Although most observers have focused on the domestic impacts of South Africa’s transition to democracy, most notably the dismantlement of its apartheid political system, this process has also entailed the transformation of South African foreign policy. As former President Nelson Mandela aptly explained in Foreign Affairs several months prior to victory in the presidential and legislative elections of 1994, he considered the charting of a new foreign policy as a ‘key element’ in the creation of a ‘peaceful and prosperous’ South Africa. The primary purpose of this article is to offer an assessment of the foreign policy adaptation strategies adopted by the Mandela and Mbeki administrations in their quest to further strengthen South Africa’s ongoing transformation from an isolated international pariah to leader of the African renaissance. An initial section outlines five strategies designed to adapt South African foreign policy to the new realities of the post-apartheid era: restoring civilian control over the security apparatus; restructuring the foreign policy establishment; self promotion as the leader of the ‘African renaissance’; adherence to the foreign policy principle of ‘universalism’; and assuming a leadership rôle in international organizations. Section two explores how the process of democratization has favoured the reemergence and strengthening of the rôles played by a wide variety of state and non-state actors within the foreign policymaking process. A final section sets out five issues that will continue to set the tone of debates over South African foreign policy well into the first decade of the new millennium. An important conclusion of the article is that although the case study of South Africa in many respects constitutes a microcosm of the foreign policy challenges confronting other African countries, it also offers insights into the foreign policy adaptation strategies pursued by emerging powers in other regions of the world.

FROM 1948 TO 1994, South African foreign policy sought to justify and protect its authoritarian apartheid political system in which a white minority...
regime imposed racial segregation on a politically disenfranchised black majority. The foreign policy cost of this strategy was South Africa’s branding as an international pariah within the African continent and the wider international community, ultimately leading to what Deon Geldenhuys, a South African specialist of his country’s foreign policy, aptly referred to as the ‘diplomacy of isolation’. This pariah status ended in 1994 when Nelson Mandela was elected president in his country’s first multiracial, multiparty democratic elections, and South Africa emerged as the embodiment of the political-military and socioeconomic changes sweeping the African continent that are often referred to as the ‘African renaissance’. Since Mandela’s election, policymakers have overseen the transformation of South Africa’s foreign policy apparatus, and in so doing have been confronted with the need to reexamine and restructure foreign policy practices and relationships. The primary purpose of this article is to explore how a variety of foreign policy adaptation strategies have sought to further strengthen South Africa’s ongoing transformation from international pariah to leader of the African renaissance.

South Africa constitutes an excellent case study for understanding foreign policy adaptation in the post-Cold War era. Often referred to as a ‘regional superpower’, South Africa is without question the leading power on the African continent. Economically speaking, South Africa represents Africa’s most industrialized economy, accounting for nearly 29 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the continent as a whole. South Africa also boasts the largest and best trained military on the African continent, including air and naval forces capable of projecting military power far beyond South African territory. In the political realm, South Africa serves as the embodiment of the democratic changes that have swept the African continent since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Dubbed the ‘rainbow nation’, South Africa is also a leader in the cultural realm as its leaders strive to create a society capable of resolving internal conflicts through the rule of law. Although in many respects representing a microcosm of the foreign policy challenges confronting other African countries, South Africa offers important insights into the foreign policy adaptation strategies pursued by emerging powers in other regions of the world.

The remainder of this article is divided into three sections. The first outlines five strategies designed to adapt South African foreign policy to the new realities of the post-apartheid era: restoring civilian control over the security apparatus; restructuring the foreign policy establishment; self promotion as the leader of the ‘African renaissance’; adherence to the foreign policy principle of ‘universalism’; and assuming a leadership rôle in international organizations. Section two explores how the process of democratization has favoured the reemergence and strengthening of the rôles played by a wide variety of state and non-state actors within the foreign policymaking process. A final section sets out five issues that will continue to set the tone of debates over South African foreign policy well into the first decade of the new millennium.

**Foreign policy adaptation in the post-apartheid era**

South Africa’s presidential and legislative elections in April 1994 serve as one of the most heralded examples of African democratic transition. Voters of all
races cast ballots in free and fair elections that ushered in South Africa’s first multiracial, multiethnic, and multiparty democracy. Mandela, who spent nearly 28 years in prison under the apartheid system, was elected president, and the party he represents, the ANC, won 63 per cent of the popular vote, 252 of 400 seats in the National Assembly, and a majority share of seats in seven of the nine provincial legislatures. This so-called South African ‘miracle’ was repeated five years later when, as promised, Mandela voluntarily stepped down from power, and his administration’s vice president, Thabo Mbeki, was elected president in free and fair elections in 1999.

Although most observers have focused on the domestic impacts of South Africa’s transition to democracy, most notably the dismantlement of its apartheid political system, this process has also entailed a complete reexamination and restructuring of South African foreign policy practices and relationships. As Mandela aptly explained in *Foreign Affairs* several months prior to the presidential and legislative elections of 1994, he considered the charting of a new foreign policy for South Africa as a ‘key element in the creation of a peaceful and prosperous country’.\(^4\) Towards this end, South African policy-makers during both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations can be credited with pursuing several strategies to adapt South African foreign policy to the new realities of the post-Cold War era.

*Restoring civilian control over the security apparatus*

One of the most delicate tasks was the process of demilitarization to restore civilian control over a security apparatus that had become too powerful in the formulation of South African domestic and foreign policies. An agreement reached between the military leaders of the apartheid-era SADF and the military wing of the ANC (*Umkhonto we Sizwe*) prior to the general elections of 1994 outlined the creation of a civilian-managed Ministry of Defense and civilian control over the military budget and approval of senior promotions and professional training.\(^5\) In recognition of the fact that military officers during the apartheid era were responsible for actions deemed illegal under both domestic and international law, the 1996 Constitution\(^6\) stipulates that all security forces ‘must teach and require their members to act in accordance with the Constitution and the law, including customary international law and international agreements binding on the Republic’ (Article 5, Paragraph 6). The process of demilitarization also included profound changes in military doctrine.\(^7\) As opposed to the apartheid-era doctrine of being able to launch counterinsurgency wars and retaliatory strikes against neighbouring countries, current military doctrine emphasizes the overriding importance of *national self-defence* in which the South African military will be deployed internationally only under fairly restrictive circumstances, including internationally mandated peacekeeping operations, humanitarian relief exercises, and, as witnessed by South African military intervention (along with Botswana) in Lesotho in 1998, the restoration of democracy.

An important challenge that confronted the newly elected Mandela administration was the necessity of integrating previously opposed military forces into the newly created South African National Defense Force (SANDF), including
85 000 (largely white) SADF soldiers, 30 000 guerrilla fighters from Umkhonto we Sizwe, 6000 guerrilla fighters from the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (the military wing of the PAC), and 7000 soldiers from four black ‘homelands’ (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) granted independence by the former apartheid regime but never recognized by another country within the international system. Despite initial tensions over salaries and ranks, particularly among the newly integrated Umkhonto we Sizwe forces, an important reason for the success of this delicate process was the decision of Joe Modise, Minister of Defense under the Mandela Administration, to initially maintain an oversized SANDF of at least 70 000 soldiers, with the intention of gradually reducing this force over time through a natural process of attrition. As succinctly noted by Mbeki, ‘We could hardly take 30 000 combatants from the ANC and throw them on the streets’. Similar to their counterparts from other portions of the SANDF, continued Mbeki, these guerrilla fighters were ‘proud of their rôle’ in the struggle to create a multiracial and democratic South Africa and understandably ‘wanted to keep their jobs in an economy where unemployment is high’.

**Restructuring the foreign policy establishment**

A second strategy to adapt South African foreign policy to the post-Cold War era was the complete restructuring of the foreign policymaking establishment. As discussed below, the 1996 Constitution has clearly established the formal rôles to be played by a wide variety of institutional actors, with the creation and consolidation of democratic practices favouring the foreign policy inputs of numerous non-state actors as well. One of the most profound examples of institutional change revolved around the restructuring of the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that it once again assumes one of the leading rôles in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. An important step in this process was the creation of a new bureaucracy—the Department of Foreign Affairs—that would integrate the best and the brightest diplomats from the foreign service of the former apartheid regime (which numbered 1917), the ANC’s Department of International Affairs (139 former members were absorbed), and the foreign ministries of the four homelands (415 former members were absorbed). This restructuring process, referred to as ‘rationalization’ within the South African policymaking community, has prompted heated interagency debates, not least of all because the Department of Foreign Affairs was the only bureaucracy allowed by the Public Service Commission (the gatekeeper for allotting all civil service positions) to expand by nearly 10 per cent in 1995 alone. However, as demonstrated by simply one indicator—the growth of South African diplomatic representation abroad from 25 embassies in 1985 to 43 embassies in 1995—South Africa’s emergence from the shadows of its former ‘diplomacy of isolation’ at the bare minimum requires an enlarged Department of Foreign Affairs capable of responding to new foreign policy challenges and opportunities.

**Self promotion as the leader of an ‘African renaissance’**

An emphasis on South Africa’s unique position as the leader of the ‘African
renaissance’—the strengthening of democratic practices and economic liberalization throughout Africa since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—constitutes a third important component of foreign policy adaptation in the post-Cold War era. This foreign policy stance is designed to emphasize the centrality of the African continent in South African foreign policy, as well as the importance of South Africa as the embodiment of Africa’s future political and economic potential, and therefore the critical rôle of South Africa as an intermediary between the African continent and leading foreign powers in all other regions of the world.\(^\text{15}\) Interestingly enough, the African renaissance, arguably one of the most cited and debated themes in African politics at the beginning of the new millennium, was initially popularized due to repeated usage by then Vice President (and current President) Mbeki, and has emerged as the defining foreign policy concept of the Mbeki Administration.\(^\text{16}\)

The Mbeki Administration’s strong attachment to the concept of the African renaissance reflects several classic African foreign policy concerns that have become integral to South African foreign policy.\(^\text{17}\) Among the most important of these are the promotion of regional integration and development, as witnessed by South Africa’s membership and leadership rôle in the Southern African Development Community (SADC; formerly SADCC);\(^\text{18}\) unequivocal support for nuclear non-proliferation, as demonstrated by South Africa’s renouncement and dismantling of a nuclear weapons programme that successfully tested a nuclear device during the apartheid era, as well as the Mandela Administration’s crucial rôle in convincing other Southern countries to accept an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; extreme sensitivity concerning the juridical rights of territorial integrity and state sovereignty, as most poignantly noted by Mandela’s impassioned rejection of US demands that South Africa avoid diplomatic contact with Qadaffi’s Libya and Castro’s Cuba; and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as personified by Mandela’s willingness to serve as a third-party mediator in an attempt to resolve ethnic conflict in Burundi.

South Africa’s interpretation of the African renaissance is also inclusive of several new themes in African foreign policy that are accepted in varying degrees throughout the African continent depending on the nature of the regime in power. A commitment to the promotion of democracy and human rights has gathered strength throughout Africa since the Cold War’s end, but nonetheless makes even some democratically elected African leaders uneasy due to its inevitable clash with the cherished principle of sovereignty.\(^\text{19}\) In the case of South Africa, the Mandela Administration’s joint undertaking with Botswana of a military intervention in Lesotho in 1998 to restore democratic rule suggests an expansive interpretation of what means can be employed to promote democratic values and human rights.

A willingness to adopt the liberal economic model of free trade and investment has also gathered strength in the post-Cold War era, and has been especially invoked by the more technocratically minded Mbeki Administration.\(^\text{20}\) Although recognizing that domestic reconstruction and development constitutes the singular priority of the South African population, the Mbeki Administration, like its predecessor, has underscored the critical rôle of foreign trade and investment (not to mention foreign aid) in this process. Towards this
end, the South African government’s close cooperation with South African businesses has yielded enormous success in penetrating the Southern African market, as well as other regions of the African continent and the world in general.

Adherence to the foreign policy principle of ‘universality’

A fourth adaptation strategy—adherence to the foreign policy principle of ‘universality’—is designed to bridge the foreign policy gap between the apartheid and democratic eras, and in so doing ensure that the best of both eras is included in contemporary South African foreign policy. The principle of universality underscores the willingness of South Africa to establish diplomatic relations with all countries of the world regardless of the domestic or the foreign policies of those countries. In the case of the Middle East, for example, the Mandela and Mbeki administrations have sought to strengthen diplomatic links with Israel (historically an ally of the apartheid regime) while at the same time establishing and strengthening diplomatic ties with Libya and Iran (historically supporters of the ANC’s guerilla struggle). In some cases, such as the ongoing diplomatic battle between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan as to which capital—Beijing or Taipei—is recognized as the official seat of the Chinese government, South Africa’s desire to maintain a two-China policy proved untenable, ultimately leading South Africa to choose Beijing largely due to economic reasons.

The willingness of the Mandela and Mbeki administrations to choose economic self-interest over regime type in the case of China (Taiwan is a democracy and the PRC remains an authoritarian dictatorship) has led to sharp critiques of South African foreign policy, most notably when one realizes that the ANC, during the period of guerrilla struggle, resoundingly denounced any government that emphasized the importance of economic self-interest in their refusals to implement comprehensive economic sanctions against the apartheid regime. In this regard, there has also been a tendency for the Mandela and Mbeki administrations to err on the side of maintaining close diplomatic ties with even authoritarian leaderships, such as Fidel Castro’s regime in Cuba, that strongly supported the ANC during its guerrilla struggle. Needless to say, South Africa’s diplomatic ties with Cuba and other countries considered by American policymakers to be ‘terrorist’ states within the international system (most notably Libya, Iran, and the Sudan), has caused repeated diplomatic tensions between Pretoria and Washington.

Assuming a leadership rôle in international organizations

A final strategy for adapting South African foreign policy to especially the international realities of the post-Cold War era has been a firm commitment to upholding and strengthening the international norms associated with the United Nations and its member agencies, as well as a wide range of other organizations, including (but not limited to) the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the British Commonwealth of Nations, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). One of the most important foreign policy objectives of the immediate
post-apartheid era was to ensure that South African diplomats quickly reasserted South Africa’s ‘rightful place’ as both a member and a leader within the international community of international organizations. Less than two months after the newly elected Mandela administration assumed the reins of power in 1994, South Africa was admitted to the OAU, joined the NAM, and was readmitted to the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations. South Africa has particularly focused on its United Nations membership, joining the governing councils of several specialized agencies and organs, such as the International Telecommunications Union and the Economic and Social Council. South African diplomats consistently argue that their country’s historic rôle in the United Nations (South Africa was one of the founding members), and current status as the embodiment of the African renaissance, make South Africa the perfect African candidate for a permanent seat on any enlarged United Nations Security Council. Indeed, South Africa’s closest rivals for a permanent UN Security Council seat are often dismissed by South African diplomats as either undemocratic (Egypt and the Sudan), beset by internal conflict (Algeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), or lacking sufficient economic resources (Nigeria and Senegal).

Key sources of South African foreign policy

The study of the sources of African foreign policy traditionally has been dominated by three bodies of scholarship.²² Whereas one body of research, often referred to as the ‘big man’ theory of African foreign policy, emphasizes the overriding importance of the personal whims of authoritarian leaders to explain the formulation and implementation of African foreign policies,²³ a second body of scholarship focuses on the impact of the larger geopolitical setting of ‘great power’ competition, most notably the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.²⁴ A third body of scholarship emphasizes the constraints imposed on African foreign policies by the continuation of ‘dependency’ relationships between African states and their former colonial powers.²⁵ In essence, these three sets of theories simplistically imply that one has only to focus on the whims and desires of either African leaders or foreign powers in order to understand the key sources of African foreign policy.

A critical argument of this article is that these explanations constitute at best exaggerations of more dynamic foreign policy processes, especially in those cases, such as South Africa, that have made transitions to democratic forms of governance. Specifically, the field of African foreign policy has neglected to explore the simple but logical hypothesis that the process of democratization, typically examined in terms of its impact on domestic politics, should also foster the democratization of African foreign policy establishments. The foreign policy implication of this trend, which calls into question existing theories, is that the process of democratization has favoured the reemergence and strengthening of a wide variety of state and non-state actors that are capable of influencing the foreign policies of African countries. The critical point here is that African democracies, including those newly established and in the process of consolidation, embody open political systems that should permit wider involvement in the foreign policymaking process.
Several state actors play an important rôle in the formulation and implementation of South African foreign policy during the democratic era (1994–present). The Constitution of 1996 that formalized South Africa’s entry into the community of democratic nations clearly stipulates the overriding importance of the president in the formulation of South African foreign policy. During the Mandela Administration (1994–99), this constitutional prerogative was further strengthened by what is often referred to as the ‘Mandela effect’—Mandela’s emergence from nearly 28 years of captivity in apartheid jails as one of the most celebrated, admired, and charismatic figures of the 20th century.26 Rather than seeking to punish his former jailers once he and the ANC emerged victorious in the 1994 elections, Mandela magnanimously extended the olive branch of cooperation to all ethnic and racial factions in South Africa, surrounding this former guerrilla leader with an aura of near sainthood within the international community. It is precisely for this reason, lament critics of the Mandela Administration, that South African foreign policy often followed Mandela’s public statements, rather than his public statements reflecting the contours of a consensus opinion within the foreign policy establishment.27

Although it will be up to future historians to sort out the long-term impact of the Mandela factor within the foreign policy realm, the election of the more technocratic and less charismatic Mbeki as president in 1999 heralded a greater routinization and ‘depersonalization’ of South African foreign policy more in line with the 1996 Constitution.28 Having served as the Foreign Minister of the ANC during its years in exile, Mbeki is clearly familiar with the multitude of foreign policy issues confronting post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike his predecessor, however, Mbeki is reportedly more open to compromise and more willing to rely on the expertise of foreign policy experts within the executive branch, most notably the Coordination and Cooperation Unit—a sort of ‘kitchen cabinet’ directly answerable to Mbeki that is comprised of young and energetic, but (critics add) often inexperienced foreign policy staffers.29

The foreign affairs bureaucracies of the executive branch also serve as an important source of South African foreign policy in the democratic era. A fascinating aspect of the emerging bureaucratic blueprint of South African foreign policy is that the existing foreign affairs bureaucracies, most notably the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, were completely transformed, often involving a synthesis of the personnel of the former apartheid regime, the guerrilla armies (most notably the ANC), and the black homelands. In this sense, the foreign affairs bureaucracies remained works in progress by the beginning of the Mbeki Administration (i.e., five years after the transition to democracy), with each attempting to further rationalize its administrative structures and organizational routines, more precisely set out organizational goals and priorities, recruit and train new personnel (as well as retrain absorbed personnel), and learn through trial and error the best means of ensuring a preferred foreign policy outcome via negotiations and bureaucratic competition with other members of the foreign policy establishment.

Several trends can be noted in the relative positions of power and influence of individual bureaucracies within the foreign policy hierarchy. The Department of Foreign Affairs has regained a substantial portion of the influence that it had lost during the apartheid years, although it continues to struggle to train enough
capable diplomats to staff South Africa’s quickly expanding diplomatic network. The department has also been plagued by critiques that its first head, Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo (an ANC stalwart), was not proactive enough and in any case did not have the proper administrative credentials to be an effective leader (a perception somewhat altered by the more proactive policies of the current foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma). To the contrary, Modise, the first head of the Ministry of Defense, won praise from many quarters for his handling of the reorganization and integration of the new SANDF. This bureaucracy, however, has played a more restrictive foreign policy rôle due to the lingering suspicions associated with its overwhelming (and highly negative) influence wielded during the apartheid era. South Africa’s heavily trade-oriented policy not surprisingly has made the Department of Trade and Industry one of the most prominent bureaucracies within the foreign policymaking establishment. This bureaucracy finds itself in competition with the Department of Foreign Affairs, with critics suggesting that the two departments should be integrated in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic competition and to ensure a more integrated foreign policy approach.\textsuperscript{30}

The parliament is a final state actor that has emerged as an important foreign policy actor in the democratic era. This constitutionally independent branch of government plays an important oversight rôle that, although not as powerful as originally envisioned by ANC stalwarts and members of civil society, clearly goes beyond the foreign policy prerogatives enjoyed by legislatures during the apartheid (1948–94) and pre-apartheid (pre-1948) eras. The leading legislative actor within the foreign policy realm is the Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs. This committee holds well-attended legislative hearings at which established tradition now requires the appearance of executive branch officials to answer questions related to South African foreign policy. Interestingly enough, the Portfolio Committee has not hesitated to criticize executive branch policies, most notably those fashioned and implemented by the Department of Foreign Affairs, despite the fact that both the presidency and the parliament are controlled by the ANC.\textsuperscript{31} It is at least partially due to this criticism that the Department of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly responded in kind, leading to an often acrimonious relationship between these two organizations, particularly during the period when Raymond Sutter served as chair of the Portfolio Committee.

A Select Committee on Defense modelled after that of the German Bundestag is also charged with investigating and making recommendations concerning the SANDF’s budget, organization, and policies. ‘Under the National Party and the previous Westminster parliamentary system, the select committee on defense had proved little more than a rubber stamp for the executive,’ explain Jakkie Cilliers and Lindy Heinecken, two specialists of civil–military relations in South Africa. ‘Now, with its powers enshrined in the Constitution, Parliament has taken an active and vigorously independent role in monitoring defense relations and the military as a whole’.\textsuperscript{32} The Select Committee on Defense perceives itself as an ‘active participant’ in all major decisions undertaken by the Ministry of Defense, and has played a critical rôle in restoring civilian control over the South African military. It is precisely for this reason, conclude Cilliers and Heinecken,\textsuperscript{33} that the ‘relative power and
A wide variety of non-state actors also play a significant rôle in the formulation of South African foreign policy. The ANC is particularly influential due to its status as the ruling party in both the executive branch and the parliament during the democratic era. The ANC’s victory in two sets of legislative elections and the alternation of power between the Mandela and Mbeki administrations have even led some scholars to refer to South Africa as a ‘dominant-party system’ in which the ANC will continue to rule for the foreseeable future. Yet the ANC’s ideological stance on foreign policy issues, and therefore its foreign policy impact, have significantly changed since the party’s inception in 1912. At least three phases can be discerned: liberal internationalist support for international law and international organizations (1912–60); pursuit of the socialist ideal of international revolution and redistribution (1960–93); and a pragmatist, more self-interested approach that emphasizes the importance of geoeconomics (1993–present).

Although Mbeki’s election represented the strengthened position of adherents of the current pragmatist phase, many ANC members of parliament maintain strong attachments to socialism, and both groups in general share the ideological leanings of liberal internationalism. The ideological differences between the ANC’s adherents in the executive and the parliament partly explain ongoing foreign policy tensions between these two branches of government. Some have even argued that the contradictory nature of South African foreign policy (i.e., the primacy of geoeconomics in some cases and the primacy of human rights concerns in others) is ‘in no small part attributable to the push/pull effects of this competing triad of theoretical perspectives and the lack of consensus the tensions between them have generated within the ranks of the ruling partly’.

The South African labor movement, under the leadership of a nation-wide umbrella group, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), is also influential in the foreign policy realm. The foreign policy strength of this actor is derivative of its highly influential rôle in the transition to the democratic era and contribution to the electoral success of the ANC in national elections. Although principally focused on domestic priorities, such as the creation of a National Economic Forum (NEF) and the passage of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), COSATU’s leadership (many of whom have positions within the ANC government) has actively pursued a wide variety of foreign policy initiatives, especially when supported by ‘fraternal’ unions in neighbouring countries. It has been argued, for example, that COSATU’s pressures played an important rôle in the Mandela Administration’s decision to actively seek a restoration of the democratically elected government of Ntsu Mokhehle in Lesotho. COSATU’s lobbying efforts were also critical in the Mandela Administration’s decision to place pressure on King Mswati to oversee a return to democracy in Swaziland. In both cases, COSATU’s actions were driven by a desire to lend support to trade union movements that were taking the lead in calling for democratization in neighbouring countries.

A wide variety of international factors have also served as important sources of South African foreign policy. South African leaders especially have been
influenced by ‘rôle expectations’ within the African continent and the wider international community. As aptly summarized by Aziz Pahad, former deputy minister of foreign affairs, there exists a ‘tremendous expectation’ that South Africa will play a major rôle in fashioning and directing the new world order at the beginning of the new millennium.\textsuperscript{40} South Africa’s special status is clearly captured by an academic literature which variously refers to the country as a ‘regional’, ‘intermediary’, ‘middle’, ‘subimperial’, or ‘semiperipheral’ power.\textsuperscript{41} Whereas African countries expect South Africa to take the lead in promoting the most cherished aims of African foreign policy, the northern industrialized democracies expect South Africa to serve as a rôle model for economic and political reforms throughout the African continent. It therefore should come as no surprise that President Mbeki has made the African renaissance and South Africa’s unique place at the intersection of the African continent and the northern industrialized democracies the cornerstone of South African foreign policy.

Foreign actors, particularly the northern industrialized democracies, also play an influential rôle in South African foreign policy. Struggling to overcome the disparities of the apartheid era that include a 35–45 per cent unemployment rate largely within the non-white majority population, South Africa has aggressively sought foreign aid, trade, and investment. In 1995, the first full year of democratic transition after Mandela’s election, South Africa received $386 million in official development assistance (ODA) and exported $27 billion in South African goods and services.\textsuperscript{42} South Africa’s leading economic partners are the member-states of the European Union (most notably Germany and the United Kingdom) and the United States. The importance of democratic transition is clearly demonstrated by the evolution of the year-end stock of foreign direct investment (FDI) in what is often referred to as the African continent’s most important emerging market: from $29 billion in 1993 (the year prior to transition) to $43 billion in 1995.\textsuperscript{43} Investment abroad by South Africans has also soared, from $59 billion in 1993 to $93 billion in 1995, due to the simple fact that wide-ranging sanctions legislation has been dropped now that South Africa is considered within the international community to be a legitimate actor.\textsuperscript{44} The recognition among South African policymakers that access to the international economy and foreign aid and investment are crucial to successful internal reconstruction and development has definitively made South Africa a firm proponent of the neo-liberal model of development.

Towards the future

Several issues will continue to set the tone of debates over South African foreign policy for the near future. The first is the degree to which the South African policymaking establishment should be focusing on foreign affairs as opposed to the serious domestic challenges confronting South Africa’s nascent democracy.\textsuperscript{45} Among the extraordinary domestic challenges inherited from the apartheid era include an extremely high 35–45 per cent unemployment rate among the majority black population (which constitutes 75 per cent of a total population of approximately 43 million people) and the impoverished nature of the historically neglected black townships in which 7.5 million citizens lack
access to running water and 3 million citizens lack housing. To these apartheid era remnants one can add the more recent but related challenges of an AIDS pandemic in which 4.2 million people are HIV positive, and a dramatic rise in criminality in which the murder rate is an astounding 58.5 killings per 100,000 South Africans (a rate nearly 10 times higher than the US rate of 6.3 murders per 100,000 Americans). In short, many South Africans who have yet to receive the benefits of the transition to democracy are increasingly prone to question the usefulness of spending precious, limited national resources on costly foreign policy initiatives when so much needs to be done at home to resolve the inequities of the apartheid era.

Even if a consensus is reached as to the proper balance between foreign and domestic policy initiatives, the South African foreign policymaking establishment remains in a process of permutation since the 1994 transition to democracy that limits its effectiveness in the foreign policy realm. Although the restructuring of the foreign policy apparatus has been largely completed, the interaction both within and between the various branches of government is far from regularized. For example, the balance of power between the executive branch and the parliament has yet to be defined, especially as parliamentarians increasingly balance an initial overwhelming focus on domestic affairs (i.e., reconstruction and development) with greater levels of interest in the realm of foreign affairs. Even within the executive branch, the interaction between the various foreign affairs bureaucracies remain extremely fluid as each seeks to more clearly outline and master its area of foreign policy expertise. In short, the process of making South African foreign policy remains a work in progress.

The lack of consistency within the foreign policymaking process not surprisingly has fostered seemingly contradictory foreign policy outputs. Critics particularly underscore the current foreign policy tension between South African rhetoric over the need to promote human rights and democracy and the more apolitical demands associated with the principle of universality and the pursuit of economic self-interest (i.e., trade and investment). Needless to say, all countries must contend with competing foreign policy objectives and few, if any, are successful in creating a hierarchy of goals in which the most important is rigidly and consistently pursued. The Mandela administration’s decision to recognize Beijing over Taiwan serves as one example of a wider and intensifying foreign policy debate over whether universality and economic self-interest should de facto serve as the guiding principles of South African foreign policy. Indeed, the unwillingness of the Mandela and Mbeki administrations to be outspoken over the human rights violations of Castro’s Cuba and other past supporters of the anti-apartheid struggle has prompted critics to charge that post-apartheid South Africa is guilty of doing exactly what it denounced others for doing during the apartheid era: turning a blind eye towards human rights violations in the name of promoting economic self-interest.

The regional context will be of particular salience to South Africa’s emerging foreign policy rôle. Ongoing civil war in neighbouring Angola and heightened racial tensions in neighbouring Zimbabwe serve as important daily reminders of the precariousness of democratization in the Southern African region and Africa as a whole. Such conflicts not only hinder the prospects for further regional integration (one of the cornerstones of regional foreign policy initiatives under
both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations), but invariably have a direct effect on South Africa itself as refugees and armed groups cross its international boundaries, and, like it or not, South African policymakers are forced to respond. Moreover, rôle expectations associated with South Africa’s status as a leader of the African renaissance have ensured foreign policy complications with its regional neighbours. In the case of the interstate war that has engulfed the Democratic Republic of the Congo—dubbed Africa’s ‘First World War’ by many observers—South Africa’s appeals for the cessation of international military involvement stands in sharp contrast to the direct military involvement of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Indeed, regional denunciations of South Africa’s foreign policy approach to this conflict clearly demonstrate a degree of regional hostility once thought to be derivative of South Africa’s hated apartheid system. In short, South Africa’s newfound status as a legitimate, post-apartheid foreign policy actor has in many respects complicated its regional relationships as smaller, less-powerful neighbours seek to limit the influence of what in essence constitutes a regional superpower.

The confounding nature of the regional security context raises the question as to what sort of balance should be sought in South Africa’s links with Africa and the wider international community. From the day of his inauguration, Mandela sought to set the tone of his and future administrations by stating that South Africa was first and foremost an African country with responsibilities on the African continent. The vast majority of South Africa’s economic and financial links, however, are with the major northern industrialized democracies. South African leaders are quick to note the overriding importance of promoting privileged economic access to the northern industrialized democracies as the best means of promoting successful internal reconstruction and development. The crucial (and unresolved) question is as follows: Should South Africa primarily focus on strengthening its links with the northern industrialized democracies, or does cultural solidarity demand a greater focus on the African continent and other developing countries within the southern hemisphere? Although some would argue the necessity of simultaneously expanding and strengthening links in all directions, others rightfully claim that the rational utilization of limited financial resources requires some kind of regional hierarchy. Only time will tell if South Africa emerges as the representative of African foreign policy issues and desires, a rising middle power reflective of the interests of the northern industrialized democracies that happens to be geographically located on the African continent, or some permutation of the two.

Notes and references


quoted in *ibid*, p 101.


Greg Mills, ‘Leaning All Over the Place? The Not-So-New South African Foreign Policy’, in Hussein Soloman (ed), *Fairy Godmother, Hegemon, or Partner? In Search of a South African Foreign Policy*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (ISS Monograph Series no 13), Johannesburg, 1997, pp 19–34. Mills also notes that 259 ‘redundancy packages’ were approved prior to 30 April 1996 (the date by which the initial consolidation was to be completed), and 112 applications for ‘severance packages’ (ie, early retirement) were received during the remainder of 1996.

*Op cit*, Ref 1.

Statistics are drawn from a larger data-based research project directed by the author that seeks to explore trends in African diplomatic representation from the 1960s through 2000.


*Op cit*, Ref 2.


The other SADC member countries are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.


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25 Eg, see Timothy M. Shaw and Julius Emeka Okolo (eds), The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in ECOWAS, St Martin’s Press, New York, 1994.
27 Op cit, Ref 12, p 24.
28 Op cit, Ref 20.
32 Op cit, Ref 7, p 252.
33 Ibid.
37 Op cit, Ref 20.
38 Op cit, Ref 30, p 175.
40 Op cit, Ref 11, p 124.
44 Ibid.