position, which was in support of former president Laurent Gbagbo, after which the South Africans made a U-turn by supporting the AU position, which called for a negotiated position between the belligerents, and later on the AU switched to supporting Alassane Ouattara.⁶⁴ In the end, it took a trip to Paris and an official meeting with French president Nicholas Sarkozy for Zuma to make a decisive call for Gbagbo to leave and for Ouattara to be installed as president, but only after it backed a negotiated solution between Gbagbo and Ouattara.⁶⁵ The Cote d'Ivoire decision and how it came about, showed indecisiveness on the part of the Zuma government, which made it difficult to pin down whether it was continuity or change that was at play when compared to the Mbeki approach.⁶⁶ One thing is certain – Mbeki was more decisive when it came to conflict resolution than Zuma appears to be.

A further example could be highlighted here to show that the rhetoric of change often invoked by officials in the Zuma government is not always backed up by the actions in reality. Just as Mbeki offered the Zimbabwe government a credit extension of some US\$1 billion in 2005, so in 2011 the Zuma government offered the beleaguered Swazi monarchy and government a R1,2 billion loan to address the woes of their ailing economy.⁶⁷ What all of this shows

is that the public speak and idiom often employed of 'change' and 'difference' is not always backed by action in reality.

Finally, when President Zuma delivered his 2012 State of the Nation Address on 9 February, there was not a single reference to matters of foreign policy or diplomacy, except for one line referring to NEPAD in the context of infrastructural development. This again conveys a message about foreign policy as an afterthought, and may help to explain the haphazard nature of foreign policy.

Conclusion: The Change of Continuity

The last 12 years of South Africa's foreign policy have been a story of promised change but general continuity, with the latter at times trumping the former when it was least expected, and change prevailing when the assumption was that continuity would be the order of the day.

There was a widespread view that the transition from the Mandela to the Mbeki era was marked by continuity rather than change. The reality is that Mbeki introduced many refinements and changes to foreign policy, and in a sense it was radically overhauled. Africa was elevated to high priority in Mbeki's foreign policy trajectory, and he was determined to leave an imprint of the country as a reliable partner, working *with* fellow African states, not as a hegemon bent on dictating the terms to the rest of the continent. He also pursued a highly ambitious South–South agenda, far more so than the one championed by Mandela, and links with Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean became important new avenues in the Republic's international relations.

Mbeki also articulated a clear North–South agenda in which he sought to extract commitments from the industrialised powers in the forms of aid, debt relief, market access, trade and resources for peace support operations that would help to bolster Africa and the South's development goals. He pursued equally grand aims pertaining to global governance, articulating political governance goals alongside socio-economic global governance aims. The former were aimed at transforming political institutions such as the UN Security Council, whereas the latter focused on the need to transform global socio-economic institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and to ensure that Africa and the South enjoyed greater levels of voice and participation. The changes introduced in South African foreign policy and diplomacy during the Mbeki period should therefore not be underestimated, but they did not achieve what they were intended to, namely a narrowing of the gap between the two domestic economies.

In the run-up to the April 2009 elections, many in the ANC threatened a decisive shift away from the policy agenda of the Mbeki era and towards sweeping change. However, as far as foreign policy is concerned, these threats did not materialise. Even before he became head of state, Zuma signalled that policy would not change and that there would be continuity. Indeed, stated policy as it was articulated on paper revealed this continuity; practice, however, revealed deviations from it. President Kgalema Motlanthe had already vowed to continue with the Mbeki foreign policy agenda and his brief seven-month stint did not see the introduction of any major changes in contradiction to Mbeki's agenda.

Zuma inherited from Mbeki a well-institutionalised foreign policy that borrowed heavily

from the foreign policy rubrics of his predecessor under the mantra of 'pursuing African advancement in enhanced international cooperation'. Zuma made it just as clear that, in line with the Mbeki approach, his government would continue to pursue a 'broad-based developmental' foreign policy trajectory. Just as the Mbeki administration had emphasised an African agenda, South–South cooperation, North–South dialogue and global governance, so the Zuma-led administration is articulating a similar set of foreign policy pillars. These are African advancement, strengthening South–South relations, engaging the North and actively participating in the global system of governance. Even the Zuma government's emphasis on a domestically driven foreign policy was akin to a notion pursued by both the Mandela and Mbeki governments, if not as well articulated or skilfully constructed.

To conclude, while following the immediate aftermath of the dramatic recalling of Thabo Mbeki as head of state in September 2008, much of the talk inside and outside government

and even inside the ruling ANC, has been of radical change under Zuma. The reality, however, has been that the articulated foreign policy of the government, at least as stated on paper, has in the main suggested continuity. The stated foreign policy borrowed heavily from the Mbeki script. However, because of largely institutional weaknesses which characterised the state and foreign policy apparatus of the Zuma government, fuelled in the main by the spill-over of *broedertwiste* (fraternal squabbles) and factionalisation in the ANC, fragmentation has been the order of the day, and a great deal of diffusion and confusion came to mark foreign policy, and deviations from even government's own stated foreign policy.

In short, during the transition from Mbeki to Zuma, there was continuity in policy on paper but detours in practice. The moral of the story is that the fractured nature of the transition and government that Zuma came to preside over has negative implications, not just for foreign policy, but for all dimensions of national policy as well.

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