

SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL INTEREST¹

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... adeptness at identifying the national interest and pursuing it in a creative way is part of the challenge of governance and state leadership in the current global arena.

Ten Year Review.²

Over the past ten years, our involvement in world affairs has been premised on the view that the strength of our nation depends on the strength of the entire continent.

Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, June 2004³

Introduction

In response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Sudan's Darfur region, the South African government recently agreed to despatch a small number of military officials to the area as part of a group of African Union (AU) peace monitors.⁴ Although the urge to respond to other people's suffering is a strong justification for intervention, it is important to understand how this and similar decisions that promote or protect South Africa's interests are determined. If one believes that the government of this country should assist with peace-making or peacekeeping, or render assistance to the victims of aggression in Darfur, then should it do the same in Chechnya? What about Iraq? One way to respond is to invoke the concept of the national interest. Supporters of this concept suggest that foreign and security policy ought to flow from a

shared understanding of the nation's broad and long-term interests. However, the concept is often questioned by those who suspect elite collusion in matters of national importance and want to know who determines the content of the national interest, and how it is done.

The concept of national interest

By unpacking the question of the national interest, many questions arise, not least the accusation that it is an old-fashioned concept used obsessively during the Cold War era to promote questionable ideologies, conceal poor policies or justify unethical behaviour. So, the death of 58,000 United States (US) soldiers in Vietnam (not to mention the death of two million Southeast Asians) was in the interests of fighting Communism; the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in the interest of extend-

ing the 'Socialist camp' (with similar untold human suffering). Even landing on the moon was in the US national interest (today the challenge is Mars). The erstwhile South African government in turn abused the concept in its defence of apartheid policies and practices, including the destabilisation of the Southern African region. Currently, in the post 9/11 period of global insecurities caused by terrorism and counter-terrorism, the concept is back in vogue, and again used obsessively by the neo-conservatives in Washington and liberals elsewhere. The dominant discourse today is the 'war on terror', with the assumption—nay, demand—that joining the US on this issue would be in all countries' national interest. It appears Libya's Ghaddafi buckled under the pressure, and most probably Spain's then-president Aznar argued that membership of the anti-Iraq coalition was in his country's national interest.⁵ That (mis-) calculation cost his party the general election of March 2004. Prisoner abuse in Iraq is being argued away as an unintended consequence of bringing freedom to the oppressed masses.

So, what then is the national interest? Stephen Krasner, in his 1978 classic *Defending the national interest* used the term to refer to the preferences of a nation's leaders, or put differently, the goals that are sought by the state.⁶ He further specified that such preferences, or set of objectives, must be related to general societal goals, persist over time, and have a consistent ranking of importance in order to justify using the term 'national interest'. As Krasner noted, in such cases one would better look to bureaucratic preferences or societal pressures to understand the actions taken by central decision makers.

National interest, national security and foreign policy

Many analysts assume that foreign policy is based on national interest. Thus, if one can identify a nation's enduring strategic interests, its foreign (and security) policies would follow. This line of thinking is evident in

Botswana where, according to the ruling party:

Central in the country's foreign policy ... are the interests of Botswana which embrace the preservation of the democratic form of government, its institutions and values, its sovereignty and territorial integrity, brooking no interference in its internal affairs, its respect for self-determination and independence of peoples, its non-racialism, its non-alignment, the non-use of its territory as a launching pad for attacks against neighbouring states, the non-use of force in the settlement of disputes and the development and security of its foreign markets.⁷

As appealing as this line of thinking is, many have argued for an inverse relationship, that is: global dynamics often determine local responses. Structures (such as the rules of the international system) determine, allow or constrain what agents (such as national governments) can and cannot do.⁸ However, a more nuanced approach might suggest that the world is not simply given and/or natural but one of artifice—it is constructed through the actions of the actors themselves.⁹ Applied to our situation, the 'fact' of South Africa's domination of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is viewed by some as good and necessary, while others bitterly resent its hegemony in the region. Thus, the beliefs, interests and actions of the many actors in the region constitute a web of interactive politics that co-determines processes and outcomes. That is to say, South Africa might be regarded as a powerful regional actor but it does not follow that its views always dominate. Its interaction with other regional actors impacts on the region as well as its own perceptions and self-image. In this sense then South Africa changes and is changed by the region.

Lastly, the way in which South African elites define their (and their country's) role towards the region, or Africa, becomes important in trying to understand South Africa's national (and security) interests. The key insight from the constructivist paradigm con-

cerns the role of identity. This approach focuses attention on the relationship between the concepts 'identity', 'interest' and 'threat'. As Weldes recently argued, identity is constructed and reconstructed in relation to others. Threats are the insecurities faced by particular identities. Some threat perceptions are a direct function of identity—that is, they follow almost logically from the nature of a particular identity. Other threat perceptions are a function of interpretation of actions or events made possible through the symbolic technology that is the security imaginary. Interests—those 'national interests' or 'preferences' articulated by decision makers—are also twofold: they can be a logical function of the identity itself, or a function of specific threats constructed in relation to the identity. The three concepts are thus mutually constituted: it is in relation to identities, or identities and threat perceptions, that interests are identified.¹⁰

Nevertheless, returning to the theme under discussion, it appears that states tend to pursue two kinds of policy preferences to operationalise their perceived/constructed 'national interest': material (that is, economic well-being) or ideological. For Australia and other members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), trade and investment is the key.¹¹ On the other hand, until recently Sudan under General al-Bashir was aligned both with Libya and with Islamic fundamentalists from Iran and elsewhere; even Osama bin Laden was allowed to reside in the Sudan.¹² Powerful states pursue both kinds simultaneously. America's interest in the Persian Gulf (and more precisely, its role in Iraq) would be an example of such a double set of preferences. As Joseph Nye wrote (back in 1991, and true today) oil is the quick answer.¹³ The other half of the answer lies in Bush's declaration, in the introduction to the post-9/11 US National Security Strategy document, that the US wants to make the world safer and better.¹⁴ As the demise of apartheid demonstrated, and perhaps the 'war on terror' will too, an ideological foreign policy manifests in misperception, or an absence of means-end calculations,

that could lead to costly policy and strategy failures.¹⁵

Keeping in mind that there exists no generally accepted definition of national security, the term is employed here to mean the processes by which the state deals with threat perceptions.¹⁶ Put differently, security is about the pursuit of freedom from threat. When it is discussed in the context of the international system, security is about the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity. Whether local or global, the security of people is affected by factors in five major sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental.¹⁷ Protecting people and institutions from a variety of threats is therefore in a country's national interest. In this sense then, foreign policy is one of the key instruments used to promote a nation's interests, including security.

South Africa's interests

In a recent study on state-civil society relations, the point was made that in South Africa, "[f]oreign policy and national interests should be debated much more vigorously. The sad fact is that in practice there is no debate on these issues".¹⁸ This statement still rings true today and calls for a debate to be opened. Questions for such a debate include the following: What is South Africa's national interest/s? Who determines it? Can South Africa afford competing interpretations of the national interest? Or is contestation inevitable; in fact a normal feature of democratic intellectual dialogue? Most of all, can the concept realistically guide South Africa's foreign policy?

Given the country's economic profile, public policies focusing on the human security agenda (e.g. poverty eradication, job creation, economic growth, personal security) should constitute the core of South Africa's national interest. After winning the national elections for the third time with an increased majority of close to 70%, President Mbeki announced that government's policies and programmes were "... informed by the struggle against poverty

and underdevelopment” and that it will respond by addressing the ‘First’ and ‘Second’ economies.¹⁹ Does it mean that its foreign policy should therefore mostly be about trade and investment? What about the pursuit of other values, and how to choose? To illustrate, public debates on foreign policy in South Africa focus, among others, on how the following issues/positions promote the country’s long-term interests:

1. The country’s overwhelming and growing regional (and increasingly, continental) economic and trade dominance.²⁰
2. The arms industry, including arms sales, and the purchase of Gripens, corvettes and submarines.²¹
3. Government’s approach to the Zimbabwe crisis (‘quiet diplomacy’).²²
4. President Mbeki’s recent visit to Haiti/accommodating deposed President Aristide in South Africa.
5. Hosting of the Pan African Parliament and the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

The concept national interest—as well as that of national security—is frequently used by the South African government *and* its critics. However, they often differ dramatically on *how* to promote the country’s national interest. These debates have often assumed the character of a zero-sum game: whatever policy or action the African National Congress (ANC) defends as being executed to advance the national interest is branded by the opposition or critics as achieving the opposite. Hence the question of whether the nation can agree on a definition.

Undoubtedly, high-level debates about government’s policy intentions, and practices, are signs of healthy democratic discourse and therefore desirable. However, disagreement on key issues also complicates government’s ability to manage effectively the country’s domestic and international affairs. It would seem to be better, wouldn’t it, to be able to speak with a united voice on critical local and global matters—from poverty eradication programmes to the condemnation of mercenary practices, or a firm position on the restructuring of the World Bank. But is it achievable? Isn’t it good enough for the ruling party to make that

determination? After all, citizens vote a party into power in order for it to make precisely those choices on the basis of its policy platform.

In a less than ideal world, different actors maintain unique definitions of the national interest. For the ANC and government, the state’s strategic policy priorities, as determined annually by the Cabinet *lekgotla* (and announced during the president’s annual state of the nation address in parliament), equals the national interest.²³ In the longer term, some level of predictability is provided in the election manifesto with which a party campaigns the elections, and in the case of the ANC the 1956 Freedom Charter provides the guiding light. In the view of the opposition, government often blurs the lines between party and national interests. Critics are fond of quoting the foreign minister as having said that her government will never condemn Zimbabwe as long as it is in power.²⁴ Other players also have sectional interests at heart when seeking to influence the policy process. For example, mining executive Clem Sunter believes the nation’s greatest challenge in the coming decade “... is the construction of an entrepreneurial economy with no racial or class divisions, thus enabling ‘Team SA’ a thrilling economic ride (on the globalisation wave) provided social harmony is pursued”.²⁵ How does this vision resonate with other sectors of society? Is it inclusive? Adding together disparate visions in the hope of getting to a synergetic sum of all the parts might be an interesting exercise but ultimately not helpful.

South Africa’s foreign and national security policy

South Africa’s foreign policy is premised upon its national interests ...

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad, 2003.²⁶

Considering the difficulties of formulating an inclusive common national interest in a democracy, a review of South Africa’s foreign policy and affairs might shed some light on the government’s efforts to define the nation-

al interest and execute policies to promote it.

In March this year, South Africa's 10 years of democracy was celebrated at an international conference organised by the Africa Institute of South Africa. As could be expected, many aspects of the country's transition received critical scrutiny. On the theme of its foreign relations, there was generally all-round recognition of progress and achievement. Indeed, the country's foreign minister, Dr Dlamini-Zuma earlier offered a plausible explanation for this state of affairs:

... our collective experiences as South Africans have placed us in a unique position to understand the challenges facing humanity ... firstly, ours is a reality of two nations, one developed and wealthy, the other marginalised and poor ... Hence we have committed our foreign policy to the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment and for the transformation of the continent and the global environment.²⁷

This is not to say that South Africa's foreign policy behaviour is free of criticism. Overtly pursuing a human rights-based foreign policy is a delicate balancing act at the best of times. The challenge is maintaining a balance between human rights commitments and the pursuit of commercial interests—something the US, in its relations with the People's Republic of China, found difficult to achieve. Losing the balance often attracts accusations of betrayal, as South Africa's earlier approach to Nigeria's Abacha and Indonesia's Suharto, and Zimbabwe's Mugabe currently illustrates. The latest controversy is the apparent choice to discount the human rights record of Equatorial Guinea's president, Brig.-Gen. Nguema Mbasogo in favour of cementing strong commercial and trade relations.²⁸ Why the government has chosen to mask its commitment to human rights promotion is a tough question to answer. Could it be that it has good strategies in place but needs to communicate them better ("put a better spin on it", as journalist Max du Preez once said)? Or could it be that it has made fundamental policy shifts by embracing the North's neoliberal paradigm—a policy

approach that is devoid of moral value ("talk left, walk right", the title of Bond's latest critique of Mbeki's foreign policy²⁹)?

The mindset and approach of some South Africans towards the African continent—either as individuals or collectively—continue to be a source of unease for many. Racism, now recast as xenophobia, still motivates the behaviour of many a South African. The level of discomfort is not lowered by an apparent inability of government to put an end to one of the country's nasty export products, namely mercenaries. Many add the perceived aggressive behaviour of South African-based companies to the list of unwanted export products. The sometimes naïve enthusiasm with which government tended to market South Africa's settlement—the Government of National Unity—to countries in conflict could be a further candidate for the list. These difficulties raise questions about the country's identity (the belief that South Africans are exceptional) and the nature of its relations with its counterparts on the continent and elsewhere (the belief that South Africa is powerful and the expectation to be seen as a natural leader).

With regard to the structural constraints upon policy choices, as discussed earlier, what is not stated upfront is the need for the country's leadership to harmonise their policy objectives with the demands of globalisation. In a sense then, and unsurprisingly, our national interest is increasingly being shaped and determined by the demands and expectations of the world's powerful, here identified as the group of 31 high-income or industrialised member states of the OECD,³⁰ the international financial institutions, the nuclear club, multinational corporations, and the US-driven war on terror. However, to fully appreciate the international state of play one should include global processes and institutions to which South Africa is party: the United Nations (UN), Non-Aligned Movement, Commonwealth, African Union, and strategic partnerships with countries such as Brazil, Nigeria, India and China.

Considering the apparent anomalies and considerable structural constraints upon foreign policy options, any attempt to assess the

government's choices ought to refer to the 'seven principles' that were elaborated in 1996 to inform the government's foreign policy orientation as the benchmark.³¹ In my view it still serves as a broad orienting guide to the country's foreign policy choices and actions. The broad public should not hesitate to make the government aware of it where its representatives—or policies—deviate from the guide. The government's foreign policy approach has over time been refined by the Department of Foreign Affairs to refer to 'wealth creation' and security, a commitment to the African Renaissance and the creation of a better world for all. By the latter is meant "strengthening solidarity among developing countries of the South" and "building partnerships with developed countries of the North".³² A subsequent further reformulation of the Department of Foreign Affairs' mission has replaced "wealth creation and security" with "South Africa's national interests and values". Studying the department's Strategic Plan for 2003–5, it appears the government's top five foreign policy priorities are the promotion of the African Renaissance, peace and security, sustainable development, strategic bilateral relations and international conferences.³³

Particular strategic foreign policy priorities for the current year were distilled by the 2004 Cabinet *lekgotla* (meeting) and include:

1. global governance—issues relating to the UN, trade, Millennium Development Goals, security, the Middle East, transborder crime;
2. consolidation of the African agenda—issues relating to democracy and stability, conflict resolution, socio-economic development, and integration into the global economy;
3. South–South cooperation; and
4. the strengthening of strategic bilateral relations.³⁴

As far as national security is concerned, South Africa has no open official document that contains a clear definition and policy commitments. The *South Africa Yearbook* of 2003/4 contains an indication of the process from which the country's strategy is deduced: "National Security Strategy is derived from implied national interests, the Department of

Foreign Affairs and the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster objectives".³⁵ Recall our earlier definition of security as the pursuit of freedom from threat. Generally speaking South Africa's security interests have been broadly conceptualised.³⁶ The 1996 White Paper on Defence states:

In the new South Africa national security is no longer viewed as a predominantly military and police problem. It has broadened to incorporate political, economic, social and environmental matters. At the heart of this new approach is the paramount concern with the security of the people. Security is an encompassing condition in which individual citizens live in freedom, peace and safety.³⁷

As the government's Ten Year Review notes, this approach is important for integrated policy making: particularly in an era of mutual vulnerabilities and a plethora of 'new' security threats including terrorism, flows of illegal migrants and refugees, international crime syndicates, illicit small and light arms trade, money laundering schemes, narcotics trafficking, environmental degradation, the spread of communicable diseases and transborder crime.³⁸

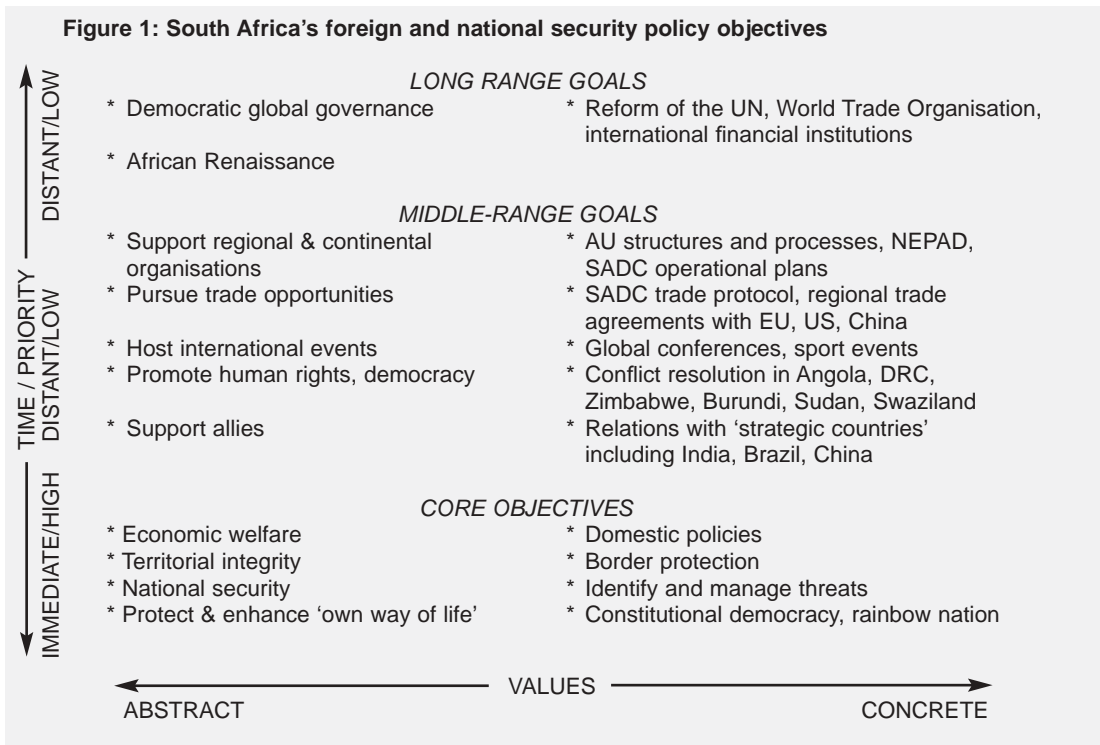
The conceptualisation of strategy and policy based on the identification and management of threats in an integrated fashion, given resource constraints, is indeed a daunting task.³⁹ There is a clear need for the harmonisation of the country's foreign policy and defence objectives. In terms of foreign policy, President Mbeki is driven by a quest for continental stability via peace making, -building, -keeping and -enforcement. This vision of Africa at peace with itself and the world also finds expression in the policy documents of the AU and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) of which Mbeki was a chief architect. Indeed, the four foreign policy priorities identified by the 2004 Cabinet *lekgotla*, quoted above, can be seen to serve as the context for constructing South Africa's national security interests. Concerning South Africa's pursuit of these objectives, the president expects the security sector to play a criti-

cal supportive and implementing role. Although members of the defence or intelligence agencies will vigorously defend their role in this quest, academics point to a gap between expectations and the potential to deliver. Shelton argues that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) must re-define its role and missions, and suggests four areas where it can contribute to Africa’s security, namely to: expand warning intelligence capacity; advance the regional and continental security regime; operationalise the SADC defence pact; and advance the AU’s security framework.⁴⁰

By utilising Holsti’s schematic conceptualisation of foreign policy objectives, we can offer a construction of South Africa’s (official) foreign policy. Holsti’s hierarchy of foreign policy objectives looks as follows: All states pursue core interests and values; they are most frequently related to the self-preservation of a political unit; these are short-range objectives, because other goals obviously cannot be achieved unless the political units pursuing them maintain their own existence; the most essential objective of any foreign policy is to

ensure the sovereignty and independence of the home territory and to perpetuate a particular political, social and economic system based on that territory.⁴¹

Holsti then identifies three kinds of middle-range objectives: the promotion of private business interests abroad, whether or not these relate to broad societal needs; attempts to increase a state’s prestige in the system (not only military capability but increasingly levels of development and scientific and technological skills); and, thirdly the many different forms of self-extension or imperialism. Many states seek advantages in neighbouring territories, including access to raw materials, markets and trade routes that they cannot achieve through ordinary trade or diplomacy. This was (is?) done via colonies, protectorates, ‘satellites’ or ‘spheres of influence’. Ideological self-extension is also prevalent in many forms, where agents of a state undertake to promote its own socio-economic and political values abroad or to ‘convert’ other peoples to a particular religious, cultural or political faith. Beyond these, there are a myriad of objectives that governments espouse: supporting friends and allies, promoting human



rights, environmental regulation, the development of international institutions, values and regulations, schemes for regional integration or security collaboration.

Long-range goals are those plans, dreams and visions concerning the ultimate political or ideological organisation of the international system.

Regarding South Africa’s approach to Africa, the mid- to long-range priorities are elaborated in Figure 2

Conclusion

In a democracy, the national interest is what a majority, after discussion and debate and through a representative parliament, decides are its legitimate long-term shared interests. The basis for such a decision should not be limited to immediate interests (survival, security) but should include economic well-being as well as other preferences relating to identity, self-image and moral values. Although most South Africans would probably agree

Figure 2: South African foreign policy priorities relating to Africa, 2003–542

Objective	Activities
<i>PRIORITY ONE: AFRICAN RENAISSANCE</i>	
Execute AU responsibilities	Establish organs of the AU (Commission, Pan African Parliament, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, the Peace and Security Council, specialised technical committees (STCs), financial institutions (FIs), the African Court of Justice) Finalise the Common African Defence and Security Policy
Promote NEPAD	Finalise modalities for the African Peer Review Mechanism Align programmes of the STCs, FIs and regional economic communities to NEPAD Coordinate partnership projects.
Finalise SADC restructuring and harmonise its policies with AU/NEPAD	Finalise and implement the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan Finalise the SADC Mutual Defence Pact
<i>PRIORITY TWO: PEACE AND SECURITY</i>	
Promote peaceful conflict resolution and encourage peace building	Work towards consolidation of peace processes in Burundi, DRC and Ivory Coast Continue ongoing efforts to achieve peace and stability and to deepen democracy in Angola, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Comoros, Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia
Combat all forms of terrorism through the UN Security Council	Implementation of UN Security Council resolutions
Maintain a role in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament issues	Continued engagement; utilise AU/SADC mechanisms to sensitise African governments
Combat transnational crime	Encourage action plans regarding transnational organised crime, money laundering, extradition, mutual legal assistance, etc.
<i>PRIORITY THREE: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</i>	
Promote the Agenda of the South	Develop feedback on NEPAD, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the World Conference against Racism (WCAR)
Work towards reform of Bretton Woods Institutions, the UN Economic and Social Council and the World Trade Organisation (WTO)	Coordinate South Africa’s position, participate in relevant events and enhance the interests of Africa and the South

that there is a national consensus on the need to further the human security agenda, there will always be dissenting voices. And many would continue to question whether particular policy options such as the multi-billion arms deal or hosting the Pan African Parliament are in South Africa's long-term interest.

The contours of the debate on South Africa's national interest have begun to emerge. Here are five examples. An early description of South Africa's national interest was provided by the authors of the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions, approved by Cabinet in October 1998:

South Africa's emerging national interests are underpinned by the values enshrined in the Constitution, which encompass the security of the state and its citizens, the promotion of the social and economic well-being of its citizenry, the encouragement of global peace and stability and participating in the process of ensuring regional peace, stability and development. These national interests are concretely reflected in key national policy documents—examples of which include the Constitution, a range of White Papers on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), the Transformation of the Public Service, Intelligence and Defence. South Africa's foreign policy ... is an important component of this definition of national interest. In short, it is in the South African national interest to assist peoples who suffer from famine, political repression, natural disasters and the scourge of violent conflict. South Africa may thus provide civilian assistance and armed forces in common international efforts when properly authorised by international authorities to help in such efforts.⁴³

The Department of Foreign Affairs recently offered an interesting, if not unsurprising, construction of South Africa's national inter-

est by linking the country's fundamental interests with that of Africa.⁴⁴ The department told parliament that "...the future of our country is inextricably linked to the future of the African continent and that of our neighbours in Southern Africa. Africa therefore remains the central area of focus in the conduct of our foreign policy". It then links the domestic with the foreign: "The national vision of building a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society is also relevant to our vision for Africa. Coupled with this is the understanding that socio-economic development cannot take place without political peace and stability." All of this means that "South Africa's efforts are therefore directed at creating an environment in which all states on the continent will achieve their full potential". As Figure 2 demonstrates, these efforts entail support for the AU, SADC and NEPAD, as well as peace-making and peace-keeping on the continent.

According to the influential Ten Year Review report of the South African government commissioned by The Presidency in 2003, the closest the country ever got to a broad vision (that is, 'an agreed understanding of the national interest') was the RDP.⁴⁵ The challenge for the country, according to the Ten Year Review, is constructing its replacement. It offers some ideas. The first is that the RDP objectives need to be integrated with the UN Millennium Declaration.⁴⁶ The second is that:

... serious consideration should be given to the nature of a social compact that can provide an encompassing framework for further development. It may also be necessary that beyond the need to improve the formal institutions of the state, much greater attention should be given to mending and reinforcing the social fabric. The first 'Big Idea' for the next century therefore is to articulate an encompassing framework which not only helps better integrate the activities of government, but also harnesses the efforts of civil society to realise the national development objectives.⁴⁷

What if our list of priorities, our own 'big

idea', looked different from those being prescribed by the world's powerful? Consider this idea from the Institute for Food and Development Policy, sounded *over 20 years ago*, but relevant today given the overwhelming belief, as George Bush puts it, in only 'one model for success'— freedom, democracy and free enterprise:

... the possibility that emerging nations may demonstrate that the US may not be the last word in democracy, freedom and opportunity ... might sound far-fetched. But think of the implications. What if a third-world society demonstrated that the choice is not just between US-style capitalism and Soviet-style statism? What if an emerging third-world order were to offer greater opportunities for citizens to be involved in shaping economic policy than either superpower model ...? Or expanded human rights protection to include the right of every rural person to farmland sufficient to live in dignity? Or began building a political system in which wealth is strictly precluded as a factor in gaining office? To US policymakers, only the market and private control over productive property are consistent with freedom and democracy. To do things differently is to undermine both. What if an emerging society were to question such a dogmatic approach, putting people's need for land, jobs, and food first? And what if such policies were pursued with broad popular support, not repressive measures, so that people felt their freedom expanded? Such a development almost certainly would give hope to oppressed peoples throughout the world. Moreover, US citizens might be encouraged to challenge the control of concentrated wealth here at home and the assumption that those monolithic corporations ... are best left beyond democratic control.⁴⁸

Two decades later, reflecting on South Africa's experiences of freedom, academics Achille Mbembe and Deborah Posel suggest ways in which its democratic project presents a possi-

ble alternative to globally hegemonic styles of power. In their view, these include:

(A) remarkable national consensus on liberal democratic constitutionalism, the idea of a society committed to processes of reconciliation across racial divides, the notion of transitional justice as the basis of national reconciliation and as an alternative to the politics of vengeance and retribution, South Africa's re-insertion into the politics, economics and cultures of the African continent, and the possibilities of the country's experience of negotiated liberation in inspiring global efforts to re-invigorate cosmopolitan ideals.⁴⁹

At the same time Mbembe and Posel warn that alongside these "markers of hope" are a number of challenges, if not crises:

HIV/Aids and gender violence, deepening orders of poverty and inequality, the persistence of social violence, and the tensions inherent in the notion of democratic citizenship (where refugees and migrants are considered 'outsiders', not worthy of entitlements).⁵⁰

The people of a country have a responsibility to assist and guide the state in determining the country's national interest. This requires continuous vigorous debate and broad participation through membership of political parties and participation in organised civil society. This is necessary to ensure that the country's policymakers manage the affairs of state effectively and in the interest of the broad population rather than for the sake of political expediency. When left unchecked, power-hungry politicians and centralised decision-making structures open the door to excessive control over and manipulation of the national agenda. Nor should society meekly accept the preferences of the world's powerful, often unilaterally imposed on the global South. Despite left-leaning academics' tendency to ridicule President Mbeki's approach to international relations, attempts at transforming the institutions of global governance (democratising the UN, WTO and so on) seem worth pursuing and ought to form part of a progressive country's national interest. As the Ten

Year Review notes:

South Africa seeks to transform a deeply divided society in a situation in which the nation-state is subjected to varying forms of global licence—economic, cultural, political and otherwise—which may not be fully appreciative and supportive of the nation-state's agenda. Thus adeptness at identifying the national interest and pursuing it in a creative way is part of the challenge of governance and state leadership in the current global arena.⁵¹

The call is not for society to support slavishly government's initiatives—or its identification of national interests—nor Western-style party political opposition, but rather strategic engagement with sectors of the state, based on the careful consideration of the merits of each case. The experience of 10 years of democracy has given South Africans sufficient experience to pursue an ongoing and informed dialogue regarding the content of their country's policies and the values that inform such choices. Let the debates continue—it is, after all, in the national interest.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference, South Africa: Ten years after apartheid, organised by the Africa Institute of South Africa, 24 March 2004, Pretoria.
2. Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (PCAS), *Towards a ten year review: Synthesis report on implementation of government programmes*, The Presidency, 2003, p 9.
3. Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, at the Budget Vote of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Cape Town, 3 June 2004.
4. Mbeki says AU must move quickly, *This Day*, 11 August 2004.
5. Following the 9/11 incident, President Ghaddafi of Libya decided to work closely with the Americans on the war on terror, ostensibly in an effort to improve his relationship with the West, who regarded him as a sponsor of terrorism. President Aznar of Spain chose to become a close partner of the US and UK in the war against Saddam Hussain, and that decision arguably led to his country being targeted by radical forces (witness the devastating bombing campaign in March 2004 in the Spanish capital of Madrid). <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article>> (27 August 2004).
6. S Krasner, *Defending the national interest*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978.
7. Botswana Democratic Party election manifesto, 1984.
8. The 'agent-structure debate' in IR was made famous by Alexander Wendt. See his 1987 article, The agent-structure debate in international relations theory, *International Organisation* 41(3), pp 335-70.
9. According to the constructivist paradigm agents and structures can be viewed as mutually constitutive entities. Social interaction via self- and collective identity becomes key. For a review of the debates on constructivism, visit the book series, *International Relations in a constructed world*, Kubalkova, Onuf and Pettman (eds), ME Sharpe, London, 1998.
10. See J Weldes, *Constructing national interests*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999.
11. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *In the National Interest White Paper*, undated.
12. M Dent, Identity politics: *Filling the gap between federalism and independence*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, p163.
13. J Nye, Why the Gulf War served the national interest, *The Atlantic Online*, 1991, <www.theatlantic.com/issues/91jul/nye> (30 August 2004).
14. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002, <www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> (30 August 2004).
15. See for example G Ikenberry, The end of the neo-conservative moment, *Survival*, 46(1), 2004.
16. B Buzan, *People, states and fear*, Lynne Rinner Publishers, Boulder, 1992, pp 18, 356.
17. *Ibid*, p 19.
18. G Le Pere and B Vickers, Civil society and foreign policy, in P Nel and J van der Westhuizen (eds) *Democratizing foreign policy? Lessons from South Africa*. Lexington Books, Lanham, 2004, p 75.
19. This refers to the polarisation of the South African society where extreme wealth (first economy) co-exists with abject poverty (second economy). During his State of the Nation address of May 2004 President Mbeki elaborated on this concept. He announced that his government will focus on the growth, development and modernisation of the first economy, and respond to the challenges of the second by launching a variety of interventions such as the Expanded Public Works Programme. *State of the Nation address by the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki*, to the joint sitting of the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, 21 May 2004, <www.info.gov.za> (30 August 2004).
20. For an interesting overview of the issues at play (as well as the facts) see the papers delivered at the *Conference on stability, poverty reduction, and South African trade and investment in Southern Africa*, 29-30 March, 2004 at the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria, available at <<http://www.sarprn.org.za/documents/d0000755/papers/index.php>> (30 August 2004).
21. Garth Shelton recommends that for South Africa

- to play a meaningful regional (and continental) peacekeeping role, the effectiveness, affordability and appropriate force structure of the South African National Defence Force need serious review. See G Shelton, The South African National Defence Force and President Mbeki's peace and security agenda: New roles and mission, *IGD Occasional Paper* No 42, Institute for Global Dialogue, Braamfontein, 2004.
22. For a thoughtful examination of South Africa's approach towards Zimbabwe, see M Schoeman and C Alden, The hegemon that wasn't: South Africa's foreign policy towards Zimbabwe, *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 25(1), 2003, pp 1-28.
 23. For example, the current director-general of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dr Ayanda Ntsaluba, recently noted that the four foreign policy priorities identified by the 2004 Cabinet *lek-gotla* (meeting) included global governance (issues relating to the UN, trade, Millennium Development Goals, security, the Middle East and transborder crime); consolidation of the African agenda (issues relating to democracy and stability, conflict resolution, socio-economic development, and integration into the global economy); South-South cooperation; and strengthening of strategic bilateral relations.
 24. Minister Dlamini-Zuma, in a media presentation in March 2003, Sapa, www.info.gov.za (30 August 2004).
 25. A decade of democracy, Special supplement, *Independent Newspapers*, 21 April 2004.
 26. *Department of Foreign Affairs Strategic Plan 2003-2005*. Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria.
 27. The other lessons from South Africa's experiences, according to the minister, included the promotion and protection of human rights, disarmament, and dialogue and reconciliation as methods of conflict resolution. *Department of Foreign Affairs Strategic Plan 2003-2005*. Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria.
 28. Presidents Mbeki and Obiang Nguema M'Basogo met in July 2004 for bilateral political and economic discussions. Earlier, in February, a Reciprocal Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Investments was negotiated and signed by the two governments, <www.info.gov.za> (30 August 2004).
 29. P Bond, *Talk left, walk right: South Africa's frustrated global reforms*, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Scottsville Press, 2004.
 30. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was founded in 1961 and consists mainly of European member states, but also including the US, Canada, Japan and Korea. The aims of the organisation is to promote policies designed to achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy. It also aims to contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral basis. B Turner (ed), *The Statesman's Yearbook 2002*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, p 49.
 31. The promotion of democracy and human rights; accepting the supremacy of peace, justice and international law in guiding relations between nations; a commitment to the development of the African continent and the Southern African region in particular; a belief that South Africa's growing economic development depends on regional and international cooperation in an inter-dependent world; a belief that our international relations must mirror our deep commitment to the consolidation of a democratic South Africa. *South African Foreign Policy Discussion Document*, Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, 1996.
 32. 2002 Annual Report, Department of Foreign Affairs.
 33. <<http://www.dfa.gov.za/departement/stratplan03-05/stratplan09.pdf>> (30 August 2004).
 34. Government's Programme of Action: International Relations, Peace and Security Cluster, <www.info.gov.za/issues/poa/irps.htm> (30 August 2004).
 35. D Burger, *South Africa Yearbook 2003/4*, Government Communications and Information Service, Pretoria, p 500.
 36. Ministry for Intelligence Services, *An overview of the civilian intelligence community*, June 2003. See also G Cawthra, Security transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, in G Cawthra and R Luckham (eds), *Governing insecurity*, Zed Books, London, 2003.
 37. *Defence in a Democracy: White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa*, Ministry of Defence, Pretoria, 1998.
 38. Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, pp 58-9.
 39. For a discussion of foreign policy making under the government's system of integrated governance (the so-called cluster system) see G Le Pere and A van Nieuwkerk, Who made and makes foreign policy?, in E Sidiropoulos, *Apartheid past, Renaissance future: South Africa's foreign policy 1994-2004*, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, 2004.
 40. Shelton, op cit.
 41. K Holsti, *International politics: a framework for analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1977.
 42. Adapted from *Department of Foreign Affairs Strategic Plan 2003-2005*. Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria. Concerning bilateral relations, South Africa maintains bi-national or joint bilateral commissions with 15 countries on the continent: Angola, Tunisia, Morocco, Mali, Egypt, Lesotho, Libya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, Nigeria, Algeria, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana.
 43. *White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions*, Department of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.info.gov.za/whitepaper/1999/peace_missions.htm> (30 August 2004).

44. *ANC Today* 4(24), 18-24 June 2004, p 5.
45. Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, p 103.
46. The Millennium Development Goals focus on reducing poverty and hunger and child death rates, promoting primary education, sexual equality, and health of mothers, combating HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases, protecting the environment, and developing a global partnership for development. For a critical analysis, see Clemens and Moss, Setting up Africa for failure, *Mail & Guardian*, 28 May–3 June 2004.
47. Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, p 106.
48. F Lappe, R Shuman and K Danaher, *Betraying the national interest*, Institute for Food and Development Policy, Oakland, California, 1982.
49. A Mbembe and D Posel, Concept paper: The promise of freedom and its practice. Global perspectives on South Africa's decade of democracy, Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
50. Ibid.
51. Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, p 9.