

South Africa's foreign policy: Highlights during 2011

*Yolanda Spies**

Introduction

1 The first year of the second decade of the 21st century was replete with enormity
2 in the international relations sphere, ranging from the natural disaster of Japan's
3 earthquake, to the human-engineered financial meltdown at the heart of the
4 world's largest economic bloc, the European Union. Within an otherwise
5 turbulent year, some aspiring states took audacious steps: South Sudan became
6 the world's newest sovereign state when it obtained independence on 9 July
7 2011 and less than a week later joined the United Nations (UN), while a few
8 months later Palestine tried, with much fanfare but less success, to do the same.¹

9 The UN General Assembly had proclaimed 2011 as the 'International Year for
10 People of African Descent',² and indeed, throughout the year much of the
11 world's attention was riveted by African events. Sadly though, this had little to
12 do with a celebration of heritage. A massive famine in the Horn of Africa, and
13 conflicts simmering in various other parts of the continent such as the Great
14 Lakes region and West Africa, ensured that Africa remained in the headlines.
15 These events were eclipsed, however, by the 'Arab Spring' which started in
16 North Africa and saw despots toppled in unprecedented, apparently leaderless,
17 revolutions. As unrest spilled over into the Middle-East, the domino-effect of
18 popular uprisings sent shivers down the spines of autocrats elsewhere, not least
19 so in the Southern African neighbourhood. Even in democratic South Africa,
20 some pundits³ speculated about when (rather than if) the country would
21 experience its own political 'Spring'.

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¹South Sudan became the 193rd member of the United Nations on 14 July 2011. During November 2011, a motion to admit Palestine as UN member did not muster enough votes in the UN admissions committee (the Security Council) and was deferred – despite the fact that Palestine was admitted as the 195th member of UNESCO on 31 October 2011.

²As declared per UN GA res A/Res/64/169 on 19 March 2010.

³For example Moeletsi Mbeki, in several media interviews, and also in an address to the Cape Town Press Club on 26 July 2011.

1 Therefore, the UN Security Council (UNSC), the world's highest authority in
 2 the maintenance of international peace and security, had a crowded⁴ agenda
 3 during 2011. It was also the first year of South Africa's second term on the
 4 UNSC – keenly anticipated, in light of the country's lobbying to become a
 5 permanent member of the Council. Its policy-makers were thrown in at the
 6 deep end of foreign policy decision-making in March when the Council had
 7 to vote on its first humanitarian intervention since the UN endorsement of the
 8 Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm.⁵ South Africa's decision to vote in
 9 favour of Resolution 1973, which authorised the use of 'all necessary means'⁶
 10 to protect civilians in Libya, became a defining moment of 2011.

11 This controversial decision, and other salient aspects of South Africa's foreign
 12 policy behaviour during the remainder of the year under review, will be the
 13 focus of this paper. First, a lingering concern will be addressed, namely the
 14 extent to which the country's foreign policy is driven by self-interest rather
 15 than cosmopolitan norms. Second, the issue of (con)fusing party and state
 16 interests in the pursuit of international relations will be considered. Thereafter,
 17 the discussion will turn to South Africa's equivocal leadership position
 18 *vis-à-vis* the rest of the continent. And finally, some aspects of South Africa's
 19 positioning in terms of global governance will be considered in order to
 20 determine whether the country is demonstrating the global leadership it aspires
 21 to in its foreign policy rhetoric.

22 **Principle versus expediency**

23 Since its first democratic elections in 1994 – and despite three disparate
 24 presidential leadership eras since then – certain tenets in South Africa's foreign
 25 policy have remained constant: a predilection for multilateralism, prioritisation
 26 of an 'African Agenda', and ideological solidarity with non-Western nations.
 27 The multilateral inclination in particular, combined with South Africa's
 28 initiatives to take normative leadership in multilateral fora, has earned the young
 29 democracy the status of a middle power. South African policy makers have
 30 enjoyed basking in the glow of the country's moral high ground in the global
 31 arena, benefiting from access to traditional as well as emerging powers, and
 32 trumpeting the Republic's democratic and human rights credentials. But a

⁴During 2011 'the Council adopted over 50 resolutions; 30 presidential statements; and over 40 press statements'. As noted by Marius Fransman, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, in an address on 'South Africa' second tenure in the UN Security Council: Promoting the African Agenda' UNISA, Pretoria 3 February 2012.

⁵As contained in the UN's World Summit Outcome par 139 of UN GA res 60/1 15 September 2005. See too subsequent endorsement in UNSC resolutions, *inter alia*, 1674 of 28 April 2006 (Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict); 1706 of 31 August 2006 (on the crisis in Darfur); and 1755 of 30 April 2007 (which extended the UN Mission in Southern Sudan).

⁶S/Res/1973 (2011) adopted on 17 March 2011.

1 proselytising attitude on the global stage has had its drawbacks, and over the
 2 years it has invited scrutiny of South Africa's foreign policy for compliance with
 3 the country's liberal constitutional mores.

4 Policy makers who have since traded-in principle for expediency probably
 5 regret the idealistic worldview that South Africa cemented into its
 6 post-apartheid foreign policy. The foreign ministry's annual 'Strategic Plans'⁷
 7 have reproduced perfunctory pledges to infuse the conduct of international
 8 relations with domestic principles of human rights, democracy and good
 9 governance.⁸ This undertaking is noble but unrealistic in a world where
 10 'national interest remains a central preoccupation of foreign policy decision
 11 makers'.⁹ Quite simply, its implementation is constrained by 'competing and
 12 more pragmatic economic and geopolitical considerations'.¹⁰

13 What troubles critics is less the (understandable) fact that South Africa acquiesces
 14 to practical imperatives, than the manner in which it 'often appears to be pursuing
 15 two contradictory sets of values', as *The Economist* phrases it. The journal's
 16 editors direct their scorn specifically to the South African head of state:

17 At one moment, Mr Zuma is upholding the principles of national sovereignty
 18 and non-interference dear to despots around the world. At the next, he insists
 19 that his 'objective' is to contribute to the ideals of democracy, human rights and
 20 justice. The result is a mishmash of unpredictable responses to apparently
 21 similar situations in different countries.¹¹

22 Dimpho Motsamai makes a similar observation, calling South Africa's foreign
 23 policy 'utilitarian at best'. According to her

24 under the Zuma administration, South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy,
 25 typified by the country's commitment to export its model of democratisation to
 26 other parts of Africa, is being viewed with increasing suspicion.¹²

⁷These are three-year plans, but are updated annually. The most recent Strategic Plan on the DIRCO website covers the period 2010-2013 at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/departments/strategic%20plan%202010-2013/index.htm> (accessed 10 January 2012).

⁸For example, in media notes for a press briefing on 5 April 2011, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, listed six principles as 'underpinning South Africa's Foreign Policy: a commitment to Africa in world affairs; economic development through regional and international cooperation; the promotion of human rights; the promotion of democracy; justice and international law in the conduct of relations between nations; and international peace and internationally agreed upon mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts' at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2011/mash0405> (accessed 12 December 2011).

⁹Alden and Aran *Foreign policy analysis: New approaches* (2012) at 3.

¹⁰Thipanyane 'South Africa's foreign policy under the Zuma government' (2011) 64/December *Africa Institute of South Africa Policy Brief* at 5.

¹¹'South Africa's foreign policy: All over the place' *The Economist* 24 March 2011 at <http://www.economist.com/node/18447027> ('*The Economist*') (accessed 30 March 2011)

¹²Motsamai 'Côte d'Ivoire policy angers Ecogas' (2011) April/May *The-African.org* at 32.

1 During the course of 2011, indecisiveness (if not outright ambiguity) around
 2 resolution of the humanitarian crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, once again
 3 raised questions about the purported moral principles that anchor South
 4 Africa's policy towards its external environment. While humanitarian
 5 intervention is at best a contentious policy choice for any government, it is the
 6 warmth of South African politicians' relations with despots and illegitimate
 7 regimes that has tainted its government's foreign policy.

8 The ignominious fall of Muammar Gaddafi is a case in point. It is no secret
 9 that the 'brother leader' had been generous with financial assistance to his
 10 African friends, including successive post-apartheid South African presidents,
 11 who fêted him openly. Thus it appeared incongruous when President Zuma,
 12 during October 2011, questioned the very foundation of Gaddafi's authority
 13 in Libya. Defending South Africa's initial support for UNSC Resolution 1973,
 14 Zuma slated the moral deficit in Gaddafi's leadership: 'There were no
 15 principles that guided the authority of Libya', he noted. 'Libya was ruled by
 16 Gaddafi and Gaddafi alone'.¹³ Conveniently, Zuma's comments were made
 17 only after the Libyan leader had been ousted. But it begs the question of when,
 18 given Gaddafi's four decades of ruthless dictatorship, Zuma and his foreign
 19 policy advisors came to the conclusion that the Libyan ruler was an odious
 20 character. Perhaps a more compelling question is why the South African
 21 government had authorised arms sales to Libya as late as 2010.¹⁴

22 Closer to home, foreign policy observers were bemused when the South African
 23 Reserve Bank (SARB) extended a loan of R2 billion to Swaziland in September
 24 2011. Africa's last absolute monarchy has a dismal track-record in governance
 25 – a matter the South African government has been reluctant to criticise.¹⁵ The
 26 SARB was quick to reassure the public that the loan would hinge on strict
 27 conditionalities, but Tseliso Thipanyane calls the latter into question. He notes
 28 that the human rights and democratisation conditions of the loan are

29 based on a 2004 bilateral agreement between the two countries that was never
 30 really implemented. This raises questions as to why this was allowed to happen
 31 when the inadequacy of human rights, democratic governance and respect for
 32 the rule of law has contributed to much of Swaziland's current economic
 33 challenges that now require financial support from the South African
 34 government.¹⁶

¹³ Author's notes taken during President Zuma's verbal responses to questions from the audience, after his speech on 'Aspects of South African foreign policy' at the University of Pretoria, 13 October 2011. Gaddafi was killed by Libyan rebels exactly a week later on 20 October 2011.

¹⁴ Geldenhuys 'Dealing with "deviants": Testing South Africa's good international citizenship' (2011) XXXIII/ 2 *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* at 13.

¹⁵ As noted in *The Economist* n 11 above.

¹⁶ Thipanyane n 10 above at 4.

1 The discrepancy between the rhetoric of value-driven foreign policy and the
 2 implementation thereof was illustrated poignantly when the Dalai Lama
 3 applied for a visa to attend Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's eightieth
 4 birthday celebrations. Despite a personal pledge¹⁷ in 2009 (after a similar
 5 controversy) by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation that
 6 the Dalai Lama would be welcome to visit, it became apparent that the South
 7 African government had no intention of issuing the visa. A range of influential
 8 commentators entered the fray (*inter alia*, Human Rights Watch, various
 9 Nobel Peace Laureates, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and even
 10 British billionaire Richard Branson). Initially the South African government
 11 (even up to the level of the Deputy President) claimed that the delay in issuing
 12 the visa was for bureaucratic reasons. However, and as critics had insisted
 13 from the outset of the debacle, it transpired that government's sole concern
 14 was its relations with China – since 2009 South Africa's largest trading
 15 partner¹⁸ and 'an increasingly important source of investment'.¹⁹

16 A chorus of condemnation, led by Archbishop Tutu, slammed South Africa's
 17 obsequiousness towards China, but to no avail. The Vice-Chancellor of Wits
 18 University, Professor Loyiso Nongxa, voiced the exasperation of many critics
 19 when he declared that 'this betrayal of a key constitutional value provides a
 20 clear window into the fragility of the democracy we are trying to sustain'.²⁰

21 In an implicit reference to the furore, President Zuma in a speech on foreign
 22 policy later that same month, said:

23 Having outlined our relations with various regions and countries, let me state
 24 categorically that our foreign policy is independent and decisions are informed by the
 25 national interest. We look at what is of benefit to the South African people, and what
 26 will advance our domestic priorities at that given time. We are not dictated to by
 27 other countries, individuals or lobby group interests within our own country.²¹

28 During December the Department of Home Affairs finally conceded that the
 29 visa decision (or more precisely, the deliberate deferment of a decision) was
 30 a result of South Africa's fear that China would retaliate. In a court affidavit
 31 submitted in December 2011, Home Affairs Director-General Mkuseli Apleni

¹⁷Nkoane-Mashabane 'Media briefing by the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation' Pretoria 14 May 2009.

¹⁸DIRCO press release 21 September 2011. 'Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe to undertake an official visit to the People's Republic of China' <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=21770&tid=43670> (accessed 31 December 2011)

¹⁹Zuma at n 13 above.

²⁰Press release by the University of the Witwatersrand 4 October 2011 'Wits condemns silencing of Dalai Lama' http://www.wits.ac.za/new_sroom/newsitems/201110/14010/news_item_14010.html (accessed 10 November 2011).

²¹Zuma n 13 above.

1 said that his advice to his minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was to take into
 2 account 'that the Deputy President had just conducted a successful visit to
 3 China'.²² At least it became clear that foreign policy principles had nothing to
 4 do with the process. National interest had become the new 'norm'.

5 **Whose 'national' interest?**

6 According to Chris Alden and Amnon Aran, 'what constitutes national interest,
 7 how it is determined and ultimately implemented are crucial to understanding the
 8 choices and responses pursued by states in international affairs'.²³ In the heady
 9 first days of post-apartheid foreign policy, the term 'national interest' was
 10 studiously avoided in foreign policy rhetoric, presumably as it was deemed too
 11 politically incorrect and reminiscent of hegemonic intentions. But this coyness
 12 has dissipated slowly, especially with the advent of the Zuma presidency in
 13 2009, and over the past few years 'national interest' has become a fixture in the
 14 foreign policy lexicon of government officials.

15 This was formalised during 2011, when the Department of International
 16 Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) concluded the process (started during
 17 2010) of drafting a White Paper on foreign policy. The final draft was
 18 published on 13 May 2011,²⁴ and during August the document was approved
 19 by cabinet for submission to parliament. This intention in itself, and the
 20 extensive consultative meetings in the drafting process (involving business,
 21 labour, foreign policy analysts and wider civil society) are laudable and
 22 indicative of a desire on the part of government to ground foreign policy in a
 23 democratic mandate. But old habits die hard and the Department could not
 24 resist giving the White Paper a rather pretentious title: 'Building a better
 25 world: The diplomacy of Ubuntu'.²⁵ This crusading inclination was mirrored
 26 in the document itself, which declares that

27 [s]ince 1994, the international community has looked to South Africa to play a
 28 leading role in championing values of human rights, democracy, reconciliation
 29 and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment. South Africa has risen to
 30 the challenge and plays a meaningful role in the region, on the continent and
 31 globally.²⁶

²²Cilliers 'The new colonialists – will South Africa continue to buckle under pressure from China?' *ISS Today* 09 January 2012 at http://www.issafrica.org/iss_today.php?ID=1408&utm_source=ISS%2BWeekly%2BIssue%2B1&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=ISS%2BToday&utm_campaign=Weekly%2BIssue%2B1 (accessed 15 January 2012)

²³Alden and Aran n 9 above at 4.

²⁴DIRCO 'Building a better world: The diplomacy of Ubuntu' White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy: Final Draft 13 May 2011 <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=148482> (accessed 13 December 2011).

²⁵The Nguni word means humanity, or literally, 'to be human', thus it could broadly be equated with cosmopolitan values.

²⁶White Paper n 24 above at 4.

1 Despite the ambitious name and consultation process, the document itself
2 turned out to be mediocre, revealing very little beyond the rehashed contents
3 of the Department's various successive strategic plans. As expected, it
4 announced the imminent formation of a South African Council on
5 International Relations (SACOIR). This idea has been modelled on the
6 reputation of institutions in other countries, such as the influential Council on
7 Foreign Relations in the United States and its British sister organisation, the
8 Royal Institute of International Affairs, known as 'Chatham House'.

9 The White Paper states that the formation of SACOIR will reflect the 'spirit
10 of a more inclusive and open foreign policy approach' in order to 'engage key
11 stakeholders ... with the aim of creating dynamic partnerships for development
12 and cooperation'.²⁷ This is a positive concept, but as in all advisory processes,
13 the autonomy of the council will be pivotal to its legitimacy. In this regard it
14 is regrettable that the terms of reference of the council were not subjected to
15 the same consultation process that resulted in the White Paper, and therefore
16 arbitrarily provide for a council under the full authority of DIRCO, with
17 members appointed and dismissed by the minister alone. Even the appointment
18 of the Chair and the Vice-Chair of SACOIR will be the minister's
19 prerogative.²⁸ SACOIR will therefore battle to establish non-partisan
20 credentials among its peer think-tanks in other democracies.

21 Something the White Paper did, and emphatically so, was to acknowledge
22 national interest as a key driver of South African foreign policy. In so doing,
23 it conceded (despite the usual moralistic rhetoric throughout the paper) that
24 reality might induce pragmatism.²⁹ It also emphasised the idea of national
25 interest as being an inclusive consideration, by asserting:

26 The business of national interest cannot be the purview of the state alone, but it
27 can encourage an enabling environment of dialogue and discourse among all
28 stakeholders to interrogate policies and strategies, and their application in the
29 best interests of the people.³⁰

30 However, it would seem that in South Africa's foreign policy, some
31 stakeholders assume a role more equal than that of others. Traditionally,
32 foreign policy analysis (FPA) has paid attention to the domestic drivers of

²⁷*Id* at 6.

²⁸DIRCO 'Terms of Reference of the South African Council on International Relations' **No date**. See par 4 (Composition of SACOIR) and par 6 (Chair and Vice-Chair of SACOIR and Minister's attendance of Plenary Meetings) at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/docs/2011/SACOIR.pdf> (accessed 31 January 2012).

²⁹White Paper n 24 above at 11. It explains that '[a]t times, South Africa faces the challenge of balancing its national interests against global realities in a rapidly changing world. Our foreign policy imperatives will need to be able to address and manage these dynamics'.

³⁰*Id* Foreword.

1 policy decisions, but as Alden and Aran point out, the field of research has
2 tended to neglect the role of political parties. They argue that:

3 by focusing on political parties and foreign policy it is possible to move away
4 from the normative tendency towards concentrating on democratic forms of
5 governance and imbuing them with special attributes to examining
6 dispassionately how single-party regimes, for example the Communist Party of
7 China, operate in ways that mimic these key functions. Political parties utilise
8 their international networks in ways that complement, supplement or even
9 contradict the formal diplomatic bilateral state apparatus.³¹

10 Arguably, Alden and Aran's observation applies to dominant party systems as
11 well, and this is where the South African case is instructive: since 1994, its
12 multiparty democracy has been dominated by the ruling African National
13 Congress (ANC). The extended rule by a single dominant party has played up
14 concerns about democratic accountability, especially in a party-list electoral
15 system where parliamentarians are beholden to the party rather than
16 constituencies for keeping their jobs. With opposition parties posing no viable
17 threat to the hegemony of the ANC, the media has stepped into the watchdog
18 void. As Wasserman and Soloman observe, '[South African] journalists ...
19 often fashion themselves in terms of an unofficial political opposition against
20 the dominant ANC and its allies'. Hence the 'ANC's hostility is widely
21 perceived to result from the vigorous reporting of corruption, mismanagement
22 and non-delivery' by journalists, and this hostility explains the party's threats
23 to establish a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal in an attempt 'to impose
24 stronger sanctions on offending media'.³²

25 During November 2011, in a move that was widely construed as an attack on
26 media freedom,³³ the ANC used its parliamentary majority to pass the unpopular³⁴
27 Protection of State Information Bill. Nic Dawes, Judith February and Zackie
28 Achmat explain that, if signed into law, the so-called 'secrecy bill' would
29 criminalise the possession and disclosure of classified information without state
30 approval. It would also give bureaucrats new powers to classify information,

³¹Alden and Aran n 9 above at 60-61.

³²The tribunal was announced for the first time in 2007 at the ANC's Polokwane conference. As explained by Wasserman and Soloman 'this was based on the ANC's criticism of the self-regulatory South African Press Council and Press Ombudsman' 'Outcry and protest' *TheWorldToday.Org* January 2012 at 25.

³³Id at 25. The authors point out that the Secrecy Bill might actually impact even more adversely on civil society organisations that attempt to expose government wrongdoing, because they generally do not have the media's easy access to legal resources.

³⁴Apart from all the opposition parties, the broad coalition includes journalists, township activists, labour unions and religious and civil society leaders, including the Nobel laureates Nadine Gordimer and Desmond Tutu. See Dawes, February and Achmat 'Muzzling the rainbow nation' 30 November 2011 *The New York Times* at http://www.NYTimes.com/2011/11/30/Opinion/Muzzling-The-Rainbownation.Html?_R=3&Src=Rechp (accessed 15 December 2011).

1 making yet more information inaccessible to the public. The authors recall South
 2 Africa's constitutional guarantee of access to information as a basic right, and
 3 warn that the bill would have 'a chilling effect on freedom of speech and reverse
 4 the strides we have made toward more transparent governance'.³⁵

5 In the run-up to the tabling of the bill, coordinated protests were held across
 6 the country. Dubbed the Right to Know ('R2K') campaign, the peaceful revolt
 7 found international resonance in the larger transnational movement to support
 8 freedom of speech and access to information. It also linked into the adoption
 9 by African media and civil society organisations (representing a wide range of
 10 countries in the continent) of the African Platform on Access to Information
 11 (APAI) which agitates for access to information legislation throughout the
 12 continent.³⁶

13 Despite the domestic and international pressure, the party's – rather than
 14 'national' – interests prevailed. Similarly, in the handling of the Dalai Lama's
 15 visa application, party interests seemed to have been a concern. In the same
 16 week the Dalai Lama cancelled his visa application to defuse the furore over
 17 it, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe undertook an official visit to Beijing
 18 'to strengthen and consolidate political and economic relations'.³⁷ This
 19 prompted Mzukisi Qobo to accuse the leadership of the ANC of going on 'a
 20 pilgrimage to Beijing to genuflect before the Chinese Communist Party'.³⁸ To
 21 be sure, in a foreign policy speech just a few weeks later, President Zuma
 22 singled out this specific bilateral relationship for effusive praise.³⁹

23 Therefore, South Africa's domestic policy, amplified in its foreign policy,
 24 increasingly manifests a blurred party-state distinction. It is not appropriate for
 25 diplomats or foreign policy leaders from democratic states to present themselves
 26 on the global stage as representatives of political parties, yet this practice has
 27 become commonplace in the case of South Africa. An example is President
 28 Zuma's address to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) during September 2011.
 29 In an otherwise lacklustre speech (but following the usual template of reiterating
 30 support for ideological allies such as Palestine, Cuba, and Western Sahara)
 31 President Zuma reminded the world that it would be the ruling party's centenary
 32 celebration during 2012.⁴⁰ He used the opportunity of addressing a global

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Wasserman and Solomon n 32 above at 27.

³⁷DIRCO press release of 21 September 2011 n 18 above.

³⁸Qobo 'SA's Foreign Policy lacks confidence' *Mail & Guardian Online* 14 October 2011 at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-10-14-sas-foreign-policy-lacks-confidence> (accessed 12 December 2011).

³⁹Zuma n 13 above.

⁴⁰Zuma 'Statement by the President of the Republic of South Africa during the General Debate of the 66th United Nations General Assembly' New York 21 September 2011 at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2011/zuma0922.html> (accessed 13 January 2012).

1 audience to sing the praises of the ANC, and did so again a month later, in a
 2 foreign policy speech at the University of Pretoria. *Inter alia*, he observed that:
 3 former ANC President Mr Oliver Reginald Tambo further enunciated our
 4 foreign policy thrust at the First Congress of the Angolan ruling party, the
 5 MPLA in Luanda in 1977.⁴¹

6 As in this example, the party-state conflation is done seamlessly. It is
 7 reproduced in policy speeches both at the domestic and international levels.
 8 Apart from concerns about national accountability, a resultant problem is that
 9 any intra-party tension infiltrates foreign policy decisions. The most
 10 high-profile example of this was in December 2007, at the ANC's 52nd
 11 national conference in Polokwane, where a 'palace coup' within the party led
 12 to the forced resignation of President Thabo Mbeki a few months later,
 13 compelling him hastily to cancel a scheduled appearance at the UNGA. During
 14 the year under review, the leadership battle in the ANC once again became
 15 acrimonious in the build-up to the party's leadership elections scheduled for
 16 2012. The leader of the ANC Youth League openly challenged the authority
 17 of the party, infamously even calling for ANC-supported regime change in
 18 Botswana. Julius Malema was eventually disciplined by his party, but other
 19 potential leadership contenders posed a more delicate challenge.

20 Some commentators⁴² have wagered that it was for party-political reasons that,
 21 during the latter half of 2011, Home Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma
 22 was nominated by the South African government to chair the African Union
 23 (AU) Commission. If successful, she would have to vacate her Cabinet post to
 24 move to Addis Ababa for the four-year term. This would be a tactical move to
 25 sideline an individual whose track-record and stature, both at home and abroad,
 26 has positioned her as a candidate for the presidency not only of the ANC, but of
 27 South Africa. It would also dispose of a Cabinet minister whose recent (and
 28 highly acclaimed) fight against corruption in the Department of Home Affairs,
 29 has seen her 'taking on some very well-connected party funders'.⁴³

30 **South Africa and leadership in Africa**

31 Speculation about Machiavellian plotting in the ruling party notwithstanding,
 32 the nomination of Dlamini-Zuma sheds light on the complex, often fraught,
 33 relationship between South Africa and the rest of the continent.

⁴¹Zuma n 13above.

⁴²See, eg, Eno 'The South African candidature for the post of chairperson of the African Union Commission: An affront or a ploy' 30 Nov 2011 internet blog at <http://opinion.myjoyonline.com/pages/feature/201111/77391.php> (accessed 10 January 2012).

⁴³Editor of the Mail & Guardian, Nick Dawes, in introductory remarks to the annual 'Cabinet Report Cards'. *Mail & Guardian Online* December 2011 at <http://cabinet.mg.co.za/> (accessed 31 December 2011).

1 The move to install her in the AU's top-job by challenging the incumbent, Jean
 2 Ping, induced heated debate in the African foreign policy community.
 3 Supporters of her candidacy emphasised the many positive considerations: the
 4 declared support of the Southern African sub-region;⁴⁴ her undisputed
 5 track-record as a strong leader, which bodes well for management of the AU's
 6 day-to-day affairs; and the fact that she would be the first woman, first
 7 Anglophone and first Southern African to lead⁴⁵ the AU Commission.

8 In similar positive vein, Handy and Kjeldgaard speculate that
 9 South Africa's decision to send a top official for the AU Commission chair is
 10 a sign that the AU is growing in importance and is considered by the continent's
 11 biggest economy as a critical position to influence the country's international
 12 relations and Africa's voice in the world.⁴⁶

13 This is certainly a message which the South African government has been
 14 advancing. Indeed, all South Africa's initiatives to impact governance at the
 15 regional and global levels – including the nomination of Dlamini-Zuma – have
 16 been diplomatically packaged as efforts to promote the so-called African
 17 Agenda,⁴⁷ with the implication that South Africa is willing to take leadership
 18 on behalf of the continent. But whether the country is willing or able to take
 19 leadership within the continent, and whether it is trusted by the rest of the
 20 continent to do so, is another matter.

21 A first concern is that South Africa, in hegemonic fashion, is acting
 22 unilaterally. As Sipho Hlongwane puts it, '[South Africa is] adding an element
 23 of schoolyard bullying to [its] interactions with other African countries' **I have**

⁴⁴Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran quote the Foreign Minister stating that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) had endorsed Dlamini-Zuma at the organisation's August 2011 summit. See 'AU vote a setback for South Africa' *ISS Today* 1 Feb 2012 at http://www.issafrika.org/iss_today.php?ID=1421&utm_source=ISS%2BWeekly%2B3&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=ISS%2BToday (accessed 2 February 2012).

⁴⁵Since the AU's inception in 2002, its Commission has been chaired by three West Africans: former Ivorian Foreign Minister Amara Essy, former Malian President Alpha Omar Konaré, and since February 2008, former Gabonese Foreign Minister Jean Ping.

⁴⁶Handy and Kjeldgaard 'South Africa's bid for the au top job: Right move, wrong timing?' *The African.org* 2 December 2011 at http://www.issafrika.org/iss_today.php?ID=1398 (accessed 31 December 2011).

⁴⁷For example, in his State of the Nation Address on 10 February 2011, President Zuma said, 'We have taken up our non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, which we will use to promote the African agenda as well as peace and security in Africa and the world'. See too, DIRCO White Paper n 24 above at 26 which promises that South Africa 'will use [its] membership [of BRICS] as a strategic opportunity to advance the interests of Africa in global issues such as the reform of global governance, the work of the G20, international trade, development, energy and climate change'.

1 assumed this is the end of the quotation.⁴⁸ The nomination of Dlamini-Zuma
 2 to replace a chair of the AU Commission who had served only one term, was
 3 seen by many observers as a confrontational gesture. Moreover, South Africa's
 4 bid (notwithstanding SADC support) is alleged to have taken place without
 5 adequate consultation among the wider AU membership. This, according to
 6 Handy and Kjeldgaard, created the impression that South Africa was 'relying
 7 on its own strength as a regional power in Africa to get this position'.⁴⁹

8 Another concern was that the bid trampled on a customary rule within the AU
 9 that the position of the chairperson should not go to any dominant⁵⁰ economic
 10 and military power of the continent, in order to prevent power politics from
 11 upsetting the diplomatic balance in the AU, and possibly paralysing vital
 12 decisions on the continent's collective interests.⁵¹ It also raised suspicions
 13 about a hidden South African agenda,⁵² possibly linked to the country's
 14 ambition to become a permanent member of the UNSC.

15 The latter point raises a sensitive matter, namely South Africa's positioning
 16 of itself *vis-à-vis* perceived competition in the continent, with other influential
 17 states such as Nigeria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Kenya, Senegal, and within
 18 SADC, Angola. This competitive flip-side to the African Agenda is revealed
 19 in DIRCO's 2011 White Paper:

20 A number of regional trends could combine to result in challenges to South Africa's
 21 regional leadership position. High energy prices and rapid growth rates could see the
 22 emergence of other regional economic centres, with aspirations for regional influence
 23 and leadership. The rapid development of a growing number of developing countries
 24 is also likely to result in increased competition among states to position themselves
 25 in order to maximise their international profiles and visibility.⁵³

26 Commenting on the White Paper, Peter Fabricius observes that South Africa's
 27 'anxiety' about challenges to its leadership in Africa is 'revealing because it
 28 suggests quite strongly that South Africa ultimately wants to be a global player
 29 not for Africa's sake but for its own'.⁵⁴ He notes the White Paper's

⁴⁸Hlongwane 'Wanted: A new foreign policy for South Africa' *Daily Maverick* 11 March, 2011 at <http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2011-03-11-wanted-a-new-foreign-policy-for-south-africa> (accessed 31 March 2011). Eno n 42 above also implies that the smaller, weaker members of SADC were 'bullied' into supporting Dlamini-Zuma's bid for the AU Commission chair.

⁴⁹Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above.

⁵⁰For example, Eno n 42 above, points out that South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria, Egypt and Libya wield considerable influence by virtue of their financial, military and material contributions to the AU.

⁵¹*Ibid*, see too Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran n 44 above.

⁵²Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above.

⁵³White Paper n 24 above at 19.

⁵⁴Fabricius 'White Paper on SA foreign policy' *Daily News* 16 August 2011 at <http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/white-paper-on-sa-foreign-policy-1.1118115> (accessed 20 August 2011).

1 ambivalence in this regard, because a rise in the stature of Africa's
2 resource-rich countries will create not just political competition for South
3 Africa, but also opportunities in the sense of bigger export markets.

4 South Africa's ambition to take a leading role on the global stage makes it all
5 the more important that its leadership credentials within Africa are above
6 board. During the course of 2011 there were certainly some successes in this
7 regard. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa provided
8 massive logistical assistance to ensure peaceful elections during December
9 2011. Madagascar is also a case in point: a political breakthrough was
10 achieved when its cabinet resigned and South Africa engineered the signing
11 of a 'road map' to the achievement of democratic elections.⁵⁵ And, in the case
12 of Zimbabwe, there were signs that 'South Africa may ... have reached the
13 limits of liberatory solidarity'⁵⁶ as Deon Geldenhuys phrases it. Geldenhuys
14 credits President Zuma with being the driving force behind a critical SADC
15 report of June 2011, but adds the *caveat* that South Africa's more forceful
16 position towards Zimbabwe may have been induced by the anti-government
17 revolts that swept across North Africa.

18 Unfortunately, South Africa's normative leadership in the continent was
19 overshadowed by areas where its foreign policy seemed to be 'on a collision
20 course'⁵⁷ with that of other African states. Marius Fransman, one of the Deputy
21 Ministers of International Relations and Cooperation, acknowledged that during
22 their joint tenure on the Security Council 'the three African countries'⁵⁸ did not
23 always adopt common positions or stance on African issues before the agenda of
24 the Council'. He prefaced this comment with the assurance that 'most of the policy
25 positions adopted and pursued by the country since January 2011 were guided
26 largely by African and AU positions on African conflicts'.⁵⁹

27 Many critics would beg to differ. Indeed, 2011 was punctuated by several
28 foreign policy blunders in Africa, of which the two most prominent were the
29 political crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya. Echoing the criticism of South
30 Africa's behaviour during the AU Commission chairperson bid, Jakkie Cilliers
31 and Liesl Louw-Vaudran point out that in both these cases, 'South Africa was
32 seen to act without due consultation and made a number of contradictory
33 decisions'.⁶⁰ In the case of Côte d'Ivoire,⁶¹ South Africa supported the

⁵⁵'Cabinet Report Card on the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation' n 43 above.

⁵⁶Geldenhuys n 14 above at 7.

⁵⁷Hlongwane n 48 above.

⁵⁸Nigeria and Gabon were the other two non-permanent African members during 2011.

⁵⁹Fransman n 4 above.

⁶⁰Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran n 44 above.

⁶¹See, eg, comment in *The Economist* n 11 above, and 'Cabinet Report Cards' at n 43 above.

1 incumbent initially, and remained ‘largely idle’⁶² for months while Laurent
 2 Gbagbo refused to step down and recognise Alassane Ouattara’s victory in the
 3 presidential elections of November 2010 – this despite the fact that the
 4 outcome of the election had been endorsed by the relevant sub-regional
 5 organisation (the Economic Community of West African States), the AU and
 6 the broader international community. During January 2011, South Africa even
 7 positioned a naval frigate, the SAS Drakensberg, off the Ivorian coast, a move
 8 that was construed by ECOWAS as military support for Gbagbo (even if the
 9 government argued that the frigate was a supply vessel, on a routine training
 10 mission in West Africa).⁶³ Arguably, South Africa’s mixed messages afforded
 11 Gbagbo an opportunity to dig in his heels while the death toll and scope of
 12 destruction escalated. It also infuriated Nigeria, the regional powerhouse and
 13 an ECOWAS anchor state, which is all too experienced in the spill-over
 14 devastation of civil wars in West Africa.

15 In fairness, it should be noted that the South Africans were pushing for a
 16 negotiated settlement between the two Ivorian sides, proposing a
 17 power-sharing agreement in which Gbagbo would retain the presidency and
 18 Ouattara would assume a position as Vice-President.⁶⁴ This approach is
 19 aligned to the broader South African policy framework, specifically the respect
 20 for sovereignty and rejection of foreign interference. Having previously
 21 mediated in the same country, the South Africans also realised that the
 22 technical outcome of the elections would not necessarily secure long-term
 23 peace in the deeply divided country. However, the ‘quiet’ diplomatic strategy,
 24 pursued at a bilateral level, happened to the detriment of South Africa’s much
 25 vaunted commitment to multilateralism.⁶⁵

26 The initial insistence on appeasing Gbagbo also reminded critics of the South
 27 African approach to the crisis in Zimbabwe, where South African support
 28 bolstered a recalcitrant Robert Mugabe for many years. Handy and Kjeldgaard
 29 summarise the criticism of the Côte d’Ivoire policy by noting increasing

⁶²Vasco Martins accuses the South African government of ambiguity on the crisis, variously congratulating Ouattara on his victory, ‘only to announce its neutrality afterwards’ and then on 21 January 2012, Zuma alleged that ‘there were some discrepancies on the manner in which the election had come to the final pronouncement of the vote’, while labelling the international calls for Gbagbo’s departure as ‘counter-productive’. ‘The Côte d’Ivoire crisis in retrospect’ (2011) 5/Spring/Summer *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* at 78.

⁶³*Id* at 82. See also DIRCO press release of 16 February 2011 ‘Media statement on the SAS Drakensberg vessel in the West Coast of Africa’ at <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=16273&tid=28259> (accessed 12 December 2011).

⁶⁴Martins n 62 above at 80. See too, Motsamai n 12 above at 32.

⁶⁵Motsamai n 12 above at 32. She points out that ‘Zuma’s prioritisation of bilateralism, as illustrated by the proliferation of “strategic” partnerships and binational commissions since 2009, may be counterproductive to Pretoria’s African agenda’.

1 'doubts ... about SA's commitment to the promotion of democracy in Africa
2 and respect for the stabilising role of regional organisations'.⁶⁶ Hlongwane is
3 blunter. He says 'South Africa could be acting as a beacon of morality, but it
4 isn't' and adds that all three post-apartheid South African presidents have had
5 an attitude of 'you don't let go of old friends, no matter how rotten they are'.⁶⁷

6 Eventually South Africa reversed its position in March 2011⁶⁸ and joined the call
7 of the AU's Peace and Security Council for Gbagbo to step down. However, the
8 bloody stand-off continued and was only ended during April 2011 when French
9 troops, with UN support and authorisation, intervened militarily. The fact that the
10 Ivorian crisis was defused through foreign intervention, as opposed to intervention
11 initiated by ECOWAS or the AU, exposed 'institutional weaknesses and divisions
12 within the AU', and saw the organisation sidelined because it is 'unable to
13 authoritatively speak with one voice and take full charge to resolve a conflict in its
14 own backyard'.⁶⁹ Festus Aboagye, in a review of the AU's recent interventions,
15 refers to the diplomacy of the organisation as 'dysfunctional' and 'fossilized'.⁷⁰

16
17 Yet another foreign policy morass for South Africa (and the AU) was the
18 international intervention in Libya. The legal and political debate about the
19 modalities of the case has been covered extensively by analysts and will not be
20 explored in this article. Suffice to state that on 17 March 2011, South Africa
21 voted in favour of UNSC Resolution 1973 which imposed a 'no-fly zone' over
22 Libya. This decision was neither as irrational nor as mercenary as many
23 observers alleged.⁷¹ South Africa went into its second term as UNSC member
24 cognisant of the legacy of its voting behaviour during its previous (2007/2008)
25 term, when it was widely criticised, also by other African states, for siding with
26 oppressive regimes. In anticipation of the second term, policy leaders vowed to

⁶⁶Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above.

⁶⁷Hlongwane n 48 above.

⁶⁸'South Africa recognises Ouattara as winner in Ivory Coast' *Reuters* 17 March 2011. See too Motsamai n 12 above at 31 and Nkoana-Mashabane, media briefing 5 April 2011 n 12 above.

⁶⁹The latter comment, made by Fritz Nganje in relation to the crisis in Libya, applies equally to Côte d'Ivoire. See Nganje 'The UN Security Council response to the Libyan crisis: Implications for the African Agenda'. (2011) 93/December *Global Insight* at 3.

⁷⁰Aboagye 'Momentous interventions' 2011/2012 (December/January) *The-African.org* at 34. See too the discussion by Paul-Simon Handy of the imbalance in the AU's normative architecture. He argues that the achievement of the AU in institutionalising a doctrine against unconstitutional changes of government is 'challenged by the absence of a governance architecture that prohibits non-democratic forms of government'. Handy 'AU's illusions of dogmatic pacifism' (2011) October/November *The-African.org* at 9.

⁷¹Nganje n 69 above at 2 referred to South Africa's decision as 'uncharacteristic'. Sean Christie, on the other hand, cites speculation that 'South Africa had backed the mainstream in the hope of winning support for a permanent seat on the Security Council'. See Christie 'SA at the UN: Do they jump or are they pushed?' *The Mail and Guardian Online* 6 May 2011 at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-06-do-they-jump-or-are-pushed> (accessed 31 May 2011).

1 be more consistent and transparent in adhering to constitutional values. During
 2 February, for example, on her way to attend a UN Human Rights Council
 3 meeting in Geneva, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane declared that South Africa
 4 would show ‘zero tolerance on impunity for grave violations of human rights and
 5 fundamental freedoms globally’.⁷² The AU had been tardy and ambiguous in its
 6 response⁷³ to the crisis in Libya, and arguably this allowed leeway for all three
 7 African members of the UNSC to support the intervention to protect civilians.
 8 A third consideration was that during the immediately preceding events in
 9 Tunisia and Egypt, public revolt was followed by largely peaceful and rapid exits
 10 of autocratic leaders, and that had created the expectation that Libya would
 11 follow suit. Another, and perhaps more compelling, fact was that the Arab
 12 League had appealed for the intervention⁷⁴ – a variable which convinced even
 13 the most resolute opponents of intervention, the Russians and Chinese, to
 14 withhold their vetoes. And, finally, Resolution 1973 contained no reference to
 15 foreign occupation or regime change in its operative paragraphs. This explains
 16 President Zuma’s confidence when he declared several months later that, given
 17 a similar situation, South Africa would have made the same decision.⁷⁵ In its
 18 voting behaviour on Resolution 1973, South Africa may have acted in haste or
 19 endorsed a vaguely worded resolution, but it did not contravene any of its
 20 foreign policy principles.

21 What caused more controversy was South Africa’s subsequent lambasting of
 22 the international intervention, and the diplomatic mud-slinging that
 23 accompanied the debate. The anti-western rhetoric⁷⁶ caused much resentment
 24 among NATO members, but the latter’s ‘rather generous interpretation’ of its
 25 UNSC mandate⁷⁷ cannot be doubted: as the intervention escalated in ferocity,
 26 it became clear that NATO’s goal was nothing less than regime change.⁷⁸
 27 Therefore, South Africa had ample reason to baulk at the manner in which the

⁷²DIRCO press release 26 February 2011 ‘The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation undertakes a working visit to Geneva to attend the High-Level Segment of the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council’ 27-28 February at <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=16565&tid=29006> (accessed 12 January 2012).

⁷³The AU did in fact, a week before the adoption of UNSC resolution 1973, release a ‘road map’ which encouraged a political solution to the conflict, and discouraged military intervention. The wording of the AU document was, however, not sufficiently emphatic to preclude its members’ support for UNSC resolution 1973.

⁷⁴Christie n 71 above.

⁷⁵Zuma n 13 above.

⁷⁶Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸See, eg, Nganje n 69 above at 3; Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran n 44 above; and Dersso ‘Lessons from North African uprisings for 2012 as AU’s year of shared values’ *ISS Today* 16 January 2012 at http://www.issafrica.org/iss_today.php?ID=1408&utm_source=ISS%2BWeekly%2BIssue%2B1&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=ISS%2BToday&utm_campaign=Weekly%2BIssue%2B1 (accessed 26 January 2012).

1 intervention was handled. Where the country's foreign policy floundered,
 2 however, was in the belated attempt at mediation as part of the AU's
 3 high-level mediation panel. Despite the AU's much-vaunted institutional
 4 provision for intervention in cases of crimes against humanity – envisaged
 5 under article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act – the organisation failed to invoke
 6 any punitive measures, not even sanctions.⁷⁹ Therefore, Zuma's various visits
 7 to Tripoli to seek audience with Gaddafi seemed spurious, if not downright
 8 naïve, and predictably ended in failure.

9 **South Africa at the high table of global governance**

10 A pervasive theme thus far has been international scrutiny of South Africa's
 11 continental and global leadership role, given its confidence that, in President
 12 Zuma's words, 'we believe we can play a critical role as a permanent member
 13 of the UN Security Council, advancing the interests of the continent'.⁸⁰ As part
 14 of its strategy to be included at the highest levels of global governance
 15 (representing Africa's or its own interests or both, depending on the view of
 16 commentators), South Africa has increasingly resorted to 'club diplomacy'. Also
 17 known as mini-lateralism, this implies the formation of diplomatic associations
 18 with small groups of selected strategic partners. Examples of the latter are South
 19 Africa's well-documented membership of the trilateral India-Brazil-South Africa
 20 (IBSA) forum, and its status as sole African member of the G-20.

21 A highlight of 2011 was South Africa's joining of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia,
 22 India and China) group of powerful emerging economies. In his inaugural
 23 address at the BRICS summit (held on 14 April 2011 in China) President
 24 Zuma proclaimed, 'We are now equal co-architects of a new equitable
 25 international system' and added, on the same idealistic note, 'such a new
 26 world order will be to the benefit of all humanity and aims at securing shared
 27 prosperity for all'.⁸¹ Six months later, Zuma again used the opportunity to
 28 attach a normative agenda to South Africa's joining of BRICS:

29 South Africa uses its membership of BRICS as a strategic opportunity to
 30 advance the interests of Africa in global issues such as the reform of global
 31 governance, the work of the G20, international trade, development, energy and
 32 climate change.⁸²

33 Zuma echoed the sentiments of many commentators on the significance of this
 34 recently constituted diplomatic node within the emerging world order. The

⁷⁹Dersso n 78 above.

⁸⁰Zuma n 13 above.

⁸¹Zuma 'Address by the President of the Republic of South Africa to the plenary of the third BRICS leaders meeting, Sanya, Hainan Island, People's Republic of China' 14 April 2011 at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2011/jzuma0414a.html> (accessed 15 January 2012).

⁸²Zuma n 13 above.

1 relevance of BRICS is not restricted to the economic sphere, but as Lubomir
 2 Georgiev opines,
 3 the distinct need for taking into account the BRICs in the global economic policy-
 4 making...[has resulted in] a *sui generis* political club that posts on the agenda their
 5 inclusion in the political processes on shaping a new multi-polar world.⁸³

6 The idea that BRICS poses an alternative power pole to counter not only the
 7 economic but also the political hegemony of the west, is supported by the fact
 8 that it includes two permanent members of the UNSC, and three aspiring
 9 permanent members.

10 All five BRICS countries served on the UNSC during 2011, a coincidence that
 11 afforded some insight into their potential alignment of foreign policy positions
 12 at the highest table of global governance. But as the year progressed, the various
 13 contentious issues on the agenda of the Council did not generate coordinated
 14 foreign policy responses. Rather, as Nganje points out, the voting behaviour of
 15 the five countries exposed 'the divergent national interest considerations of
 16 emerging economies'. He warns that 'contrary to what might have been hoped
 17 for when South Africa joined the BRICS club, Pretoria cannot safely depend on
 18 its emerging power allies for the promotion of the African agenda in the
 19 UNSC'.⁸⁴ Indeed, South African policy makers' penchant for trumpeting a
 20 normative international agenda and their zeal to bond with non-Western allies,
 21 may have blinded them to the fact that BRICS has neither an ideational
 22 foundation nor a value-driven mission. As Andrew Cooper has pointed out, the
 23 club is 'largely silent on most political, strategic and social matters'.⁸⁵

24
 25 South Africa has ample value-driven foreign policy projects and diplomatic
 26 affiliations (such as IBSA, which does indeed have a normative agenda) and
 27 its policy makers do not have to attach this label to all their diplomatic
 28 endeavours. For example, the year 2011 ended on a high (and 'green') note
 29 when the country successfully hosted yet another international summit, this
 30 time the UN's COP17, on climate change.⁸⁶ The two-week summit in Durban
 31 reached a deal labelled the 'Durban Package': it undertakes to negotiate a new

⁸³Georgiev 'The BRICs - one of the manifestations of the future multi-polar world' (2011) 6 *Diplomacy* at 214 points out the substantial economic influence of the BRICS: 15% share in global trade, 20% -plus share in global GDP, and significantly, in terms of growth potential, '42% of the world population, 2/3 of which being of working age'. At 207, he also notes the stabilising role of BRICS 'against the background of the shrinking economies in the developed countries and the ageing population in most of them'.

⁸⁴Nganje n 69 above at 3.

⁸⁵Cooper 'Labels matter: Interpreting rising states through acronyms' in Alexandroff and Cooper (eds) *Rising states, rising institutions: Challenges for global governance* (2010) at 69.

⁸⁶The COP17/CMP7 UN Framework on Climate Change Conference was held from 28 November to 9 December 2011 in Durban, South Africa.

1 and more inclusive treaty and the establishment of a Green Climate Fund, and
 2 provides for legally binding targets on greenhouse gas emissions that will
 3 come into force as from 2020. The emission targets are much lower, and the
 4 target date much later, than hoped for and the outcome of the conference was
 5 therefore by all accounts a watered down compromise. In foreign policy
 6 analysis such a phenomenon can be described as 'satisficing':⁸⁷ a result not
 7 optimal or satisfactory to the policy makers involved, but nonetheless meeting
 8 a bare minimum of adequacy.

9 Although reviews of South Africa's (and in particular conference president,
 10 Minister Nkoana-Mashabane's) handling of the negotiations have been mixed,⁸⁸
 11 the fact of the matter is that the COP 17 meeting was never going to be easy,
 12 regardless of the host country. And few insiders expected the conference to
 13 result in any level of success, given the acrimonious tenor of the global debate
 14 on climate change. The modest success of the conference, and South Africa's
 15 procedural handling thereof, is therefore not to be sneered at. As Patel remarks:

16 Climate change is one of the most divisive and complex areas [in international
 17 relations] today and a failure in Durban would have hindered the future of
 18 multilateral decision making. South Africa's mediation efforts were aimed at
 19 securing an inclusive, transparent and multilateral process.⁸⁹

20 COP 17 thus offered a positive manifestation of South African foreign policy
 21 practice adhering to its guiding principles.

22 Conclusion

23 A perusal of the literature on South Africa's foreign policy over the course of
 24 2011, yields little consensus on the substance or trends in the policy.
 25 Commentary across the spectrum of critics (and even supporters) of government
 26 decisions, is punctuated by terms such as 'contradictory',⁹⁰ 'unpredictable',⁹¹
 27 'ambiguous',⁹² 'temperamental',⁹³ 'regressive',⁹⁴ 'controversial',⁹⁵ 'clumsy',⁹⁶

⁸⁷Alden and Aran n 9 above at 23.

⁸⁸'Cabinet Report Card' n 43 above. See also 'Durban Package aims to sustain global efforts to reduce gas emissions' *The New Age* 12 December 2011 at www.thenewage.co.za (accessed 30 December 2011).

⁸⁹Patel 'While COP17 hailed "a success", SA slammed as mediator' *Daily Maverick* 12 December 2011 at <http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2011-12-12-while-cop17-hailed-a-success-sa-slammed-as-mediator> (accessed 31 December 2011).

⁹⁰Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran n 44 above.

⁹¹*The Economist* n 11 above.

⁹²Martins n 62 above at 80.

⁹³Motsamai n 12 above, at 31.

⁹⁴Qobo n 38 above.

⁹⁵Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above.

⁹⁶Christie n 71 above.

1 'sometimes- erratic'⁹⁷ and even 'disastrous'.⁹⁸ In essence, it has been a year of
 2 mixed messages. What is becoming obvious, is that there is a leadership deficit
 3 – or as Gilbert Khadiagala says, 'lack of a clear sense of leadership, inspiration
 4 and purpose'⁹⁹ – in this domain of South African policy formulation and
 5 implementation.

6 Naturally, criticism starts with a comparison of rhetoric (what policy professes
 7 to be) and revelation (how the policy manifests in practice). In this regard, it
 8 was found that almost two decades after the country's transition to democracy,
 9 South African foreign policy still displays moralistic verbosity. A normative
 10 approach, which is in keeping with South Africa's constitutional mores, is
 11 desirable. Excessive proselytising, paired with flagrant displays of political
 12 expediency, devalues South Africa's international credibility.

13 If foreign policy leaders have finally owned up to the centrality of South
 14 Africa's self interest in foreign policy implementation, many of them are yet
 15 to see the line which (should) exist(s) between state and party interests.
 16 'National interest' in a democratic dispensation means exactly that, and on the
 17 global stage, South African leaders should be proud to represent a country of
 18 rich (and sometimes unwieldy) diversity. This is not just an idealised code of
 19 public conduct, it is a constitutional imperative, and it is implied in the South
 20 African foreign policy principle that projects 'the promotion of democracy'¹⁰⁰
 21 into the international arena.

22 An area that remains problematic, is South Africa's leadership credentials
 23 within its own continent. Many worthy diplomatic initiatives are being
 24 implemented, but their success is shadowed by doubts about South Africa's
 25 intentions and mandate, and bewilderment over the complex emergencies
 26 where the Republic shies away from decisive leadership. At issue is not South
 27 Africa's insistence on peaceful solutions to conflicts (and definitely not its
 28 prudent hesitation to join armed intervention), but rather the methodology
 29 involved: indulging unrepentant dictators, insisting on drawn-out political
 30 procedures when an humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding, and not reading the
 31 diplomatic mood of a region. Something many commentators¹⁰¹ have pointed
 32 out, is that grave situations demand decisive leadership, which includes the

⁹⁷Handy n 70 above at 9. **Please confirm.**

⁹⁸'Cabinet Report Card' n 43 above. See also Patel n 89 above, regarding the peculiar and 'unhurried' mediation style of the South Africans, which irked allies and foes alike.

⁹⁹Christie 'An armchair guide to SA's foreign policy challenges' *The Mail and Guardian Online* 25 March 2011 at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-03-25-an-armchair-guide-to-sas-foreign-policy-challenges> (accessed 26 March 2011).

¹⁰⁰See Nkoana-Mashabane n 8 above.

¹⁰¹Handy and Kjeldgaard n 46 above. See too Martins n 62 above at 83 and 84.

- 1 threat of military action by a regional or global power who has the ability and
2 political will to execute an ultimatum. South Africa's ability to lead the AU
3 in matters of peace and security – and by analogy its credentials to assume a
4 permanent position in the UNSC – hinges not only on its soft power, but on its
5 hard power as well. Any ambiguity in this regard undermines credibility.
- 6 South Africa has a track-record of punching above its weight in international
7 forums, and its 2011 admission to the BRICS is evidence of this. In some
8 spheres of global governance, its diplomacy is assertive, even transformative.
9 Yet in other respects, and often within Africa, it fumbles and contradicts itself.
10 Nganje makes the point that South Africa's defence of 'the African agenda in
11 the UNSC should ... begin in Addis Ababa and not in New York'.¹⁰² Likewise,
12 its defence of the South African agenda should start in Pretoria. It is a matter
13 of leadership.

¹⁰²Nganje n 69 above at 4.