

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, FOREIGN POLICIES AND STATE IDENTITY: SOUTH AFRICA (2015)

DIRK KOTZÉ\*

## Introduction

The year 2015 was a period of little change in South Africa's international posture, characterised by continuity and policy predictability but little innovation. The period of the Zuma administration's second term since 2014 has been dominated by domestic and party political issues while international affairs were experienced mainly through the prism of economic issues: 2015 is a year after the general election in 2014 at which the ANC received a new mandate to govern, no ground-breaking resolutions in the domain of foreign relations were adopted at the ANC's National Conference in 2012, which had to be incorporated in its election manifesto and post-2014 policies: 2015 is two years away from the ANC's next Policy and National Conferences and therefore is truly entrenched in mid-term continuity with little motivation for significant changes.

Conventionally, a state's international relations and foreign policy are justified in terms of its national interests: it is the work of both policy-makers and scholarly analysts. In the case of South Africa a good example is presented by Chris Landsberg.<sup>1</sup> The national interest is applied by the way in which specific national priorities and policies are promoted by concluding specific forms of international relations. In addition to the national interest, a state's international relations can be determined by its reputation or status. A superpower's relations certainly differ from those of a middle-sized or regional power; Nordic states have developed a reputation for providing high levels of international aid and want to maintain that reputation. Other states have the reputation of promoting peace and security and therefore continue to contribute to peace-keeping operations; the Netherlands, already, and Tanzania (which is in the process of developing), have reputations as centres of international public law.

The argument presented here is that a state's international relations and foreign policies can be influenced by the perceptions of its identity.

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\* Professor in Political Sciences, Unisa.

<sup>1</sup> C Landsberg *The Diplomacy of Transformation: South African Foreign Policy and Statecraft* (2010) 206–207.

The main contention is that South Africa's international relations and policies should be regarded as reliable indicators of its state identity and are determined not only by its national interest and reputational needs. The reverse argument is also possible: state identity is an important determinant of South Africa's international relations and policies. This discussion uses elements of both.

Briefly, it considers the implications of the interplay between state identity and international relations, which is followed by a focus on South Africa and the articulation in practical terms of the identity-relations interplay. In this regard the policy framework as articulated in 2015 is presented, as well as a summary of South Africa's multilateral and bilateral activities as implementation acts of the policy objectives. International visits by the South African policy-makers are treated also as indicators of policy priorities and identity articulation. A single issue is isolated as a policy matter which serves as one of the identity indicators, namely South Africa's use of the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF).

## International relations and state identity

Identity questions have been popularised by postmodernism, constructivism, decolonialism, and in most ideological approaches. Though they influence each other, a distinction between national and state identity should be maintained: a national identity in an integrated society is similar to a nation and derives from cultural, historical, political, and social characteristics. National identity is not easy to define or describe: Huntington, Chipkin or Khalidi<sup>2</sup> are examples of the extensive scholarship on this topic.

State identity, on the other hand, is not about the perceptions people have of themselves or others but designates the state as an abstract entity: it is argued that a state is partly determined by its people (or nation) but a state is more than its people. That added element to state identity is clarified here in order to apply it to South Africa.

In this regard reference can be to Wendt, although he concentrates on corporate identity, which for him is the 'intrinsic, self-organising qualities that constitute actor individuality'.<sup>3</sup> For organisations (or states) this refers to their constituent individuals, physical resources, and the

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<sup>2</sup> SP Huntington *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004), I Chipkin *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'the People'* (2007); R Khalidi *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> A Wendt 'Collective identity formation and the international state' (1994) 88 *American Political Science Review* 384 385

'shared beliefs and institutions in virtue of which individuals function as a "we"'.<sup>4</sup> According to Wendt, for a state, its corporate identity generates four basic interests or appetites, namely physical security, ontological security or predictability in relationships to the world, recognition as an actor by others and development in the sense of meeting the human aspiration for a better life.<sup>5</sup> Here, physical security includes national security and general peace and security; relationships to the world also include multilateral and bilateral relations; recognition by others is about international status and prestige; and development includes both a global imperative (such as those of the global South) and a state policy focus. Wendt provides an indication of how these factors relate to identity articulation: 'How a state satisfies its corporate interests depends on how it defines the self in relation to the other, which is a function of social identities at both domestic and [international, *my insertion*] systemic levels of analysis'.<sup>6</sup>

Because identity is often determined in comparison with others, state identity therefore is how a state relates to other states, how a state wants to brand itself in the international community by using means such as public diplomacy and 'soft power' (Joseph Nye). It is also about a state's reputation in the international community with regard to its willingness to participate in global or regional systems or rebel or be aligned to specific state patrons (such as Russia, China, Europe, and the USA or even Venezuela under Hugo Chávez). A state's identity can also be determined by its track record on international norms such as democracy, human rights, transparency or compliance to international law as shown by indicators such as Freedom House<sup>7</sup> or the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance<sup>8</sup> or instruments such as the African Peer Review Mechanism.<sup>9</sup> Governance issues and state economic competitiveness are reported on by the World Economic Forum, and a state's socio-economic factors are included in the UNDP's Human Development Indices.<sup>10</sup>

Identity also determines associations: the choices states make in terms of their multilateral and bilateral partners contribute to their

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Freedom House 'Freedom in the world', available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016> (accessed 31 March 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Mo Ibrahim Foundation 'Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance', available at <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/> (accessed 31 March 2016).

<sup>9</sup> African Union 'African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)', available at <http://www.au.int/en/organs/aprm> (accessed 31 March 2016).

<sup>10</sup> UNDP *Human Development Reports*, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2015-report> (accessed 31 March 2016).

identity. Finally, the presence or absence of a sense of public citizenship in international affairs, in the form of using its rights and meeting its obligations or responsibilities, defines a state's identity: some states demonstrate greater initiative, some play an activist role and some contribute more than others.

In concrete terms, state identity is determined by the following points. First, whether the state perceives itself as part of the East or the West, the North or South. Some states are more pronounced on one axis, others have an identity based on both axes, for example, Japan is part of the East and North, China is part of the East and the South, Turkey focuses mainly on the East-West axis. Second, a state's level of economic development, such as an advanced or industrialised economy or an emerging market, or a middle-income state, or an energy-producing economy, or a member of the G20 or EU, or as a former Asian Tiger, can be an element of an identity. Third, historic factors play a role in a state's current relations and identity, such as its alignment during the Cold War; whether it went through a decolonisation process and how it relates to its former colonial power as well as with those who supported its independence struggle; whether it has a national liberation history and who supported it. A state's self-perception of its leadership role will determine whether it feels obliged to become involved in certain issues or situations and what role it should play in them. The issues important to a state, whether the environment or human rights, peace and security, health, trade, crime prevention or cultural matters, define a state's agenda and activism and are the issues which shape its identity.

State identity normally is not a static factor and alters together with policy and government changes as issues emerge or disappear or as the international environment changes. It applies to South Africa: the question is whether South Africa's state identity is undergoing change at the moment.

### **South Africa's international relations in terms of state identity**

The previous section provided a framework in terms of which the interplay between South Africa's international relations and its state identity can be explored.

As a point of departure one can determine a domestic focus on a South African state identity followed by its international component. The dominant narrative of the ANC in domestic terms consists arguably of the following elements: first, it is a product of national liberation associated with the principles of democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism. These principles justify the ANC's leading role in government, but also explain the ANC's loyalty to Cuba, China, the Palestinians, Western Sahara, and

the former Frontline States, as well as its historical support for the Non-Aligned Movement and currently for the G77+China group.

Second, the narrative is based on African norms and values, notably ubuntu and restorative justice, but at the same time it emphasises South Africa's cultural diversity. Third, the narrative dictates that a post-apartheid state requires transformation in all spheres because it is perceived as both a race- and class-divided society. This transformation has to be policy-driven within the constitutional framework. Currently, all three elements of such a state identity are encompassed in the government's policy objective of a 'developmental state' guided by the National Development Plan. According to Chris Landsberg, the 'developmental state' identity description cum policy objective was introduced during the Mbeki administration and was continued after 2009 by the Zuma administration.<sup>11</sup> Its policy requirements (informed by the examples of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and post-war Japan) suggest indicators of South Africa's international posture. According to Landsberg

as soon as Zuma was inaugurated, he made it plain that he would make a capability analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the state in order to help realise the goal of establishing in South Africa a democratic, developmental state.<sup>12</sup>

The second dimension of South African state identity is concerned with its position internationally, the choices made in its international relations and international branding. The first domain of concern is its multilateral relations. South Africa's participation in the United Nations is aimed first at promoting multilateralism as an international norm and to undercut unilateral actions by major powers. In itself it is an indication of South Africa's own identity perception as a small or medium power which can exert influence only in co-operation with other states. South Africa's voting record in the Security Council in the past was partly informed by its criticism of major powers' use of the Council instead of other UN bodies to present issues which serve their specific policy interests.

In the same vein South Africa is persistent in its call for reform of the international governance institutions (such as the Security Council or Bretton Woods institutions) and has increased its involvement in peace and security matters in Africa. In his address to the UN General Assembly, on 28 September 2015, President Zuma motivated his call for a restructured Security Council so that it can deal more effectively

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<sup>11</sup> Landsberg (note 1 above) 199–206.

<sup>12</sup> Id 199.

with the conflicts in the Middle East and Africa.<sup>13</sup> South Africa served on the Security Council in 2007–2008 and 2011–2012<sup>14</sup> and did not have direct influence in the Council in 2015 when Nigeria, Angola, and Chad were the three rotating African representatives.

In terms of global citizenship South Africa was very involved in the talks on climate change which produced an agreement in Paris in December 2015. As chairperson of the G77+China group and as an active African Union member and in the context of BRICS (as part of the BASIC group),<sup>15</sup> South Africa wanted to see concrete results after hosting the COP17 conference in Durban. In terms of the global South, as an identity indicator and in multilateral terms South Africa participated in BRICS, in the G77+China and served as its chairperson in 2015 and as a key participant in the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) which met in December 2015 in South Africa.

The BRICS annual summit was held in Ufa, Russia in 2015 to finalise its New Development Bank: South Africa would host its Africa Regional Centre in Johannesburg. BRICS is a significant identity indicator for South Africa in terms of North-South and global power relations: it is presented by South African policy-makers as a group of powers from the South which does not pose a challenge to the existing global governance institutions. It is also presented as a group of leading emerging markets. However, Russia does not define itself as part of the global South and is not a member of the G77+China group: as a former superpower, it is problematic to regard Russia as an emerging market. It is also inappropriate for China, the second largest economy after the USA, to be called an emerging market. The question therefore is how BRICS can be understood as an identity indicator: one possibility is that each of the five members has its own reason for being involved in BRICS. Another possibility is that a successful BRICS will create a new multipolar global system and present a new non-Western pole. Though it is officially denied, the New Development Bank is interpreted by observers as an alternative to the IMF and World Bank, which fits the decolonial identity propagated by President Mbeki, in the form of the New Partnership for Africa's

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations News Centre 'In UN speech, South Africa President calls for reform of Security Council' (28 September 2015), available at [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52021#.VwYts\\_I95D8](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52021#.VwYts_I95D8) (accessed 28 March 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations 'South Africa at the United Nations Security Council', available at <http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/pmun/SAatUNSC.html> (accessed 28 March 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Department of Environmental Affairs 'Joint statement issued at the conclusion of the 19<sup>th</sup> BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change' (10 October 2014), available at [https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/19thbasic\\_ministerialmeeting\\_concluded](https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/19thbasic_ministerialmeeting_concluded) (accessed 26 March 2016).

Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU), and continued by President Zuma. Russia arguably is the fiercest anti-EU/-NATO proponent in BRICS and President Zuma's close engagement with President Putin reinforces an impression of non-Western sentiment. A Russian nuclear agreement in the making serves as an indicator of such a relationship.

Two multilateral engagements which present other dimensions of South Africa's identity are its membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and the G20. The Commonwealth (formerly the British Commonwealth) is an intergovernmental organization of 53 members, including Portuguese-speaking Mozambique and the former German colony Namibia.<sup>16</sup> In 1961 South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth and regained membership in 1994. In symbolic or identity terms South Africa's memberships of BRICS or the G77 on the one hand and the Commonwealth on the other, appear to constitute a contradiction. The Commonwealth is not a trade bloc but mainly a political, educational, cultural and sports community whose members experience a sense of international prestige from their membership, as does South Africa. In symbolic terms, South Africa's return to the Commonwealth meant a return to the pre-1961 dispensation, before the Republic isolated itself from the international community and before the state fully entrenched itself in apartheid.

In the final instance, in multilateral terms South Africa is intimately associated with the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In both cases South Africa is a key player in dealing with peace and security matters. South Africa has become a *de facto* permanent member of the AU's Peace and Security Council,<sup>17</sup> and it is directly or indirectly involved in SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security Cooperation. This dimension of its relations constitutes an important element of its state identity. Earlier, its involvement in peace and security processes was associated with South Africa's own peaceful negotiations and transition, but lately it is associated with its economic, military, and diplomatic capacity to become engaged in crisis situations.

Other aspects of the AU are the organisational architecture President Mbeki introduced such as NEPAD or the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). By 2015 the latter had lost most of its momentum and NEPAD has become less prominent. President Zuma is still responsible for co-ordinating continental infrastructural programmes, but the Mbeki legacy

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<sup>16</sup> The Commonwealth 'About us', available at <http://thecommonwealth.org/about-us> (accessed 31 March 2016).

<sup>17</sup> P Fabricius 'SA to serve on AU Peace and Security Council' *IOL* (28 January 2016), available at <http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/sa-to-serve-on-au-peace-and-security-council-1976997> (accessed 31 March 2016).

has not been fully sustained by the Zuma government. The focus now is more on developing free trade areas, such as the SADC-EAC-COMESA tripartite agreement. South Africa's presence in the G20, BRICS, and IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) means that its trade priorities are not primarily or exclusively focused on Africa. The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation's statement, that Africa remains central to South Africa's foreign policy,<sup>18</sup> is not entirely accurate as it does not encapsulate the country's international dynamic and identity.

South Africa's multilateral relations present a matrix of global, African, regional, global South, and post-colonial identity features. A discussion of its foreign policy reveals how this is reflected in the policy and international relations during 2015. In addition to its multilateral relations, a survey of its bilateral relations provides an indicator of how South Africa views itself in terms of its choices of states with which it wants to associate: in this respect South Africa has formal diplomatic relations and is host to foreign delegations from 113 states.<sup>19</sup> Such a large number means that formal diplomatic relations are not necessarily a good indicator of South Africa's preferences.

More indicative of the nature of bilateral relations might be official state visits, the ministerial and working visits in a year, meetings of high-level bilateral commissions in a given year, and interventions by South Africa in other countries, such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe or Burundi. Changes in regional focus are also an indicator, such as South Africa's increasing emphasis on the East and Asia. Therefore, it is important to determine with whom South Africa conducts active bilateral relations and at what level they are maintained.

Finally, in both multilateral and bilateral relations it is important to determine what issues are important for South Africa as they are significant indications of the nature of South Africa's state identity and, combined with South Africa's use of its soft power (to make it attractive for other states) and the government's use of Brand South Africa,<sup>20</sup> promote the state's image and reputation. Some of the issues South Africa wants to associate with are peace and stability in Africa, a strong anti-terrorism stance, environmental matters, specifically climate change, intra-Africa trade, AU issues such as Agenda 2063, nuclear non-proliferation, global governance and changes to the global balance of power, a centre for

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<sup>18</sup> M Nkoana-Mashabane 'Budget Vote speech by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, H.E. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Cape Town, 21 May 2015', distributed by email from [dircopress01@dirco.gov.za](mailto:dircopress01@dirco.gov.za) (21 May 2015).

<sup>19</sup> DIRCO 'Foreign representation in South Africa', available at [www.dirco.gov.za/foreign/index.html](http://www.dirco.gov.za/foreign/index.html) (accessed 28 March 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Brand South Africa: Official custodian of South Africa's National Brand, available at <http://www.brandsouthafrica.com/> (accessed 31 March 2016).



international sport, promotion of human rights, the Palestinian issue and to become a provider of developmental aid in Africa (through the ARF).

Specific attention to developments in 2015, which either reaffirmed or deviated from the general presentation of South Africa's state identity, will be a tangible demonstration of the interplay between international relations and foreign policy and state identity. The first step is to assess the presentation of South Africa's foreign policy in a number of official statements. It should be noted that this will not represent the entire policy spectrum: as Thomas Dye indicates, public policy is about what a government chooses to do or not to do<sup>21</sup> and not only about formal policy statements.

### **Formal presentation of foreign policy**

Public policies are never finalised or articulated in an all-encompassing policy format: nuances differ and certain aspects increase in prominence while others become dormant. Formal presentations of South Africa's foreign policy during the course of 2015 were made in the State of the Nation address, DIRCO's budget vote, DIRCO's Annual Report and its Strategic Plan 2013–2018, and in a number of speeches.

Researchers and observers debate the very nature of policy and whether it is a value-driven or an interest-driven policy. Policy-makers are conscious of this debate and often commence with a value statement: Deputy Minister Luwellyn Landers in a presentation of South Africa's foreign policy priorities claimed that the policy 'is shaped by the domestic values that all South Africans share, among them being, our steadfastness in defending human rights, our determination to creating a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society'.<sup>22</sup> These principles were expanded into the following interdependent principles, namely human rights in the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres, and that justice and international law should guide the relations between states.<sup>23</sup> On this basis, according to Minister Nkoana-Mashabane, the policy's objective is 'to forge a better life for all South Africans and a better Africa and the world':<sup>24</sup> it is a noticeable illustration of one of

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<sup>21</sup> TR Dye *Understanding Public Policy* (1998) 2–3.

<sup>22</sup> L Landers 'Speech by South African Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Luwellyn Landers, at the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid, Spain, on 09 April 2015 entitled: "South Africa's foreign policy priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century"', available at [www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2015/land0409.htm](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2015/land0409.htm) (accessed 4 April 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Landers (note 22 above).

<sup>24</sup> Nkoana-Mashabane (note 18 above).

Wendt's corporate identity interests, namely the human aspiration for a better life.

Ostensibly an insignificant point included in the Minister's budget vote speech was that South Africa's international relations are premised on 'cooperation and partnerships instead of competition in global affairs'.<sup>25</sup> This point holds many policy implications and reflects a particular value orientation: it implies a choice against realism and is in favour of liberal co-operation. By implication it would rely on multilateralism, which reflects South African reality as not a major power which can act unilaterally, and it sets parameters for South Africa's international engagements.

It could be argued that beyond the value orientation, South Africa's self-perception and identity articulation are pronounced through the branding of its policies, which the Minister in her department's annual report did as follows

The pursuit of the African Agenda is the focal point in telling the good African story, which is influenced by our foreign policy objectives that is [sic] anchored in the National Development Plan. It is also in synch with the continent's Agenda 2063, which seeks to create a united, stable, developmental and prosperous Africa that is a leading continent in global politics. That is why the essence of our foreign policy during the year under review found expression through programmes aimed at regional integration, enhancing multilateral relations, reinforcing South-South cooperation and continuing as we have in the past by being involved in global system of governance.<sup>26</sup>

This branding integrates the symbol of South Africa's national interest (the NDP) with the AU's long-term development plan (Agenda 2063) and presents it as a policy in which South Africa's future depends on Africa's (applying the ubuntu logic). An additional consideration in 2015 was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ANC's Freedom Charter, whose last clause deals with international relations and calls for peace and friendship. In her budget vote speech the Minister acknowledged its historic meaning and claimed: 'Peace and Friendship must remain the core agenda of our foreign policy'.<sup>27</sup> In the same context, but without referring to the Freedom Charter, in his State of the Nation address, President Zuma introduced his discussion of South Africa's international relations by

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Department: International Relations and Cooperation *Annual Report 2014–2015*, available at [http://www.dirco.gov.za/department/annual\\_report\\_2014\\_2015/annual\\_report\\_body2014\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dirco.gov.za/department/annual_report_2014_2015/annual_report_body2014_2015.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2016) 8.

<sup>27</sup> Nkoana-Mashabane (note 18 above).

focusing on its involvement in peace and security matters.<sup>28</sup> The Freedom Charter's prominence in these statements in combination with the policy principle that Africa is central to the policy is a reliable indicator that South Africa's relations on the continent are dominated by peace and security considerations.

An important identity and branding priority for South Africa's policies is that it is 'an important player in the international arena'<sup>29</sup> and a 'country recognised and respected worldwide as a significant player in global politics':<sup>30</sup> this importance is underscored by Wendt's social identity interest of being recognised as an actor by others. Rather than confining itself to the continent as a regional player South Africa sees itself on the global level, which serves as a justification for South Africa's multilateral activities in the UN, G20 and BRICS, hosting international conferences, such as the COP17 and sports events, and its call for reform of the global governance institutions: 2015 was a year in which all of these goals were addressed.

The foreign policy's priorities in 2015 were summarised by Deputy Minister Landers in four categories. The first is Africa and the AU, consistent with the policy orientation for many years since 1994. Landers emphasises South Africa's support for attaining prosperity for Africa, which in his view depends on peace and stability. The second priority is to enhance the country's strategic partnerships and diversify its relations: South-South co-operation and strategic relations with the North are highlighted. In terms of geostrategic partnerships, South African policy-makers remained silent on the East-West dimension of international relations. The third priority is to promote a fair global governance system premised on multilateralism and collective solutions for shared challenges. Contemporary governance institutions, according to Landers, are imbalanced and are not reflective of current global realities. The last priority is economic diplomacy, which in Landers' opinion is the central pillar of relations among states. In this regard, South Africa wants to attract international trade and investment and to promote Africa as a major economic player.<sup>31</sup>

A departmental budget is also indicative of policy priorities. Not all policy activities can be measured in fiscal terms on an equal basis: a good example is the human resources budget item which is normally

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<sup>28</sup> JG Zuma 'Address by His Excellency Jacob G. Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa on the occasion of the Joint Sitting of Parliament, Cape Town, 12 February 2015', available at [www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=21570](http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=21570) (accessed 13 February 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Nkoana-Mashabane (note 18 above).

<sup>30</sup> Department: International Relations and Cooperation (note 26 above) 8.

<sup>31</sup> Landers (note 22 above).

much greater in departments with intensive human interactions than in departments with a technical focus and high capital expenditures. In the 2014/15 budget year DIRCO allocated the following to its five programmes<sup>32</sup>

International relations (mainly bilateral)	R3,12 billion
Departmental administration	R1,25 billion
International transfers (membership fees, etc)	R863 million
International cooperation (mainly multilateral)	R485 million
Public diplomacy and protocol	R276 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>R5,99 billion</b>

This budget reveals a huge difference between bilateral and multilateral relations. In policy terms much attention was paid to the importance of multilateral membership of the UN, AU, Commonwealth, G20, and others, but the main thrust of diplomacy is at the bilateral level. The cost of bilateral relations in terms of embassies and related infrastructure means that bilateral and multilateral costs are not equal in nature and comparisons have to allow for this difference: even at the level of working visits by the Ministry the scale is much greater at the bilateral level.

The different representations of South Africa's foreign policy during the course of 2015 suggest a strong presence of policy continuity. Its principles, objectives, and programmes remain the same. A significant dimension which was challenged was South Africa's membership of the International Criminal Court (ICC): the ANC's sub-committee on international relations recommended during the party's National General Council in October 2015 that South Africa should withdraw its membership.<sup>33</sup> The implications of this decision are that South Africa's public association with multilateralism and its promotion of public international law, its support for human rights at the international level, and promotion of transitional justice, peace, and security as part of international humanitarian law have to be discounted against its commitment to African issues and solidarity with other African leaders. Though the ANC took the decision in October 2015, by April 2016 the Government had not acted on it but approached the Meeting of the

<sup>32</sup> Department: International Relations and Cooperation (note 26 above) 15.

<sup>33</sup> African National Congress 'Report of the 4th National General Council held at the Gallagher Estate, Midrand, Gauteng, 08-11 October 2015' (Reports of Sectoral Commissions: International Relations), available at [www.anc.org.za/index.php](http://www.anc.org.za/index.php) (accessed 6 April 2016) 64 section 2.9.

Assembly of State Parties of the ICC in November 2015<sup>34</sup> to put the matter on its agenda. The ICC has not reported South Africa to the UN Security Council. This is a matter of real policy significance for South Africa.

### **Multilateral and bilateral activities**

The policy objectives of multilateral and bilateral relations have been discussed: their practical manifestations have numerous dimensions, including official visits. The distinction between official state and working visits is important to include in such an assessment: state visits normally are comprehensive in nature and focus on the status of bilateral relations; working visits mostly concentrate on a specific issue. Given the fact that South Africa's international relations in the first instance are conducted by the President and secondly by DIRCO, both institutions have to be included in the survey of visits.

During 2015, President Zuma as head of state undertook state visits to Algeria and the DRC. He hosted visits by the presidents of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. He also undertook working visits to Guinea, the Sudan, Egypt, Angola, Tanzania, China, and Germany. It is noticeable that the state visits involved only African states; most working visits were also to African states.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was appointed as a special presidential envoy to South Sudan and as SADC mediator to Lesotho. As a consequence, he undertook several visits to these two states and also to Tanzania (to promote unity in the SPLM). In his capacity as Deputy President, he received the Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam and visited Kenya and Iran. He led a government and business delegation on an official visit to Japan.

In 2015 a working division between the President and his Deputy became more pronounced: President Zuma concentrated on general relations, mainly with African states, and fulfilled his general multilateral responsibilities at summits; Ramaphosa in most instances took over the Presidency's involvement in conflict issues. President Zuma attended the two AU assembly summits (including hosting the one in June) as well as the UN General Assembly meeting in September. He also attended the annual BRICS summit in Ufa, Russia, the third India-Africa Forum Summit

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<sup>34</sup> M Nkoana-Mashabane 'Opening statement by Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, delivered at the General Debate of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Assembly of States Parties of the International Criminal Court, The Hague, 18–26 November 2015', available at [www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2015/mash1118.htm](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2015/mash1118.htm) (accessed 10 March 2016).

in Delhi, the annual SADC summit in Botswana, and hosted the FOCAC summit in Johannesburg. In 2015 South Africa chaired SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation and President Zuma presided over Troika meetings several times to deal in particular with Lesotho. In this period South Africa also chaired the G77+China group at the ministerial and ambassadorial level. Most of these multilateral meetings in some way involved African issues.

Visits by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation included numerous preparatory ministerial meetings for the summits or meetings of multilateral organisations. During the year she undertook visits to Italy, Sweden, Russia, Jamaica, the UAE, Niger, Mauritius, and the Netherlands for the Assembly of State Parties of the ICC. Africa was not as prominent in her bilateral visits. At the deputy ministerial level, many visits were undertaken to Hungary, Denmark, Spain, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Suriname, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Madagascar, Iran, Syria, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The majority were undertaken by Deputy Minister Landers and certain patterns are noticeable: most were to Latin America and the Caribbean, only one visit was to an African state (Madagascar), there was little contact with Eastern Europe and there was no contact with the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand) and the Far East.

At least fifteen bilateral meetings of formalised bilateral commissions or consultative bodies were held during the year: with Switzerland, Chile, Spain, the USA, Iran, Vietnam, India, the UAE, Uganda, Ireland, Cuba, Sweden, the UK, and the DRC. A meeting of the Tripartite Mechanism on Dialogue and Cooperation between South Africa, Angola, and the DRC was held.<sup>35</sup> Some of the trends in ministerial visits regarding the Pacific, the Far East and Eastern Europe mentioned earlier were repeated in these bilateral meetings. A different trend, however, was that European states were most active in this form of bilateral relations, whereas Latin America and the Caribbean were much less engaged in bilateral meetings than in deputy ministerial working visits. African states also were not active in bilateral commissions as a diplomatic means. As a result, South Africa's diplomacy with African states appears to be focused on the highest level and less on ministerial working visits and bilateral commissions. South Africa appears to prefer working through the AU, SADC and their bodies in a multilateral context. The opposite ostensibly applies to the Europeans – fewer high-level contacts but much more activity at the level of bilateral

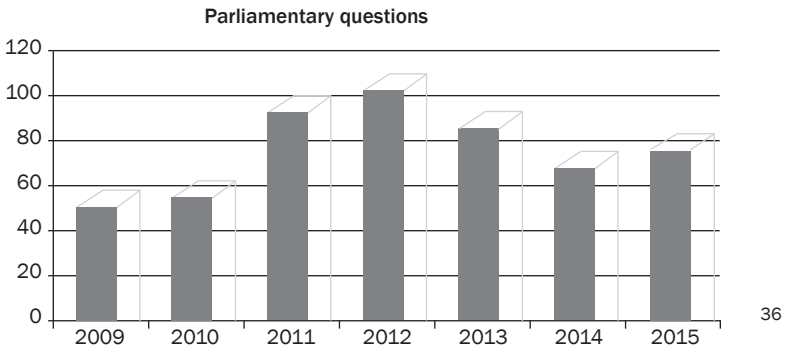
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<sup>35</sup> Summarised from all the DIRCO media statements at DIRCO '2015 media statements', available at [www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015/index.html](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015/index.html) (accessed 2 March 2016).

commissions — while the deputy ministerial level concentrated on Latin America.

### Parliamentary questions on international relations

Parliamentary questions provide an indication of how the legislature approaches international relations in comparison with the executive: Parliament is concerned with its oversight responsibilities and, as a result, financial and managerial departmental matters are more prominent. At the same time the parliamentary role in international relations, especially through its portfolio committee, depends on the quality, knowledge, and expertise of the parliamentary members. Quantity is not an indication of substance or quality but the number of parliamentary questions does, to a degree, indicate the intensity or concentration of attention on a specific issue. The frequency of questions on a particular topic indicates how importantly it is regarded in Parliament. The total number of questions addressed in 2015 by members of Parliament to the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation was 78, compared with 69 in 2014 and 87 in 2013. The graph below provides a comparison of the number of questions asked since 2009.



It is clear a declining tendency since 2012 turned around in 2015, which suggests more parliamentary interest in South Africa's international relations, but it has not returned to the levels of 2011–2012. There is no obvious explanation for this pattern. The issues which dominated the questions in 2015 were, first, departmental managerial matters, second, conflict issues (in Burundi, Israel/Palestine, Lesotho, and South Sudan) and, third, questions on BRICS. Several questions relating to the

<sup>36</sup> Compiled by the author based on the archive of parliamentary questions at DIRCO 'Parliament questions and replies', available at <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/parlyquest.htm> (accessed 2 March 2016).

AU were asked, mainly about the Pan-African Parliament, South Africa's chairing of the Peace and Security Council, the AU summit in South Africa, and diplomatic immunity for heads of state. Questions regarding South Africa's bilateral relations were few and referred to Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, China, Israel, Iran, and Cuba. Multilateral relations with FOCAC, the AU, UN, and SADC received a moderate level of attention. With regard to policy matters only three questions were asked about South Africa's stance on limiting the number of presidential terms (motivated mainly by the Burundian controversy), its policy on the guiding principle of a belief in universal human rights, and South Africa's position on Burundi (six questions).<sup>37</sup> Ironically, very few questions were asked about the executive's policy priorities, such as UN restructuring, SADC, South Africa's relationship with China, and its hosting of the FOCAC summit in Johannesburg, or on the controversy of President al-Bashir's presence in Johannesburg at the AU summit and South Africa's refusal to arrest him on behalf of the ICC.

The patterns seen in 2015 in comparison with 2014 are that the organisational or managerial matters of DIRCO remain the largest category of questions, though slightly smaller in 2015, which underscores that parliamentary oversight is its imperative. Questions dealing with conflicts in Africa and the Middle East remain prominent. On the other hand there were fewer questions relating to SADC in 2015, despite the fact that South Africa chaired its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. Only two questions were posed about Deputy President Ramaphosa's role as SADC mediator in Lesotho; the parliamentarians were more interested in the security situation in Burundi. A general lack of interest in multilateral affairs prevailed though the AU solicited more interest than before. The general conclusion therefore is that the international focus areas of the executive and legislature are not similar though not contradictory. Reflecting on the questions it is difficult to determine which issues were important for Parliament, other than its constitutional oversight function.

### **Development co-operation, humanitarian assistance and value entrepreneurship**

Since the time of President Mbeki's visionary ideals of an African renaissance, the African century, and the institutions he envisaged (like NEPAD and the AU) the African continent has been an area of

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<sup>37</sup> Summarised by the author from DIRCO 'Parliamentary questions and replies for 2015', available at [www.dirco.gov.za/docs/parlyquest.htm](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/parlyquest.htm) (accessed 2 March 2016).



huge potential for South Africa. He envisaged Africa as a terrain of contestation for influence spheres with other major powers. Aware of the neocolonial accusation, most European powers over time developed a network of governmental and semi-governmental agencies to engage with African governments and local NGOs in the fields of humanitarian and developmental assistance and promotion of governance values as soft power instruments and an alternative means to build productive bilateral relations in the form of agencies like Oxfam, DFID, USAID, SIDA and governance think-tanks like the German foundations.

South Africa never openly confronted these European and American agencies as neocolonial instruments. However, South Africa's philosophy of African independence and self-assertion, typical of the Mbeki era and which lately is expressed in decolonial jargon, arguably, motivated the South African government to establish the ARF and more recently to transform it into the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) as an antidote to these agencies. This is an aspect of the South African foreign policy which is understated and still relatively unknown.

In its budget estimates for 2014/15 the National Treasury provided a rare insight into the government's thinking in this respect

Since 1994, South Africa's development cooperation with the rest of Africa has been largely defined in terms of geographic priority, infrastructure development, mediation and national reconstruction development. Assistance has been provided to countries outside of the continent that share ideological links with South Africa and have experienced similar liberation struggles.<sup>38</sup>

The latter part of the quotation above, in particular, raises questions about the developmental nature of this policy and whether it facilitates other policy objectives not openly articulated here. States like Cuba and Vietnam have been involved in ARF projects. The choices of South Africa's engagements in such projects are not explained and their policy relevance is also not clarified. The ARF is managed in DIRCO but it is relatively vague about its objectives: in the 2014/15 DIRCO departmental annual report, the fund's rationale is reduced merely to promotion of economic co-operation between South Africa and other countries by providing financial assistance to development projects in those countries.<sup>39</sup> In the

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<sup>38</sup> National Treasury 'Budget 2015 – Estimates of National Expenditure, Vote 6: International Relations and Cooperation', available at [www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2015/enebooklets/Vote%202006%20International%20Relations%20and%20Cooperation.pdf](http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2015/enebooklets/Vote%202006%20International%20Relations%20and%20Cooperation.pdf) (accessed 1 March 2016) 17.

<sup>39</sup> Department: International Relations and Cooperation (note 26 above) 18.

ARF's own annual report of 2014/15 its strategic objectives are identified in five different categories. It is noticeable how broad the spectrum of its mandate is and potentially how influential as a policy implementation instrument it can become.

The ARF's first objective is to promote democracy and good governance. During the 2014/15 financial year this objective entailed South Africa's deployment of election observers as part of the SADC teams in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Mauritius. It also involved financial support to the UNDP for electoral assistance in Guinea-Bissau. The second objective is to contribute towards human resources development and in the 2014/15 financial year R7,1 million was awarded to the Public Protector for the African Ombudsman Research Centre Project. The third objective is to support socio-economic development and integration. Two projects were supported in this respect, namely the Cuban Medical Aid Project in Sierra Leone and the Rice and Vegetable Production Project in Guinea (Conakry) in co-operation with Vietnam. The fourth objective is to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Niger received assistance in 2014/15 of R141 000. Lesotho also benefited from it. The Lesotho project provides some insight into the ARF: all the products used in that project had to be procured from South Africa and 40 per cent of the grain products had to be acquired from smallholder farmers in South Africa. European agencies which in the past followed the same approach were severely criticised for this neocolonial attitude and for not supporting local products. However, in this instance Lesotho was suffering from food shortages and therefore was not able to provide the products. The fifth objective is to contribute towards post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD). A contribution of R18,2 million to the SADC Organ Observer Mission for the Lesotho election in February 2015 is an example of such an initiative.<sup>40</sup>

The ARF's budgetary trends make a proper understanding of the Fund difficult: how it is used and for what purpose. It appears it is used mainly for *ad hoc* projects based on the personal preferences of key decision-makers or short-term 'opportunistic' projects which are not informed by a longer-term policy perspective. This incoherence is illustrated by its budget allocations over the past four years and a future estimate

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<sup>40</sup> DIRCO *African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund Annual Report 2014–2015*, available at [www.dirco.gov.za/department/african\\_renaissance\\_2014\\_2015/arf\\_annualreport\\_201\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dirco.gov.za/department/african_renaissance_2014_2015/arf_annualreport_201_2015.pdf) (accessed 10 March 2016) 9, 19–21.

2011/2012	R280,16 million
2012/2013	R1,07 billion
2013/2014	R41,3 million
2014/2015	R277,56 million
2017/2018	R422,2 million (estimate)

Despite this budget volatility the National Treasury stated that by the end of March 2014 the ARF had accumulated a reserve of R1,5 billion.<sup>41</sup> The ARF's legislation (Act 51 of 2000) was promulgated in 2000. It is the successor to the Economic Cooperation Promotion Loan Fund. It has been anticipated for years that the ARF will be converted into the SADPA. A draft Partnership Fund for Development Bill has been prepared to be tabled in Parliament in 2015/16 as a legislative framework for SADPA. It is foreseen that its objective will be to 'support South Africa's outgoing development cooperation policy by providing funding and technical support for the development initiatives'.<sup>42</sup>

These developments are premised on a policy which is either not publicly known or does not exist. The domains of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, PCRD, and development assistance are policy areas inundated by conceptual problems, unintended consequences, policy contradictions, and lack of line-function co-ordination and policy clarity. A clearly articulated South African policy in this domain is nonexistent. Numerous policy examples in this field by both governmental agencies and international NGOs can be found in many parts of the world, for example, both the AU and NEPAD have their own PCRD policy frameworks. An example of such a policy development comes from Sweden: its SIDA developed a concept paper on 'developmental humanitarian assistance' in 1999 in order to search for clarity in the area; its preliminary policy concepts concentrated on integrating short-term and long-term perspectives in order to address the short-term needs with long-term developmental approaches, to discard the distinction between political conflicts and natural disasters and to approach both in terms of social and economic restructuring of communities. It also discarded a linear chronological schedule of priorities such as post-conflict actions or rehabilitation and preferred to focus on problems which require special approaches across time periods.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> National Treasury (note 38 above) 18.

<sup>42</sup> Department: International Relations and Cooperation (note 26 above) 17; DIRCO (note 40 above) 9.

<sup>43</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) *Developmental Humanitarian Assistance — A concept paper* (1999) 1–2, 5.

## Conclusion

Utilising the concept of state identity, it is possible to approach international relations and foreign policy from a different perspective. State identity emphasises state branding and by implication public diplomacy as means to establish a reputation or status for a state in the international community which depends on both its rhetoric and initiative. Beyond the national interest it provides motivation for states to engage in international relations and could be used partly to explain the policy choices states make.

This discussion provides the basis for a conclusion that during 2015 South Africa's foreign policy gave the impression of few new policy initiatives undertaken by the Zuma administration and that continuity strongly characterised the policy environment. Policy changes regarding South Africa's membership of the ICC and public sector changes affecting DIRCO employees as well as the launch of the SADPA were in the pipeline but not implemented in 2015.

Multilateral and bilateral relations form the backbone of South Africa's diplomacy, which is indeed the conventional state of affairs in many countries. In those relations a distinction can be made between the initiatives taken by the Presidency and by DIRCO. Presidential diplomacy focused on multilateral summit responsibilities and relations with African states, whereas DIRCO and the Ministry were responsible for bilateral relations.

The role that the ARF plays in South Africa's international relations is unclear, but it has huge potential to become a key policy instrument in the form of SADPA once clarity about its policy foundation has been reached. Two thousand and fifteen was a typical mid-term year for international relations with a relatively high level of activities but no significant new trends emerging. It might become best known for the al-Bashir/ICC controversy and the fact that a South African High Court found that the South African government did not honour its international law obligations in this case.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Southern African Litigation Centre v Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development & others* 2015 (5) SA 1 (GP), judgment delivered on 24 June 2015 in the Gauteng Division of the High Court.