

South Africa's Evolving Role in Peacekeeping: National Interest and International Responsibilities

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Introduction

Having committed itself to regional peace and security and to the strengthening of regional security arrangements, the South African Government has since the mid-1990s embarked upon a process of planning for eventualities relating to peace missions.[1] Against this background the *White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions* (hereafter White Paper) was compiled by the Department of Foreign Affairs, approved by Cabinet on 21 October 1998 and tabled in Parliament on 24 February 1999. Generally speaking, the White Paper could be regarded as a crucial framework and guideline for South Africa's participation in peace missions. The document has a wide scope and covers not only the philosophical and political aspects of involvement in peace missions, but also the practical aspects of the country's potential contributions. From a foreign policy point of view, the White Paper is certainly a document of much significance. It is possibly the most important foreign policy document of the last decade to pass Cabinet, since it forced the South African Government to outline its national interest and to define how this interest interfaced with its philosophy on conflict resolution and its general approach towards Africa.[2]

Towards the end of 2002, the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) also clearly linked South Africa's military-strategic objectives to "promoting security", which was defined as "the provision of external deployment or support to enhance security in support of decisions by the executive". Practically speaking, this entails sub-regional, regional or international peace support operations.[3]

¹ The notion 'peace mission' is used as a generic term to include all political, diplomatic and military activities related to multinational endeavors to prevent or settle disputes in terms of the UN Charter.

² Jakkie Cilliers, "An Emerging South African Foreign Policy Identity", *ISS Papers* 39 (April 1999), 10.

³ South African National Defense Force (SANDF), *South African Military Strategy* (Pretoria: 1 Military Printing Regiment, 2002), 5.

While South Africa has clearly outlined its policy guidelines on participation in peace missions, the Government has practically moved to involve the SANDF in United Nations (UN) peace missions in two African states. Towards the end of 2000 an announcement was made that a limited number of South African officers would be deployed as military liaison officers to support the internationally brokered peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and specifically to serve in the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). Furthermore, in a significant announcement in March 2001, the South African Government stated that in compliance with the international obligations of South Africa towards the UN, the SANDF would contribute elements of specialized units to the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC). This announcement was a historical development in that it paved the way for the SANDF's first substantial contribution – specifically of a human resources nature – to international peace missions.

These developments also coincided with the deployment of South African troops in Burundi in October and November 2001 with a view to protecting about 150 Burundian political leaders who returned from exile to participate in that country's power-sharing Transitional Government. In the early months of 2003, the number of South African troops deployed in the above-mentioned missions stood at about 900 SANDF servicemen and women.[4] At the time of writing, the South African Government also announced that the SANDF would play a support role in the Liberian peace process.[5]

The aim of this paper is to analyze and assess the extent to which self-declared concerns in relation to South Africa's national interest and international profile underpin and inform the SANDF's recent and current involvement in international peacekeeping. Specifically, the paper endeavors to focus on the preoccupations of South African

⁴ Siphwe Nyanda, "The South African National Defense Force and Peace Missions in Africa". Paper presented at a conference under the auspices of the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the Center for International Political Studies (CIPS) and the Pretoria branch of the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), University of the Pretoria, 27 February 2003, 4.

⁵ Erika Gibson, "Parlement moet ja sê vir ontplooiing" ('Parliament must say yes to deployment'), *Die Burger* (13 August 2003), 2.

decision-makers with the questions of national interest and international responsibilities as the South African Government has attempted in recent years to come to terms with the challenges of multinational peacekeeping. Against this background, it should be clear that this paper does not offer a single-minded realist outlook that national interest and the pursuit of high international profile is the end-all and be-all for South Africa and furthermore that it is pursued by all means at the State's disposal. In any event, it could be argued that South Africa has departed from the orthodoxy of predominantly politico-military or realist conceptions of the pre-1994 era to an approach typical of developing states in world politics.[6]

Pursuing National Interest

The concept of national interest has traditionally been attached to the theory and practice of foreign policy. In a study of South Africa's national interest in the post-1994 era, Du Plessis convincingly argues that a distinct notion of the national interest of South Africa transpired from its foreign policy practice. It is also indicated that South Africa's notion of national interest covers a spectrum ranging from normative prescriptions expressed in idealistic value-laden terms, through more specific operational considerations, to explanations and justifications of contentious policy choices.[7] It should be known that 'what is best for South Africa' has never been explicitly outlined or indicated in the form of a fixed set of priorities or in a singular policy outline. Thus any attempt to identify South Africa's national interest – specifically pertaining to international peacekeeping – should be inferred from official documents and statements, as well as what is evident at the operational level.

Security and economic concerns

Generally speaking, as a practical manifestation of any country's foreign relations, the political will to commit resources to peace missions depends largely upon

⁶ Anton du Plessis, "Revisiting South Africa's National Interest in an Era of Change and Transition: Theoretical Considerations and Practical Manifestations", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* xix/2 (November 1997), 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78, 102.

the perceived national interest of potential contributors. In this regard, the South African Government clearly links peace and stability in Africa and the region to the country's national interest.

As long ago as 1997, a foreign policy discussion document of the African National Congress^[8] purported that South Africa's approach to the rest of the continent was based on the following considerations:^[9]

- South Africa is part of the African continent, and that its economic development is linked to what happens on the continent as a whole.
- South Africa has an important role to play in the economic and political revival of the continent.
- The economic development of the African continent as a whole will be a significant step in overcoming the North-South divide.

Against this background it is hardly surprising that South Africa's security interest is strongly attached to that of the rest of the continent and that the country's armed forces have been specifically committed to participating in peace missions on African soil.

The official South African viewpoint in this respect was clearly outlined in the White Paper. It stresses that South Africa's emerging values are underpinned by the values enshrined in the Constitution, which encompass the security of the state and its citizens, the promotion of the social and economic well-being of its citizenry, the encouragement of global peace and stability and participating in the process of ensuring regional peace, stability and development. In a perhaps more significant outline it is also stated that South Africa "has an obvious interest in preserving regional peace and stability in order to promote trade and development, and to avoid the spill-over effects of conflicts in the neighborhood".^[10] In addition, the Chief of the SANDF, General Sphiwe Nyanda pointed out that "the most obvious link with the national interest is the

⁸ The governing political party in South Africa.

⁹ Pierre du T Botha, "An African Renaissance in the 21st century?", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* xxix/1 (June 2000), 3-4.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), *White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions*, *Government Gazette*, Notice 2216 of 1999 (Pretoria, 4 October 1999), 22

effect (of peacekeeping) on the economy of the sub-region and therefore of South Africa".[11] This state of affairs is no coincidence, since Africa is one of South Africa's largest export markets. Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan state that[12]

...exports to Africa are sharply different from South Africa's exports to its traditional Triad markets[13]. Unlike South Africa's continuing export of gems, precious metals, minerals and base metals to the North, South Africa's exports to Africa are now the largest destination for value-added goods, taking nearly 30 per cent of total beneficiated exports... in manufacturing and services South Africa's prime growing market is Africa, particularly Southern Africa. Other than tourism and trade in minerals and niche agriculture (wine and fruit) with the North, it is in Africa that South Africa has its strongest competitive advantages.

Since the mid-1990s observers have often pointed out that it is in South Africa's economic interest to do all it can to stabilize the region. Furthermore, it has often been said that South Africa cannot prosper in a sea of African insecurity and instability. In such a situation, the country will suffer as a result of populations fleeing their unstable countries and desperate situations, and as a result of people trying to survive by trading in drugs, weapons and contraband. Thus for South Africa, peacekeeping in Africa – especially in Southern Africa – may be considered as action in direct support of its own security and economic interests. [14]

In this context, the South African *Defense Review*, points out that problems relating to political conflict in Africa are not confined within national borders. It is specifically mentioned that inter- or intra-state conflicts may arise in Southern Africa and that such conflicts could pose a security threat to regional peace and stability, and thus to South Africa itself, being an integral part of the Southern African community. The *Defense Review* states that conflicts and underdevelopment have a negative impact on neighboring states in the form of a range of non-military threats: environmental

¹¹ Nyanda, 1.

¹² Fred Ahwireng-Obeng and Patrick Mc Gowan, "Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa" (part 1), *Journal of Contemporary Africa Studies* 16/1 (January 1998), 11.

¹³ Europe, North America and Japan.

¹⁴ Jakkie Cilliers and Mark Malan, "From Destabilization to Peace-keeping: The Potential Role of South Africa", *Africa Insight* 26/1 (1996), 343.

destruction; the spread of disease; refugee movements; and cross-border trafficking in drugs, stolen goods and small arms.[15]

In a similar vein, the former Director General of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr Jackie Selebi[16], stated that "[t]he instability of others is a dire threat to our own stability in the long term". Furthermore, "[w]e cannot talk of an African renaissance, or even achieve a better life for people in South Africa, if around us countries are in conflict... if Africa disintegrates there will be no South Africa. There will be such a movement of people from central and southern Africa into South Africa that our economy will never be able to address the interests of South African people".[17]

To this end, a link has been traced between the country's national interest and regional security concerns. Thus, unlike arguments or viewpoints in the mid-1990s that a distinct notion of South Africa's national interest was singularly absent, or where evident, the Government was unable or unwilling to comply with it,[18] the national interest of South Africa is clearly evident from its recent and current foreign policy outlook and practice, specifically as far as peacekeeping is concerned.

In view of the above, it could not be argued that South Africa's foreign policy is formulated and implemented in a deterministic fashion according to a fixed set of national interests, specifically coupled to economic and narrow security interests. The following section will expand on this statement in more detail.

Moral concerns and the African future

The foreign policies of all states invariably, in however muted form, reflect the values that inform their domestic policies.[19] Accordingly, Cilliers and Malan earlier asserted that South Africa, aware of its *apartheid* history and related suffering of people,

¹⁵ Department of Defense (DoD), *South African Defense Review*, as approved by Parliament (Pretoria: 1 Military Printing Regiment, April 1998), 18-20.

¹⁶ Currently National Commissioner of the South African Police Service.

¹⁷ Jackie Selebi, "Interview with Jackie Selebi", *Global Dialogue* 3.3 (December 1998), 14.

¹⁸ Du Plessis, 77.

¹⁹ Jack Spence, "The New South African Foreign Policy: Moral Incentives and Political Constraints", *ISSUP Bulletin* 1 (1998), 3.

has attempted to infuse a moralistic tone into its foreign policy.[20] Spence also states that the post-1994 South African Government clearly aspired to foreign and defense policies that reflected the values explicit in the constitutional settlement and committed decision-makers to the defense and assertion of liberal norms in the execution of foreign policy and in the definition of national interest.[21]

In an altruistic tone, the White Paper also declares that it is in the South African national interest to assist peoples who suffer from famine, political repression, natural disasters and the scourge of violent conflict.[22] In a similar vein, General Nyanda indicated that “[t]here is also the factor of altruism – the notion of doing something for the common good of mankind as a matter of principle. Typically, the situations which lead to peace missions involve great human distress, suffering and injustice”.[23] Thus it seems that South Africa’s approach to participation in international peace missions not only links peace and stability in Africa and the region to the country’s national interest, but also indicates at a more altruistic level that the country should play a role in alleviating the suffering caused among Africans by the scourge of armed conflict.

It may be also be stated that South Africa’s contributions to MONUC, UNMEE, as well as its peace support effort in Burundi, coincide with the African Renaissance vision and the fact that African states have to deal with their own problems at a time when the continent stands at a critical juncture in its history. In this framework, South Africa’s current relations with the rest of the continent are concerned with Africa’s long-awaited upliftment: spiritual, technological, cultural, political, administrative and otherwise. In this regard, it would seem that South Africa – with President Thabo Mbeki clearly at the helm – feels a strong responsibility for realizing the ‘African dream’. Therefore, in the words of Van Wyk: “[t]he African Renaissance and the vision for the continent outlined

²⁰ Cilliers and Malan, 342.

²¹ Spence, 3.

²² DFA, 22.

²³ Nyanda, 1.

in the NEPAD[24] emerged as the defining foreign policy concept of Thabo Mbeki's presidential administration".[25]

Thus the South African foreign agenda since the late-1990s has undoubtedly been based on the African Renaissance vision, which is advanced as the main pillar of South Africa's international policy not only relating to Africa, but to all international relations globally. In fact, Du Plessis drew a direct parallel between South Africa's national interest of the late-1990s and the African Renaissance vision.[26] As far as peacekeeping is concerned, the White Paper also makes the point that "although South Africa acknowledges its global responsibilities, the prioritization afforded to Africa in South African foreign policy makes Africa the prime focus for future engagements".[27]

More recently, from a security point of view, the South African Deputy Minister of Defense, Ms Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, outlined the current responsibility of the SANDF as "to contribute to NEPAD, the Partnership for Africa's Development". The rationale behind this is that "[p]eace, prosperity and development in Africa means peace, prosperity and development in South Africa". As such, an interrelatedness between South Africa's future and that of the broader continental context has clearly been articulated and outlined – and should be pursued by the South African military. Practically speaking, this means that the SANDF has the task "to do peace-support duty in countries north of our border".[28] The Department of Defense Strategic Plan for the Financial Years 2002/3 to 2004/5 also states that "[t]his plan reflects the strategy and objectives necessary to ensure that the SANDF will remain a valuable instrument of State and continue to contribute fully towards the achievement of Government's domestic and foreign policy objectives thereby helping to ensure the safety, security and

²⁴ The New Partnership for Africa's Development is arguably the most profound policy formulation that have emerged from African leadership in relation to Africa's development challenges.

²⁵ Jo-Ansie van Wyk, "The Saga Continues...The Zimbabwe Issue in South Africa's Foreign Policy". Paper delivered at the Colloquium of the South African Association of Political Studies, Hammanskraal campus of the University of Pretoria, 12 October 2003, 8.

²⁶ Du Plessis, 90-91.

²⁷ DFA, 22.

²⁸ Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, "Foreword by the Honourable Ms N.C. Madlala-Routledge, Deputy Minister of Defense", South African Department of Defense, 2001/2002 Annual Report (Cape Town: Formaset Printers, 2002), xi.

well-being of the citizens, not only of South Africa but the entire region”.^[29] All in all, this boils down to the point that the SANDF needs to render military assistance on a continent that grapples with intractable civil wars and conflict, since South Africa needs to contribute meaningfully to the creation of requisite conditions for the achievement of prosperity, stability and security on the continent.

From the above it appears that South Africa’s national interest – with specific reference to the country’s involvement in conflict resolution and peacekeeping – is not only defined in economic and security terms, but also outlined in terms of continental concerns. In this sense, it could be concluded that South Africa’s involvement in peacekeeping is underpinned by (fairly universal) economic and security concerns, but also informed by a morally-inspired philosophical stance that a better future for the African continent is important for the South African state and its people – all of which has been attached to the country’s national interest. As such, this makes the South African position a somewhat peculiar and certainly interesting case.

International Political Considerations

South Africa’s involvement in peacekeeping could also be assessed and understood in terms of South Africa’s international political profile, a leadership role in Africa, as well as its newly found status as a contributor to international peacekeeping – as could be inferred from official sources and practical manifestations.

Demands placed on South Africa’s leadership

In the community of nations, South Africa could be regarded as a ‘middle power’. Between Denmark and Indonesia on the one hand and Thailand and Finland on the other, South Africa has been ranked number 29 in terms of Gross National Product in the 2001 World Competitiveness Yearbook.^[30] The country seems to align and present itself as part of that consortium of countries that includes developed states such

²⁹ Department of Defense, *DOD Strategic Plan for Financial Years 2002/3 to 2004/5*, www.mil.za/Articles&Papers/StrategicPlan/StrategicPlan2002/page-vii.htm.

as Norway, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, and developing countries such as India, Cuba and Brazil.[31]

South Africa has certainly shown a remarkable ability to engage in and contribute to multilateralism and middle power diplomacy in recent years. In this regard, Schoeman rightly points out that there are numerous examples of the high expectations of South Africa's role in the international system after 1994. Moreover, South Africa seems to have accepted a 'special role' with regard to South Africa having experienced time and again how countries, organizations and people have looked to the country's leadership to provide guidance, new initiatives and break-throughs in deadlock situations.[32] In 1998, South Africa was also elected to chair the Non-Aligned Movement for a period of three years and has likewise become the first chair of the newly established African Union (AU) in July 2002. In addition, President Thabo Mbeki has probably been the most prominent African leader to address international forums, including G8 summits, with regard to plans for uplifting African countries, and he continues to play an important diplomatic role in the international community.

Economically speaking, specifically from a Southern African point of view, it is difficult to overstate South Africa's dominant position in much of Africa. See Table 1 for a comparative index.[33]

³⁰ Anon, *The World Competitiveness Yearbook: 2001* (Laussane: Institute for Management Development, 2001), 364.

³¹ Cilliers, 1.

³² Maxi Schoeman, "South Africa as an Emerging Middle Power", *African Security Review*, 9/3 (2000), www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/9No3/SAMiddlePower.html.

³³ Information obtained from The World Bank Group, "The World Bank in Africa" (Country Data Profiles), <http://www.worldbank.org/afr>.

Table 1:

| Southern Africa – Comparative GDP (2001) | |
|---|---------------|
| Angola | \$9,5 billion |
| Botswana | \$5,2 billion |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | \$5,2 billion |
| Lesotho | \$796 million |
| Madagascar | \$4,6 billion |
| Malawi | \$1,7 billion |
| Mozambique | \$3,6 billion |
| Namibia | \$3,1 billion |
| South Africa | \$113 billion |
| Swaziland | \$1,3 billion |
| Tanzania | \$9,3 billion |
| Uganda | \$5,7 billion |
| Zambia | \$3,6 billion |
| Zimbabwe | \$9,1 billion |

In practical terms, comparative research towards the late-1990s indicated that South Africa's economy vis-à-vis Southern Africa displayed the following profile:[34]

- Although South Africa is home to only 39 per cent of the region's total population, it is responsible for 80 per cent of the region's GDP.
- South Africa's economy is more than four times larger than the total of all the other economies in the region.
- South Africa produces 90 per cent of all manufactured goods in the region.
- The Northern Cape province (the smallest economy in South Africa) has a larger economy than Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland.
- Only one country in the region has a larger economy than that of the Free State (the fourth smallest provincial economy in South Africa).

³⁴ A Roux, "The budgetary and welfare consequences of security co-operation in the southern hemisphere: a South African perspective", *Scientia Militaria* 27 (1997), 11.

- South Africa has the highest Gross National Product (GNP) per capita in the region.

Not surprisingly, South African observers often contended in the late 1990s that South Africa should be a leader in Africa and that inevitable responsibilities and commitments flow from its position of economic and military strength. Cilliers, for instance, asserted that South Africa's position in the region is that of an economic powerhouse and that the country would, therefore, need to go to extraordinary lengths to make multilateralism, consultation and peace building reflective of its engagement in the region. It was also foreseen (at that point) that Pretoria would inevitably be drawn into peacekeeping missions that are poorly resourced, given the realities of the African continent.[35]

In this context, many observers have identified South Africa as the one state able to help ensure effective peacekeeping in Africa. After the political transformation of South Africa in 1994, there were growing expectations that South Africa would "take up its responsibilities as a potential regional leader and to exert its influence in creating a stable region". Accordingly, "South Africa is experiencing a constant barrage of calls for assistance, intervention and mediation in African crises".[36] This may appear quite dramatic, but there could be no doubt that South Africa is (sometimes rather simplistically) perceived as a regional leader. Neither could there be any doubt that South Africa would remain subject to multiple pressures to 'do something' to help put an end to fighting in conflict-stricken African states. In fact, the former Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mr Salim Ahmed Salim, made it clear during a visit to South Africa in December 1998[37] that he had been disappointed by South Africa's reluctance (at that time) to play a more active role in conflict resolution in Africa.[38] In this regard, the former Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Mr Jackie Selebi, informed the South African military in 1999 that "it is no secret that many outside

³⁵ Cilliers, 1.

³⁶ Francois Vreÿ and Abel Esterhuysen, "South Africa and Southern Africa: Isolationist or Regional Conflict Manager", *Conflict and Development Watch* 2/1 (April 2000), 12.

³⁷ That is before the SANDF entered the peacekeeping domain.

³⁸ Mark Malan, "Keeping the Peace in Africa: A Renaissance Role for South Africa?", *Indicator SA* 15/2 (Winter 1998), 3.

our borders have been rather disappointed by the limited number of operations in which our National Defense Force has been involved in terms of peace-keeping operations”.[39]

Therefore, it is interesting to note that the White Paper starts with an opening statement to the effect that since 1994, domestic and international expectations regarding South Africa’s role as a responsible and respected member of the international community have steadily grown. “These expectations have included a hope that South Africa will play a leading role in international peace missions”. The White Paper also states that South Africa is committed to responsibly fulfilling its obligations under the Charters of the UN and the OAU[40], as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Treaty.[41] Thus South Africa’s decision-makers became fully aware of international expectations that the country needs to play an increasingly significant political-military role in African peacekeeping requirements and international peacekeeping endeavors. In this context former Director-General Selebi stated the following in an address to the South African military:[42]

I believe it is our collective intention as constituent role-players in our foreign policy establishment, to seek, to locate the country in its rightful place in the community of nations, and to transform ourselves to a nation into a global player that is capable of making a meaningful and significant contribution to the advancement of the welfare of the nations in the world. I also believe that we are jointly seeking to rapidly develop and continuously evolve in us all, as this country’s foreign policy role-players, an adequate capability to engage the international community at all levels, bilateral, regional and globally. We should all seek to situate this country as an indispensable and very necessary part of the international decision-making processes, whether such matters affect international security and peace, international politics and economics, or international trade or environment... Given the fact that the SANDF remains Africa’s most capable and sophisticated military instrument, there is naturally great expectation that this country should increasingly be involved in peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-enforcement operations, especially in Africa.

39 Jackie Selebi, “The Role of the Department of Defense in the Promotion of South Africa’s Foreign Policy, Especially in Africa”. Presentation to the South African National Defense College, 10 March 1999, 11.

40 The OAU was effectively replaced by the African Union in July 2003 as continental organization in Africa.

41 DFA, 5, 23.

42 Selebi, 1999, 7

More recently, the Deputy Minister of Defense stated that “we are now confronted with playing an even greater role because of the progress being made in peace negotiations in the Great Lakes Region. Our country, led by President Thabo Mbeki, has taken Africa to greater heights with the launch of the African Union”.^[43] In a public address early in 2003, General Nyanda also asserted that “South Africa, has, relatively speaking, (a) wealth of resources and capabilities to contribute (to peace missions)... South Africa has involuntarily been thrust in a leadership role, which ultimately serves South Africa’s national interest”.^[44]

Likewise, the South African Minister of Defense, Mr Mosiuoa Lekota, stated in Parliament in 2003 that as the biggest economy in the Southern African region, South Africa would have to carry much responsibility for the envisaged regional force to be established within the SADC, which is expectedly due for establishment when a SADC Defense Pact is signed. As a driving force behind the idea of a SADC Defense Pact, Lekota told Parliament that a West African regional armed force^[45] is already in existence for more than a decade, and that it is now up for regions such as Southern Africa to follow suit.^[46] In a similar vein, Rear Admiral Rolf Hauter, Chief Director Strategy and Planning in the SANDF, stated that “we, as South Africans, will have to come to terms with the fact that, as the biggest economy in the region, our country will always have to carry bigger responsibilities”.^[47]

Thus it is clear that South Africa’s leadership is conscious of South Africa’s profile and international demands placed on South Africa’s leadership, and that the country needs to be responsive to calls for military contributions to peacekeeping. At the same time, it should be clear that the post-1994 South African leadership has been reluctant to portray an image of a regional Big Brother. Van Wyk contends that South Africa’s role as an intermediary between African and developed states is not often

43 Madlala-Routledge, xi.

44 Nyanda, 1.

45 That is the Economic Community of African States Monitoring group (ECOWAS).

46 S’tthembisio Msomi, “Lekota Wants More Money for Defense Force”, Sunday Times (15 June 2003), 4.

47 Rolf Hauter, “The Challenges of Military Strategy”. Paper presented at a symposium on Strategic Challenges for South Africa, organized by the Center for Military Studies, University of Stellenbosch and the Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, 27 February 2003, 2-3.

appreciated by other African states.[48] Reporting on the June 2003 Summit of the African Union (AU), Munusamay asserts that South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki is regarded with suspicion by other African leaders, who sometimes view him as too powerful, and they privately accuse him of wanting to impose his will on others. "In the corridors they call him the 'George Bush of Africa', leading the most powerful nation in the neighborhood and using his financial and military muscle to further his own agenda".[49] Be that as it may, this implies that the country's leadership has to walk a tightrope between regional perceptions regarding its status and role in the region and a genuine foreign policy commitment to Africa's reconstruction and development[50] – including peace support. At the same time, it needs to be noted that a number of Africa states – all of which are lagging far behind South Africa in terms of economic and military power – have played important roles in peacekeeping in African conflict situations in recent times. This is outlined in the section below.

South Africa's international peacekeeping profile

Some observers argued in the late-1990s that South Africa's input in the African debate on peacekeeping had been fairly limited since the country was still relatively inexperienced in the field of peacekeeping, and because of a perceived reluctance to deploy troops in conflict situations. For instance, Malan pointed out that[51]

[p]articipation in international peacekeeping is a passport to international respectability and to an authoritative voice in the debate on the future of international conflict management and the reform of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community. It is through such participation that countries with far less resources such as Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe enjoy a stronger voice in these debates – despite the considerable insight and analytical capability of South Africans in this arena.

48 Van Wyk, 8.

49 Ranjeni Munusamy, "The George Dubya of Africa", Sunday Times (13 June 2003), 19.

50 Van Wyk, 8.

51 Malan, 21.

However, South Africa has officially declared its commitment to playing a meaningful role in Africa and the rest of the international community, and has earlier even (at least by implication) stated its aspiration to become a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN.[52] Against this background it is important to note that the White Paper explicitly states that participation in peace missions is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for international respectability, and for a strong voice in supra-national organizations and in debates on multinational conflict management.[53] With its contributions to MONUC and UNMEE, as well as the peace support effort in Burundi, South Africa has clearly demonstrated its commitment to becoming involved in international peacekeeping endeavors. Therefore, it could be stated that South Africa has realized that participation in international peacekeeping is important for playing a significant role in the international community, in Africa and in the regional environment.

Having said that, functionaries in peacekeeping circles often contended in the 1990s that South Africa had to 'catch up' with Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe and others – countries that are all fairly experienced in the field of UN peacekeeping. Likewise, some observers argued in recent years that South Africa lagged behind the list of African countries that subscribed to the UN standby system: Botswana, Chad, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.[54]

Considering Africa's international position, it should be noted that the increase in troop contributions to the UN system in recent years has mainly been the result of developing countries contributing troops to peacekeeping operations. At the beginning of 1991, of the top ten contributors, only two were developing countries, namely Ghana and Nepal.[55] Ten years later, the overwhelming majority of the top ten contributors of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide were developing

⁵² Wilile Nhlapo, "South Africa and Peacekeeping: A Look to the Future". Paper presented at a conference, *From peacekeeping to complex emergencies: peace support missions in Africa*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 25 March 1999, 5.

⁵³ DFA, 22.

⁵⁴ Malan, 23.

⁵⁵ UN Department of Public Information (Peace and Security Section in co-operation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations), "United Nations Peacekeeping from 1991 to 2000", <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/pub/pko.htm>.

countries – three of them were African states. This also implies that Western contributions to UN peacekeeping operations have considerably decreased since the mid-1990s. In this regard, the UN's profile of contributions to UN peacekeeping operations indicates the following as regards the top ten positions as of January 2003:[56]

Table 2:

| Country | Observers | Civilian police | Troops | Total |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------|
| Pakistan | 76 | 217 | 3 997 | 4 290 |
| Bangladesh | 64 | 114 | 4 051 | 4 229 |
| Nigeria | 52 | 64 | 3 163 | 3 279 |
| India | 41 | 504 | 2 205 | 2 750 |
| Ghana | 48 | 184 | 1 928 | 2 160 |
| Kenya | 55 | 49 | 1 671 | 1 775 |
| Uruguay | 59 | – | 1 603 | 1 662 |
| Jordan | 50 | 483 | 1 089 | 1 622 |
| Ukraine | 31 | 198 | 917 | 1 146 |
| Australia | 28 | 70 | 831 | 929 |

By comparison, contributions from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council were as follows:

Table 3:

| Country | Observers | Civilian police | Troops | Total |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------|
| United States | 23 | 585 | 2 | 610 |
| United Kingdom | 36 | 142 | 431 | 609 |
| France | 45 | 91 | 212 | 348 |
| Russia | 93 | 121 | 117 | 331 |
| China | 52 | 66 | 2 | 120 |

Interestingly, in 1993, France was the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations with around 6 000 troops, while the United Kingdom's contribution increased fivefold since the end of the Cold War to 3 700.[57]

⁵⁶ UN Department of Public Information (in co-operation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations), "Contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations", <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/contributors/Jan2003Countrysummary.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Ian Kemp, "Peacekeeping between the battle lines", *Jane's Defense Weekly* (13 March 1993), 26.

As far as South Africa's involvement in peacekeeping is concerned, it was publicly stated in February 2003 that about 900 SANDF members were deployed on African soil. It was also announced that another 1 268 members were to be deployed within the framework of an expanded MONUC.[58] This then materialized in June 2003 when the SANDF deployed to war-ravaged Kinshasa in the eastern part of the DRC.[59] In the words of General Nyanda: "Our goal is to have the capacity to deploy between four and six battalions by 2004" and that "South Africa could become one of the foremost contributors of forces for peace missions".[60]

However, it should be noted that reduced military spending and a dwindling defense budget have been at the center of significant budgetary changes in South Africa in the past decade. Practically speaking, the SANDF saw many years of consecutive cuts since the end of the 1980s. In recent years the defense budget has been pinned down at more or less 1,7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product[61] – a situation that seems to put some strain on the peacekeeping requirements emanating from demands placed on South Africa on the one hand, and the capability of the SANDF to meet such requirements and challenges on the other. To this end, the Minister of Defense warned Parliament in 2003 that "[w]e are deploying twice as many members of the defense force than was anticipated in the *Defense Review*, while our budget, as anticipated in the same review, has not been met".[62]

Against this background, the Chief of Joint Operations in the SANDF, Lt Gen Godfrey Ngwenya, recently urged caution against overstressing the capacity of the SANDF in deploying more troops in peace support. Specifically, it has been stated that almost 2 500 members of the SANDF were deployed to the DRC, Burundi and Ethiopia, and that the SANDF's force structure did not allow for more deployments on foreign

⁵⁸ Nyanda, 4

⁵⁹ Ranjeni Munusamy, "High Price of Keeping the Peace", *Sunday Times* (22 June 2003), 4.

⁶⁰ Nyanda, 4

⁶¹ See Mosioa Lekota, "Address by the Minister of Defense, the Hon Mosioa Lekota, MP, on the occasion of the Defense Budget Vote, National Assembly, Cape Town, 13 June 2003", www.mil.za/MinistryofDefence/Frame/Frame.htm.

⁶² Msomi, 4.

soil[63] – implying that South Africa has effectively reached a ceiling as far as troop contributions are concerned. Yet, the figures continued to rise as information indicates that as of 30 September 2003 just over 1 400 SANDF members served as UN ‘blue helmets’ in the DRC, while about 1 600 SANDF members were deployed to Burundi.⁶⁴

Also, in August 2003, the South African Government was officially requested to send troops to war-ravaged Liberia by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The initial South African response was indicative that the South African Government was cautious not to overextend the capabilities of the SANDF as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Aziz Pahad, stated that “[i]t’s not just a question of finances. We also have to consider whether we have the capacity to send more troops on such missions and whether we are not stretching ourselves too much”.^[65] Yet, shortly afterwards the Government indicated that the SANDF would indeed contribute to the Liberian peace process.

This, then, coincides with the South African Government’s official stance that South Africa, as a member of the UN, has to assist the world body in its peacekeeping task. Also, in the words of General Nyanda, “South Africa has just recently become widely involved in peace missions in Africa, and more deployments are on the horizon. After a healthy pause, post 1994, during which time the SANDF integrated and transformed, the SANDF is on the march – a march for peace, development and prosperity”.^[66] In this regard, it needs to be noted that a figure of about 3 000 South Africans deployed as (UN and non-UN) peacekeepers brought South Africa close to the forefront of international troop-contributing nations for peace support endeavors. To this end, observers assert that South Africa’s recent involvement in peacekeeping endeavors has undoubtedly enhanced the country’s image in the eyes of the

⁶³ Louise Oelofse, “SA veiligheid kan skade ly” (‘South African security could suffer damage’), *Rapport* (20 July 2003), 6.

⁶⁴ UN Department of Public Information (in co-operation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations), “Contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Monthly Summary of Contributors”, www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/September2003Countrysummary.pdf; SAPA-DPA, “Afrika-unie se vredesmag vir Burundi reg om ontplooi te word” (‘African Union peace force ready to be deployed’), *Die Burger* (21 October 2003), 7.

⁶⁵ Ranjeni Munusamy, “SA Asked to Send Troops to Liberia”, *Sunday Times* (3 August 2003), 4.

⁶⁶ Nyanda, 4.

international community.[67] At the same time, it seems that the SANDF has a somewhat limited capacity – given the current financial constraints within the South African budgetary framework – and that South Africa’s future peacekeeping contributions therefore need to be viewed in that perspective.

Conclusion

It was stated initially that the aim of this paper is to analyze and assess the extent to which self-declared concerns regarding South Africa’s national interest and concerns pertaining to South Africa’s international profile underpin and inform the SANDF’s recent and current involvement in international peacekeeping. Accordingly, the focus has been on the preoccupations of South African decision-makers with the notions of national interest and international concerns as the South African Government has attempted to come to terms with the challenges of multinational peacekeeping.

From the above, it seems that the South African Government holds the view that it has no choice but to accept participation in peacekeeping as a foreign policy priority, and that the country should continue to engage in challenges of a peacekeeping nature. Apart from South Africa clearly linking peace and stability in Africa and the region to the country’s national interest, South Africa’s leaders and other relevant functionaries are also strongly concerned with Africa’s well being and future in a somewhat altruistic sense. In fact, it could be stated that altruism is a distinct reason for South Africa’s participation in peacekeeping. To this end, South Africa’s current relations with the rest of the continent seem to be underpinned and informed by security and related economic concerns, but also by a philosophical stance that a better future for the African continent is important for the future South African state and its people. In other words, it is clear that South Africa today sees itself as part of Africa and the Government therefore holds the view that instability and insecurity, especially in Southern Africa, is to the detriment of the country. From a political, security and economic perspective South Africa consequently maintains that an approach of close political-military involvement in

⁶⁷ Vanessa Kent and Mark Malan, “Decisions, Decisions: South Africa’s Foray into Regional Peace Operations”, *ISS Paper 72* (April 2003), 13.

regional and continental matters should be pursued. In addition, the South Africa's leadership is conscious of South Africa's international profile and demands placed on South Africa's global leadership, and thus believes that the country needs to be responsive to calls for military contributions to peacekeeping. Also, since African armed forces have been playing increasingly significant roles in UN peacekeeping operations, these events have effectively compelled South African decision-makers to commit the SANDF to significant levels of involvement in peacekeeping endeavors.

However, current financial constraints within the South African budgetary framework clearly have an impact on the South African military position and it needs to be seen how this would affect the public statement of the Chief of the SANDF that 'more deployments are on the horizon'. At the same time, as parts of the international community continues to minimize their military involvement on the African continent, the political-military role of South Africa on the African continent is likely to be continued and even extended. Also, as stability in the region remains an ongoing priority and challenge, pressure from within the region and elsewhere in the international community for increased or at least ongoing South African political-military involvement could be expected.