



## **A Summary of the White Paper on South Africa’s Foreign Policy**

July 2019

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### **1. Introduction**

In a dynamic and increasingly interdependent world, it is essential for South Africa to regularly make an evaluation of its foreign policy and to ensure that its national interests are realised. As such, South Africa has both assessed and articulated its foreign policy priorities in the White Paper of South Africa’s Foreign Policy. The following brief is a summary of the White Paper on South Africa’s foreign policy entitled: “Building a better world: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu”, which was approved by Cabinet 5 December 2012.

### **2. Overview and Summary of the White Paper on South Africa’s Foreign Policy**

The White Paper on Foreign Policy is intended as a document which would articulate the foreign policy of South Africa as it has been envisioned for the coming years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It begins with a foreword which emphasizes the impact of South Africa’s struggle history defining the main tenets of South Africa’s engagement with the international community. These tenets can essentially be described as Pan-Africanism and South-South solidarity. The



foreword also gives recognition to the fact that South Africa's foreign policy and its national interests are inextricably linked to the African continent.<sup>1</sup>

Adding to this, the foreword states that:

In preparing the country to become a winning nation in the coming decades of the 21st century, our international relations work must endeavour to shape and strengthen our national identity; cultivate our national pride and patriotism; address the injustices of our past, including those of race and gender; bridge the divides in our society to ensure social cohesion and stability; and grow the economy for the development and upliftment of our people.<sup>2</sup>

In the Preamble of the White Paper there is some discussion of Ubuntu, an African philosophy which reconceptualised with the concept of diplomacy:

The philosophy of Ubuntu means 'humanity' and is reflected in the idea that we affirm our humanity when we affirm the humanity of others. It has played a major role in the forging of a South African national consciousness and in the process of its democratic transformation and nation-building.<sup>3</sup>

Underpinning this new orientation of our diplomacy will be recognition of the moral directives of South Africa's struggle history which the White Paper speaks to by noting that:

*Since 1994, the international community has looked to South Africa to play a leading role in championing values of human rights, democracy, reconciliation and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment. South Africa has risen to the challenge and plays a meaningful role in the region, on the continent and globally.*<sup>4</sup>

This new orientation seeks to move away from interest based diplomacy and shift towards a people-centred diplomacy, the preamble speaks to this by making mention of Batho Pele which is essentially "putting people first". The preamble concludes by discussing the importance South Africa will place on improving relations both within the region and the African continent as a whole. Additionally, there is recognition of the potential gained by changing the dynamics of our relations with the global North. Essentially, our foreign policy with regards to the global North should be healthier and focused on mutually beneficial interactions which recognize the unique realignments that have been underway in the international system.<sup>5</sup>

In its Introduction, the White Paper speaks to the realignments in the international system. Additionally, the focal points of our foreign policy are articulated, reflecting the areas of focus

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<sup>1</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2012).



described by President Zuma in his State of the Nation Address for 2011, and the Strategic Plan of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, namely:

Remaining loyal to the constitutional principles that have inspired South Africa since 1994, our foreign policy is currently based on the primacy of the African continent and the Southern African Development Community; commitment to South-South cooperation; the centrality of multilateralism; consolidating relations with the North; and the strengthening of bilateral social, political and economic relations.<sup>6</sup>

As a strategy to achieve its objectives, the White Paper describes the establishment of key mechanisms which include:

- South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA)
  - An integral part of DIRCO that will enhance South Africa's international cooperation and implementation of development and humanitarian assistance programmes
- South African Council on International Relations (SOCIR)
  - Will be established as a forum for interaction with the Department on foreign policy development and implementation, with the aim of creating dynamic partnerships for development and cooperation.<sup>7</sup>

The White paper discusses the value of the African continent's major initiatives such as the establishment of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The introduction of the White Paper also noted that South Africa's foreign policy was evaluated against the government's priorities and objectives in the Fifteen Year Review of South Africa's Foreign Policy for the period 1994 to 2009. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess progress made, but to also identify any shortcomings and challenges to ensure that the Department is better equipped to contribute more to the initiatives of government.<sup>8</sup>

The review highlighted the Department's dedication to the eradication of poverty and to end the marginalisation of the poor, not only in South Africa, but throughout the world. Additionally, it is noted that South Africa has embraced multilateralism as an approach to solve challenges confronting the international community. In this regard, South Africa took up a leading role in various multilateral fora, including SADC, the AU, NAM, G77+China, the Commonwealth, and the United Nations, championing the cause of developing countries and Africa in particular. As a non-permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) from 2007-2008 and for the period 2011-2012, South Africa promoted peace and security with emphasis on Africa and improving cooperation between the UNSC and regional organisations such as the AU Peace and Security Council.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid



In the following chapter, some attention is given to describing the mandate of the Department of International Relations and the Minister responsible for it. The *Constitution of South Africa, 1996*, empowers the President to formulate national policies and assigns cabinet portfolios. Thus, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation is given the responsibility to formulate, promote, and execute South Africa's foreign policy. The Minister assumes overall responsibility for all aspects of South Africa's international relations in consultation with the President. The Department is the principal adviser on foreign policy, and lead coordinator and manager of South Africa's international relations and cooperation.

The Department and its Missions abroad carry out its mandate by:

- Aligning, coordinating, and managing South Africa's international relations and related activities;
- monitoring developments in the international environment, including the provision of early warning to political principals;
- formulating foreign policy options;
- protecting South Africa's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- conducting economic diplomacy;
- conducting public diplomacy;
- establishing and managing structures and mechanisms for achieving foreign policy objectives;
- managing development cooperation and partnerships;
- advising on international law matters and acting as custodian for all South Africa's international agreements; and
- providing consular services.<sup>10</sup>

The chapter which follows gives more depth to the role of South Africa's struggle history played in how foreign policy will be conducted. There is also some attention given to the values which underpin the constitution of South Africa and how those values will be maintained in how South Africa interacts with the international system. These values are fundamental in how South Africa conducts itself in the international arena, but equally important are the systemic shift which can significant impact on countries not willing or able to adapt. The systemic shifts are discussed in the next chapter of the White Paper as follows:

We are in a period of convergence of a number of trends that are leading to major shifts in global political, economic and social/cultural dynamics: such as demographics; climate change. Therefore, in order for South Africa to be effective in meeting its challenges, it must shape its domestic and foreign policies to respond to global drivers and trends that are influencing the international system. These influences have varying impacts in different parts of the world and include, without order of priority: demographics; realignment of new economic powers; new media and social networks; innovation; environmental change; heightened demand for scarce resources; and changing nature of conflict and insecurity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid



The 'global drivers' identified in the White Paper are then discussed in more substantial detail in the rest of the chapter with the aim of adequately articulating the nature and extent of shifts in the international system. The next chapter deals with South Africa's aspirations to strategically position the country at various levels and in different contexts. For 2025, South Africa envisions that it will be "a successful and influential member of the international community, supported by a globally competitive economy on a sustained growth path that has made significant inroads in addressing unemployment, inequality and poverty in South Africa, and contributing to the development of our region and continent".<sup>12</sup>

The White Paper continues by describing some of the global trends that South Africa believes will shape the future. As these trends converge, countries will have the opportunity of maximising their influence by playing a leading role both on specific issues and within their respective regions. While this process unfolds, South Africa can benefit from deepened integration into the global growth markets. Globalisation and regional integration offer opportunities to South Africa and other countries around the world depending on the level of integration into the global economy. Notably, while globalisation has created many opportunities in the international system, it has also brought about many serious risks. The combined impact of climate change, rapid population growth, urbanisation and growing inequality in general worsens social stresses relating to food security, access to water, and increasing environmental degradation. These stresses have the potential to cause instability in our region. Additionally, a range of regional trends could combine to compromise South Africa's leadership position within its region. Noteworthy, is the White Paper's assertion that "South Africa's position of global influence not only depends on its regional positioning, but also on its ability to contribute to global solutions and policy innovation".<sup>13</sup>

South Africa seeks to position itself within the globe and "South Africa's vision is to be a successful, influential and leading member of the international community, supported by a globally competitive economy on a sustained growth path that has made significant inroads in addressing unemployment, inequality and poverty in South Africa, and contributing to the development of our region and continent".<sup>14</sup> Adding to this point, the White Paper then speaks to the various levels through which South Africa will engage with the international community and discusses the following:

## 2.1 Africa

- Africa is at the centre of South Africa's foreign policy.
- South Africa will therefore continue to support regional and continental processes to respond to and resolve crises, strengthen regional integration, significantly increase intra-African trade, and champion sustainable development and opportunities in Africa.
- South Africa will intensify its engagements in the AU and its structures
- South Africa will continue to advance common African positions through its structured bilateral activities and other international fora

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<sup>12</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2012).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup>



- South Africa will work with SADC and its member states to maintain the readiness of the SADC Brigade
- Support for the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) remains important to assist the continent consolidate democracy and meet universally accepted standards of participatory democracy
- NEPAD is the socio-economic development programme of the AU that also represents a comprehensive vision for Africa's renewal.
- South Africa should continue to support the implementation of NEPAD programmes, particularly those that strengthen cross-border infrastructure development, ICT, agricultural, tourism, capacity building and industrialisation.
- South Africa will continue to support the regional economic programme of SADC that provides for policy co-ordination and convergence, sectoral co-operation and market integration through the SADC Free Trade Area. The integration of SADC, the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the East African Community (EAC) will advance political unity and economic strength of Africa.
- South Africa will strongly support the transformation of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) into a vehicle for advancing and deepening developmental integration<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2 Multilateralism

- The United Nations (UN) system, through its universal membership and broad mandate, occupies the central and indispensable role within the global system of governance.
- South Africa will promote the increased alignment between the developmental agenda of Africa and the South and that of global organisations
- South Africa's foreign policy will continue to recognise the importance of multilateralism and a rules-based international system that is governed by international law.
- South Africa will remain an active participant in the efforts to comprehensively reform the architecture of global governance, including the UN system and the Bretton Woods Institutions, to make them more effective, legitimate, and responsive to the needs of the developing world.
- South Africa's multilateral relations with the South will continue to find expression particularly through the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), the Commonwealth, the NAM, and the G77.
- South Africa will actively participate in the BRICS, whose members are reshaping the global economic and political order
- Following the successful hosting of UNCTAD, the World Conference against Racism (WCAR), the World Economic Forum, and the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), NAM, CHOGM and the launch of the AU, South Africa remains willing to host high-level conferences, as a valuable diplomatic platform in support of multilateralism and global consensus<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid



## 2.3 Economic Diplomacy

- South Africa's economic diplomacy will be focused on providing guidance to government and the business sector on economic developments and markets, pursuing market access for South African products, attracting investments and tourism, removing barriers to trade, and supporting the development of larger markets in Africa.
- South Africa will support the harmonisation of policies and standards across the continent, as strengthened regional integration presents opportunities for regional industries
- South African economic diplomacy in the region will support an integrated development strategy for SACU, SADC and the continent that includes Spatial Development Initiatives, investment promotion into the region, region-wide industrial development linkages as well as the development of supply-side capacity that will enable countries in the region to diversify their economies and take advantage of opportunities for more dynamic and diverse exports.<sup>17</sup>

The White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy then reflects on South Africa's wider Bilateral Interests by discussing the following regions:

## 2.4 Asia

- Power shifts in the global political and economic system have increased the relevance of the Asian region, with major emerging powers such as China and India increasing their global influence.
- Asia has become South Africa's largest trading region and an increasingly important source of investment, particularly China, India and Japan.
- South Africa should focus on identifying under-explored markets in the region that will provide new export opportunities
- South Africa should not lose sight of the fact that there are also many middle powers in Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Vietnam that are both partners and competitors. South Africa will leverage the fact that these countries share similar views on reform of global governance, solidarity and economic justice.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.5 Middle East

- South Africa will remain consistent in its support for the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region, in particular the Middle East Peace Process premised on a two-state solution, and continue to pursue a diplomatic role based on South Africa's successful political transition and solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- It is important to engage the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries for the realisation of South Africa's development priorities.

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<sup>17</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid



- Middle Eastern markets remain small, but the growing population and oil wealth offer South Africa opportunities, particularly in agro-processing, construction and civil engineering, engineering technologies in gas to liquid energy production, and its advanced service sector<sup>19</sup>

## 2.6 Europe

- Europe will remain of strategic interest to South Africa.
- The European Union remains South Africa's largest trading partner, with the region generating more than a third of South Africa's total trade. It remains an important source of foreign direct investment and official development assistance into South Africa, as well as a primary market for tourism.
- South Africa will continue to encourage European partners to be engaged in the development of the African continent, meet their development assistance commitments, as well as push for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) due to its detrimental effects on development in Africa.<sup>20</sup>
- South Africa will also continue to cooperate and engage with European countries beyond the EU, such as Russia and Turkey, recognising their important role in regional and global politics.
- South Africa's relations with Europe cut across the EU, the region consists of members of the G8, G20, permanent and non-permanent members of the UNSC and regular engagement through both multilateral and bilateral interaction on all levels is essential.
- The EU-Africa Strategic Partnership will continue to drive future Africa-EU relations, based on the Joint Action Plan, which includes institutional and financial support for the AU and its institutions, as well as support for the African peace and security architecture<sup>21</sup>

## 2.7 America's and the Caribbean

- South Africa's bilateral relations with the countries of the Americas and the Caribbean will serve as a firm foundation for advancing multilateral cooperation as well as to promote South Africa's domestic priorities.
- The USA will continue to remain a dominant political, economic and military power, with significant potential for South African and African trade, tourism, and investment.
- The USA and Canada are important supporters of peacekeeping as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts in Africa, through the UN and bilaterally. In this regard, South Africa will continue to urge them to align their support with the AU peace and security objectives.
- An increase in political aspirations and the active role of middle powers in Latin America will enable partnerships and strategic coalitions to advance mutual interests.
- Other countries in the region also provide economic and political opportunities to pursue complementarities within the context of South-South cooperation, multilateralism, and closer bilateral strategic relations

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2011).



- South Africa will utilise the SACU/MERCOSUR Preferential Trade Agreement to foster complementarities in its industrial, agricultural and services sectors
- In addition, contact with the African Diaspora in the region would serve to enhance relations with South Africa and the African continent, especially with respect to the Caribbean countries.

The African Diaspora in the Americas, particularly in the Caribbean, continues to have significance for South Africa in light of their support for Africa's liberation and a shared vision of an equitable world.<sup>22</sup>

The White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy concludes with a chapter entitled "Taking Diplomacy Forward". This chapter begins by noting that the Department of Foreign Affairs was renamed as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to emphasize the improved alignment between South Africa's foreign policy and domestic objectives. Adding to this point the chapter postulates that "an increasingly complex and multidimensional international environment requires a coherent cross-sectoral approach and a coordinated response across all spheres of government, public enterprises, the private sector, labour, civil society, and other non-state actors".<sup>23</sup> The Chapter then discusses the role that will be played by DIRCO and notes that the Department will strengthen the management and coordination of South Africa's international relations by enhancing its role "in providing strategic information on global developments and foreign policy options, as well as managing and facilitating South African activities and engagements".<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the Department will strengthen the Consultative Forum on International Relations (CFIR) as a vehicle to manage and coordinate the international activities of all stakeholders. The establishment of a South African Council on International Relations (SACOIR) is also envisaged as a consultative platform for engagement with non-state actors. The establishment of a professional diplomatic service in addition to the aforementioned structures is seen as a way to enable effective coordination and to ensure policy cohesion and synergies in South Africa's bilateral and multilateral interactions. Notably, public diplomacy is described as "essential to actively project South Africa's image, values and culture both domestically and abroad". The Department will broaden the use of available technologies and platforms, especially social media networks to communicate with stakeholders on South Africa's international relations. Public diplomacy activities include outreach programmes to bring foreign policy to the people. Adding to this, the South African government will continue to contribute to institutional support and capacity building to other requesting states and in this regard. Also, the Department will continue to provide training to foreign diplomats as a means of creating goodwill and understanding.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

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<sup>22</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2012).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, (2012).



The White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy highlights the fact that South Africa's greatest asset lies in the power of its example enshrined in the Constitution. Additionally it notes that "in an uncertain world, characterised by a competition of values, South Africa's diplomacy of Ubuntu, focusing on our common humanity, provides an inclusive and constructive world view to shape the evolving global order".<sup>26</sup> This document represents the fundamental policies which will define South Africa's foreign policy in the future. As such, Parliament is mandated to ensure that South Africa's foreign policy aligns with the country's domestic priorities.

#### **4. References**

Building a better world: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu - The White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid