

# FROM MANDELA TO ZUMA: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTHERN ATLANTIC REGION FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Anselmo Otavio<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As it is known, Ceuta's conquest by Portugal in 1415 initiated the discovery and, consequently, strategic transformation of the Southern Atlantic region by European powers. It is important to consider, first, that these actions were a process, since from the 14th century the necessary conditions for maritime expansion were being created by Portugal. Secondly, the arrival at Ceuta represented not the end, but the beginning of a phase marked by the search for an alternative maritime route that would connect Europe to India and would grant the Portuguese Crown access to spices from India's territory.

Although this process was initiated by Portugal, it is a fact that, throughout the centuries, countries like Spain, the Netherlands and England have also pursued the same development. From then, the territories belonging to the South Atlantic coast have been impacted by European powers, since, due to colonization, they were encompassed by different political and economic dynamics. While Lisbon connected Brazilian and Angolan territories through a relationship based on the purchase and sale of slave labor, the Netherlands at first, England later, comprised the Cape Colony to the Afro-Asian dynamic, keeping this territory's interactions circumscribed to their respective colonies in the Asian side.

Overall, it can be considered that the Cape Colony's time under Dutch and British control was the first moment of South Africa's European-orchestrated relationship with the Southern Atlantic. On one hand, South

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic International Studies Doctoral Program, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: anselmo\_otavio@yahoo.com.br

African territory was imposed a role as a refueling station for Dutch and British navigators who were either on their way to Asia or returning to Europe and needed supplies. On the other hand, the Cape Colony became a part of one of the main maritime lines of communication between the East and the West and, because it belonged to countries which had their possessions concentrated in Asia, it privileged the Indian Ocean as compared to the Southern Atlantic. An example can be found on the interactions between Cape Colony and India, which was controlled by England and provided labor to work on South African diamond and gold mines.

A second moment of interaction between South Africa and the Southern Atlantic was during the National Party (NP) rule. Over NP's six administrations – Malan (1948-1954), Strydom (1954-1958), Verwoerd (1958-1966), Vorster (1966-1978), Botha (1978-1989) and De Klerk (1989-1993) – racial segregation (*apartheid*) was the main principle of South Africa's acting. While internally the use of racist laws and violence towards anti-*apartheid* movements were examples of how these governments tried to keep the regime safe, internationally the denial of its condition as African country, the need to be seen as a Western country and its interest in approaching capitalist powers were Pretoria's choices to perpetuate the racist regime.

Pretoria's close relationship with capitalist powers impacted South Africa's approach to the Southern Atlantic region. In fact, aside from maintaining its focus on the Indian Ocean, South African governments began to consider the need to include the Southern Atlantic region in the Cold War dynamics. It began to defend the creation of the South Atlantic Treaty Organization (SATO) as a vital step, considering that if South Africa became controlled by communist regimes, which were advancing in the region, the Cape Route would be managed by the Soviet Union, a matter that would affect not only the connection of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, but would also have an impact on oil imports from the Persian Gulf to the capitalist bloc. In other words, through this discourse South Africa was trying to militarize the Southern Atlantic, considering SATO fundamental for the continuity of the *apartheid* regime, once its existence would preclude any type of maritime attack to South African soil.

Unlike such moments, a third period of this interaction can be identified in the post-*apartheid* regimes, when the process of broadening the country's international relations took place. In this sense, the goal of this article is to analyze the interaction between South Africa and the Southern Atlantic throughout the Mandela (1994-1998), Mbeki (1999-2008) and Zuma (2009-) administrations. Making use of a vast and specific literature, this article proposes that South Africa's increasing interest towards the

Southern Atlantic region is in fact a reflection of its appreciation of South-South relations.

## The Mandela administration and the maintenance of the Southern Atlantic region as low priority

In general, it is possible to note that the foreign policy of the Mandela administration (1994-1999) had three main objectives. The first and, in a way, the most obvious, was the rupture with the foreign policy conduct adopted by Pretoria until then. The signs of this transformation had been already indicated in an article written by Mandela in 1993, that is, before he took office as South Africa's president. The document, published by *Foreign Affairs* under the title *South Africa's Future Foreign Policy*, highlighted the need for South Africa to accompany the changing scenario post-Cold War.

From Mandela's point of view, matters such as human rights, democracy, the primacy of international law, the search for peace through non-violent mechanisms and the economic interdependence between countries would become more and more important in the post-Cold War setting. Another point raised by Mandela was South African appreciation of African aspirations, notably economic development and the fight against extreme poverty. Roughly, when Mandela actually became president, other issues were introduced to South African foreign policy, such as the appreciation of multilateralism, the respect to other countries' sovereignty, and the search for non-violent interstate conflict resolution (Lipton 2009). However, the main points presented in the *Foreign Affairs* article kept relevant.

In a way, the behavior previously described reflected the synchrony between Freedom Charter – a document created in 1955 where the main aspirations of the African National Congress (ANC) were outlined, in a time of struggle against the *apartheid* regime – and the need to adapt South Africa to the international post-Cold War scenario. On the one hand, *Freedom Charter* (1955) highlighted the appreciation of freedom, democracy, and conflict resolution through peaceful means, among other things. On the other hand, the transition process from the racist regime to multiracial democracy in South Africa was happening simultaneously to the end of the East-West dispute, which pushed the advancing of free trade, as well as liberal democracy, human rights, respect for the environment, among other values honored by the West. In other words, Pretoria was redirecting its foreign policy in order not only to break from the *apartheid* regime's international behavior, but also in order to align with the points estimated

by Western countries, gaining the title of a country with “*strong moral dimension*” (Van Wyk 2002: 182), or being called “*a good international citizen*” (Hamill and Lee 2001: 33).

A second goal of Mandela's administration was aligned with the achievement of a prominent role for the transformation of the African continent through the reaffirmation of South Africa as an African country. An example can be found in South Africa trying to be more participative at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and trying to make it harmonic with objectives such as democracy, development and peace. As indicated by Mandela, “peace, stability and democracy are necessary conditions for development” (Mandela 1998).

South Africa's attempt at being more present in the continent, either through the Organization of African Unity, through SADC or through agreements with African countries, is closely related to two aspects of its post-*apartheid* history. The first is the desire to be more active in conflict resolution, to be more integrated to the continent and, consequently, to be concerned with the continent's future. An example of this sense of belonging is Mandela's speech at Finland's Parliament, when he stated that “first and foremost, we are part of the African continent, and Africa's problems are our problems” (Mandela 1999).

The second aspect, in contrast, has to do with South Africa's necessity of finding in the African continent solutions to its own internal post-*apartheid* problems. In fact, while trying to strengthen diplomatic ties with those countries which during the racist regime had been supporting South African liberation movements, Pretoria found that a closer relationship with such states could be a solution to its own socio-economic issues inherited from the *apartheid* regimes, as well as a way for expanding South African companies' market (Ngwenya 2011).

In sum, Mandela's administration (1994-1999) symbolized changes for South Africa, among which was the priority given to regional insertion. Unlike NP's administrations previously, which directly or indirectly searched for interaction through imposition, coercion and war (Pereira 2012; Visentini and Pereira 2010; Branco 2003), Mandela's South Africa valued cooperation and regional and continental peace.

Along with this interest for regional insertion, a third and last objective of South African foreign policy during Mandela was that of being more active in the international level. One of the country's new administration's first initiatives was to approach old allies who fought against the former racist regime (Ngwenya 2011) and to look for admission or readmission into international organizations. In fact, while regionally

Pretoria was seeking for admission into OAU and SADC, internationally it was joining the *Commonwealth*, the United Nations (UN) the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), G-77 and others (Dirco 1996).

The result was a successful policy in terms of international relations when compared to the policies that had been previously attempted. During the *apartheid* regime South Africa had only 30 diplomatic missions around the world, while in 1996 the country already counted 124 missions and was part of 45 International Organizations (Barber 2005). On the one hand, this success can be related to the exercise of universality in its foreign policy, as well as its choice of strategic partners<sup>2</sup>.

In terms of universality, an example of that is the fact that South Africa interacted on the one hand with the United States and on the other with Iran, Cuba and Libya. Those last countries had helped the ANC in its fight against *apartheid*, but they were seen as rogue or pariah states by Washington (Hamill and Lee 2001). In terms of strategic partnerships, the breaking of relations with Taiwan and the strengthening of ties with the People's Republic of China is a highlight of this policy, as China would later become an important political and economic partner of South Africa.

There was an expectation that the Southern Atlantic region would be a part of South Africa's new international insertion plan. It would be a way of opposing the former regime's proposal of SATO and also of showing that Pretoria no longer vowed for the militarization of this region, but searched for cooperation instead. Such change can be found at South Africa's and Namibia's joining of the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS), whose fourth meeting happened on Cape Town in 1996. Under the title "*Bridging the South Atlantic*", this meeting indicated the need to consolidate the Southern Atlantic region as an economic space favoring development and valuing greater economic, technological and academic cooperation, as well as the establishment of communication between South American and African countries that were part of the initiative (Penha 2011).

The fact that South Africa and Brazil were both interested in strengthening diplomatic and economic ties also contributed to this expectation about the Southern Atlantic region. While in office, Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) adopted a policy of selective partnerships which elected South Africa and Nigeria as its strategic partners in Africa. In the case of Nigeria, Cardoso was mainly concerned with economic relations: a commercial mission was sent to Lagos and a multi-sector meeting was held in Brasilia. As for South Africa, Brazil's idea

<sup>2</sup> According to Schraeder (2001: 234), "the universality principle highlights South Africa's will to establish diplomatic relations with all countries of the world, independently of national or external policies adopted by those countries".

was to establish a free-trade agreement with the country that was Africa's main economy at the time (Pimentel 2000). There were two presidential visits between the countries during that time; the first in 1996 when Cardoso met with Mandela in Pretoria and the second in 1998 when the South African president visited Brazil (Reis 2008).

However, even though there was a common interest from both sides of the Atlantic, and even though South Africa had a plan for international insertion, the Southern Atlantic region in fact remained in the background. This can be understood through the interaction of three features: South Africa's interest for a greater regional role, its defense policy and its limited military budget. A reflection of this is found in South African Defense Force (SADF)'s transformation into South African National Defense Force (SANDF), a change marked by three characteristics. The first one was a paradigm shift about the concept of security – from traditional security to human security (Kangwanja 2006). The second referred to the inclusion in military personnel of ex-combatants of the *apartheid* regime (Stapleton 2010). The third and last one was the decrease of resources spent with the Armed Forces. In 1990, the Armed Force's budget was equivalent to 3.9% of the country's GDP, while in 1998 SANDF's budget was the equivalent of 1.4% of South Africa's GDP (SIPRI 2016).

Along with the previously listed characteristics, there has also been a prioritization of regional insertion, notably in terms of Southern African security issues. This tendency can be first noticed with the creation of "*Defense in a Democracy White Paper on National Defense for the Republic of South Africa*", the main document of South Africa's Defense, which indicates that Pretoria should prioritize regional stability, for "South Africa has a common destiny with Southern Africa" (SANDF 1996: 20).

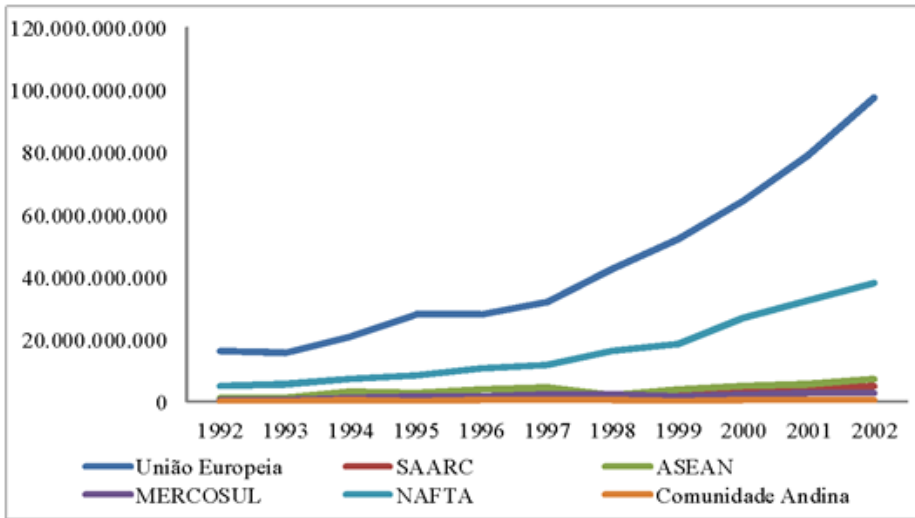
In parallel to the *White Paper*, another example is the creation of the Organ on Politics Defense and Security (OPDS) in 1996, aiming at building peace and stability in the Southern part of the continent through the integration of military and human security. Finally, the priority of regional security is connected with Mandela's government's participation in regional conflict resolution. The president acted as mediator in talks between Mobutu Sese Seko's authoritarian regime (1965-1996) and the insurgent group *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo* (AFDL) under the leadership of Laurent Kabila, during the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Kabemba 2007). In another conflict resolution participation, South African National Defense Force took part in peace enforcement in the Kingdom of Lesotho, when the country was about to enter a political crisis in its second general elections after major-general Lekhanya's rule (1986-1993).

A Mandela administration choice that contributed to keeping the Southern Atlantic region in a secondary position was the orientation of the *South Africa Navy* (SAN), which had gone through budgetary and contingent cuts (from 6.500 to 4.500) (Wessels 2010). In general, either due to a reduction of its resources – which made SAN prioritize acting in certain areas – or due to a possibility of greater interaction with other Navies, in fact what happened during the Mandela administration was a tendency to prioritize ties with Western powers and *Commonwealth* member countries, instead of Southern Atlantic countries. From 1994 to 1998, Pretoria took part in naval exercises in its maritime coast along with USA, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands and others. South Africa also took part, along with Germany, in a military exercise called *Good Hope*, which involved both countries' air forces in 1994. It also participated in training courses with the United States and France, and it maintained a close relationship with *Commonwealth* countries such as India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Mauritius, Kenya and Singapore (Manganyi 2014; Wessels 2010).

During the same period, South Africa tried to strengthen its ties with other Indian Ocean countries through the creation of the *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC) in a meeting at the Mauritius Islands, with the objective of strengthening political and regional ties among its members. Unlike this approach, relations between SAN and Navies of the other margin of the Atlantic have been scanty. The main occasions were when South Africa participated in UNITAS maritime exercises in 1996 – a series of exercises designed by the United States and South American countries – and when it took part in ATLASUR in 1997. In that same year, SAN celebrated its 75th anniversary with the presence of 36 countries, out of which only three were from South America (Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) (Manganyi 2014; Wessels 2010).

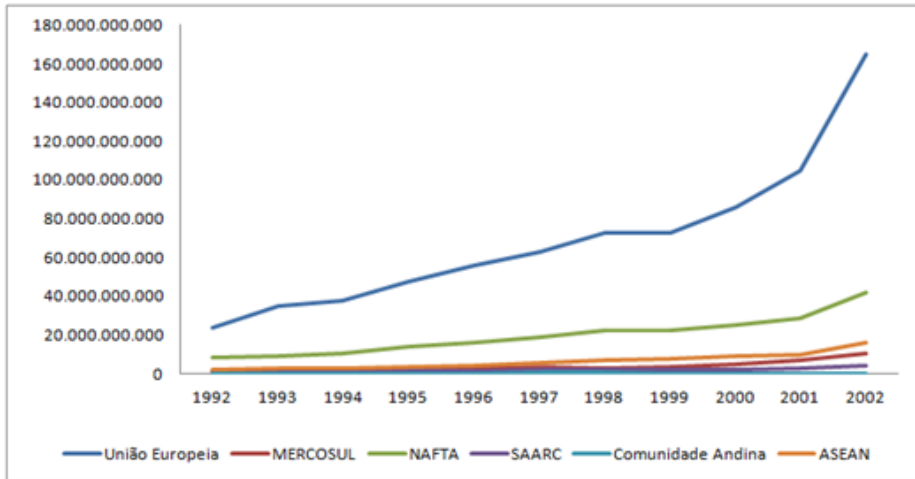
Apart from the security focus, the continuity of the South Atlantic's secondary position in South Africa's policies can be noticed by analyzing the country's economic interactions during the Mandela administration. Although there was an interest in MERCOSUL (this was one of Mandela's goals when he travelled to South America in 1998), what happened in reality was the priority of regional trade or trade with Asian and Northern countries. The increase of commercial flows among regional countries was expected, since, as previously noted, the "new" South Africa had a regional insertion policy. However, what we highlight here is Pretoria's other international trade partners, as seen below:

**Image 1 – South Africa's exports (in Rands and by economic bloc)**



**Source:** Created by the author based on data from DTISA (2017)

**Image 2 – South Africa's imports (in Rands and by economic bloc)**



**Source:** Created by the author based on data from DTISA (2017)

According to data from the *Department of Trade and Industry of South Africa* (DTISA), both in terms of imports and in terms of exports the European Union and the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) have maintained their position as South Africa's main commercial partners. They are the only blocs to which South Africa exports more than ZAR\$20,000,000,000 (DTISA 2016). In a contrasting figure, between



1994 and 1998 there were low levels of trade between South Africa and MERCOSUL, a fact that, along with the military devaluation, has kept the Southern Atlantic region as a secondary route if compared, for example, with the Indian Ocean.

## ***African Renaissance, African Agenda and a new look towards the Southern Atlantic region***

As previously stated, the changes adopted by the Mandela administration turned South Africa's new international insertion to a diametrically opposite direction if compared to PN administrations. An example can be found in the priority given to the African continent, which during the *apartheid* regime was considered relevant only in terms of the continuity of the racist regime. Another example is the new South African goal of expanding its international relations, which had been, until then, limited to relations with Western powers.

In general, when we analyze the almost ten years when Mbeki presided the country (1999-2008), it is possible to find forms of continuity in terms of foreign policy as compared to his predecessor. A first case is the valuing of human rights and democracy, both of them issues related with Mbeki's critique of military and one-party governments, considered diachronic in 21st century Africa<sup>3</sup>. The belief that conflict resolution should be carried out by non-violent means and the appraisal of multilateralism and universalism to fundament the choice of strategic partnerships were other examples of the points in Mbeki administration's foreign policy which resembled that of Mandela.

The adoption of universalism and multilateralism would turn out to be strategic for the Mbeki administration. On the one hand, it was important for South Africa's regional insertion, since it demonstrated some flexibility in South African actions and, consequently, granted Pretoria the possibility of approaching African countries that followed a diametrically opposite way from that of South Africa – such as, for instance, Zimbabwe – but that were politically and historically relevant actors in the continent. In other words, universalism and multilateralism generated non-confrontation with some African countries and were both important means of unlinking South Africa's image as a pro-Western country, a “lackey of the United States or any other Western country” (Landsberg 2000: 119).

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3 In a speech at Abuja in 2000, Mbeki said that “tyrants fear the masses and always try to demobilize them through propaganda, corruption and terror. Our task as progressive people is to oppose tyrants”.

On the other hand, the maintenance of good relations with many African countries was seen as necessary for the promotion of a new African political ideology for the 21st century (Nabudere 2001), most commonly referred to as *African Renaissance*. Hlophe and Landsberg (1999) highlight two dimensions of *African Renaissance*. The first one is the relationship between this renaissance and the Ghanaian term “*Sankofa*”, which meant moving South Africa and the African continent towards a prosperous future, which would be reached through the valuing and recovery of an African past dating back to before the European invasion. The second is the importance of the interaction between democracy and economic development, a relation which would create a stable and favorable base for economic growth, granting Africa a new role in globalization.

These dimensions indicated by Hlophe and Landsberg (1999) are key for *African renaissance* and had been fostered by Mbeki even before he took office. In his speech at the United Nation University in 1998, *The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World*, he presents, in fact, *African Renaissance* to the world. In this speech, it is possible to notice that Mbeki's proposed return to a pre-European past had the objective of reconstructing African dignity, an important feeling in terms of the combat to the existing stigma of a continent eternally dependent of charity from the outside world, incapable of fighting its own problems and passive to dictatorship governments.

Besides, this speech strengthened the view defended by Mbeki that there is a relation between economic development and democracy, and it also demonstrated to the world that the African continent had been trying to adapt to neoliberal conditioning and needed to create new partnerships with industrialized countries. In a way, the expectation for *African Renaissance* was that economic ties with industrialized countries and their interest for the continent's natural resources could be availed. In other words, it was considered that the success or failure of this doctrine was related to the dynamics of the partnership, or in Landsberg terms (2005: 740) to the “*mutual accountability*” or “*mutual responsibility*”, in the way that there shouldn't be any form of paternalism between African and industrialized countries (Landsberg 2005).

As president, Mbeki sought the consubstantiation of the mutual responsibility dynamics signaled by the *African Renaissance*. In regional terms, Pretoria turned to the creation of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), an initiative for the promotion of the continent's economic development, which was received enthusiastically by Western powers (Bujra 2004), as it accepted globalization, neoliberalism and all of its conditionings, but on the other hand indicated democracy and conflict

prevention as preconditions for the development of the African continent (NEPAD 2001). Besides NEPAD, South African government acted intensely for the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU). In this respect, points such as the respect for human rights, democracy, good governance, as well as Pretoria's proposed structure model, *Pan-continentalism*, were included in AU (Landsberg 2012c; CAAU, 2000)<sup>4</sup>.

On one hand, if the creation of NEPAD and a transition from OAU to AU symbolized the consubstantiation of the *African Renaissance*; on the other hand, they turned into important tools for the elevation of *African Renaissance* into a new level, commonly known as the African Agenda. Generally, the African Agenda can be understood as a phase of continuity and growth of the *African Renaissance*. Continuity, because it has remained faithful to the incentive and creation of democratic systems by African countries, to the efforts for peace and security in the continent and to efforts leading to economic development, among other objectives defended by this doctrine of African renovation (Landsberg 2007; Kondlo and Landsberg 2007).

The African Agenda can also be understood as a phase of growth of the *African Renaissance*, because in regional terms it aims at intensifying South Africa's interactions with African countries. In this case, it becomes clear that through its growth the African Agenda has become an important tool for a greater integration of South Africa to the continent. An example can be found in the incentive to South African companies to invest in Africa. In fact, small investments by companies such as *Checkers, Game an Makro, Protea Hotels, Debonairs, Nandos and Steers, Truworths and Weoolworths, Standard Bank/Stanbic and Multichoice*, and greater investments by *MTN, Vodacom, Transnet, Eskom, AngloGold Ashanti, Randgold Resources, Sasol* and *PetroSA*, have become more frequent (Comnimos, Daniel and Lutchman 2007). Besides, in commercial terms, the African Agenda has not only promoted trade among various African countries, but it also has turned South Africa into the second greatest buyer of products exported by countries such as Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Lesotho and Malawi.

At the same time, *African Renaissance* has also enabled South Africa to have a greater role internationally. In terms of the mutual responsibility dynamics, it is possible to notice a distinction established by the Mbeki administration concerning South African expectations of its North-South and South-South interactions. In terms of North-South relations, South

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4 Pan-continentalism is understood as "the process through which states unite to create new norms, principles, institutions, political structures, and agree to live according to these norms and structures in harmony with each other" (Landsberg 2012c)

African expectations were to break from Afro-pessimism, presenting instead the image of a continent in transformation and inviting rich countries to be a part of this renovation process. One of the main examples of this is the promotion of NEPAD as part of the OECD and G8 agendas, both seen by Pretoria as financiers of this development Project (Bujra 2004). Such activism, apart from strengthening the country's image as part of the African continent, also guaranteed Pretoria the status of Africa's "voice" in the post-Cold War world.

Concerning South-South relations, besides the appreciation of groups which South Africa had become part of during the Mandela administration – G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement – the Mbeki administration integrated South Africa into other groups, such as the *Forum for China-Africa Co-operation* (FOCAC), the *New Asian-African Strategic Partnership* (NAASP), the *New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership* (NAASP), the *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC), the IBSA Forum and others. On the one hand, Pretoria's interest to be part of these groups guaranteed its integration with countries such as China, Russia, Brazil, India and other emerging powers. On the other hand, it altered South African perception of the Southern Atlantic region, since the country would seek a greater interaction with Brazil.

An example of this can be found by analyzing the IBSA Forum, composed by South Africa, Brazil and India. Its symbols walk side by side with three major South African interests. The first one is the strengthening of strategic partnerships with countries belonging to other regions, in this case South America and Asia. The second refers to the goal of being a more active country in global governance, since the existence of this forum is closely related to points such as the United Nations Security Council reform, defense and respect of international laws, and diplomacy as the best way for conflict resolution (Declaração de Brasília 2003). Finally, the third interest would be South Africa's role in the process of expansion of the interstate system, that is, its geostrategic importance between the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. However, unlike previous moments, when the country was tied to Western powers, with the *African Renaissance* its geographic specificity became an asset for South-South relations.

In security terms, it is also possible to notice South Africa's appreciation of the Southern Atlantic region. An example is the renovation of the *South African Navy* (SAN), involving the increase of contingents, the acquisition of new ships and submarines and, in 2006, the release of the "*Maritime Doctrine for the SA Navy*" (MDSAN), a document that demonstrated the importance of South Africa as a bi-oceanic country and the necessity of maintaining its maritime surroundings safe from possible

threats (SAN 2006). The renovation of SAN and the adoption of MDSAN granted South Africa an increase in multilateral exercises, which during the Mandela administration were fewer and mostly accomplished with *Commonwealth* members.

Specifically in terms of South-South relations, a highlight is ATLASUR, which aims to create greater cooperation and exchange of experiences between the Navies of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and South Africa. During the Mbeki administration, ATLASUR V happened in 2002, ATLASUR VI in 2006 and ATLASUR VII in 2008, with the V and VII at the South African coast. Besides ATLASUR, another prominent exercise was IBSAMAR, which initially took place in Cape Town (2008), having cooperation and mutual respect between Brazil, South Africa and India as its main objectives, as well as the development and perfecting of naval tactics and of doctrines for the defense of terrestrial platforms, and the conduction of operations fighting threats to member-countries (Manganyi 2014; Wessels 2010).

In parallel to the political-diplomatic (IBSA) and security (SAN) scopes, economically there has also been a greater interaction between South Africa and South America. According to data from DTI (2017), it is possible to notice an increase in commercial exchange between Pretoria and Mercosul. In terms of South African exports, if in 1999 Pretoria had exported ZAR\$1,690,464,320 to Mercosul countries, in 2009 this amount was reaching ZAR\$4,170,128,695. In terms of South African imports, the same period saw an increase from ZAR\$3,663,047,110 to ZAR\$19,034,871,129, a growth that shows the continuity of the deficit.

It is important to highlight that in the Afro-Asian dynamics, when trade between South Africa and the SAARC are analyzed, the economic relation tends to favor South Africans. In 1999, South African imports amounted to ZAR\$1,928,439,495 and exports to ZAR\$2,112,101,117. In 2009, the values were ZAR\$17,025,128,128 and ZAR\$19,500,726,004 respectively (DTI 2017). However, even though the economic relation between South Africa and SAARC members is more interesting to Pretoria in terms of its surplus, it is a fact that political-diplomatic initiatives for the approximation of the regions (such as ASA) and the creation of military exercises involving South Atlantic countries (such as ATLASUR) or IBSA members (such as IBSAMAR) are events that, in general, demonstrate South Africa's greater interest for the Southern Atlantic region.

## The Southern Atlantic region during the Zuma administration (2009-2014): continuity or decrease in importance?

After Mbeki's resignation and Motlanthe's brief administration (2008-2009), Zuma took office (2009-)<sup>5</sup>. On the short term, some changes were speculated both internally and externally, as Zuma was supported by groups such as the *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU), *South African Communist Party* (SACP), and *ANC Youth League* (ANCYL), all opposed to policies adopted by the previous administration. It is important to note that ANCYL under Julius Malema (2008-2012) claimed for the abandonment of free trade and for the nationalization of banks and mining industries (Hughes 2011).

Internally, it was expected from the Zuma administration to act towards the curtailment of unemployment, better access and improvement of public health and education; that is, solutions to challenges inherited from the *apartheid* regime which had not been solved by previous administrations. In terms of South Africa's international relations, there were also expectations, especially when the *Department of Foreign Affairs* (DFA) was transformed into *Department of International Relations and Cooperation* (DIRCO). In sum, this change was meant to, internally, convince South African population that foreign policy is important for the country, and externally, to show African countries that South Africa would keep faithful to the non-hegemonic character of its role in the continent (Landsberg 2010).

However, when we analyze the Zuma administration, we find a level of continuity in South Africa's foreign policy. This can be observed by the fact that democracy, economic development, respect to multilateralism, non-violent conflict resolution, as well as the diversification and increase of strategic partnerships – all features that had been guiding South Africa's post-*apartheid* performance – remain as its most important policy points (Landsberg 2012b, 2012a). Besides, the prioritization of the African continent remained, symbolized by the maintenance and intensification of the African Agenda. This can be found in the search for creating peace in the continent, either through *peacekeeping* or *peacemaking* operations, or through support for the reconstruction of countries after conflicts (Landsberg 2010, 2012b, 2012a).

Beyond security, examples can be found in the creation or

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<sup>5</sup> According to Landsberg (2012a: 8), support to RECs and the maintenance of Africa as a priority were two of the many characteristics which, "in sum, the change from Mbeki to Motlanthe was marked by the continuity and not by change".

maintenance of bilateral economic agreements, so-called *Business Forums*, signed with countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Namibia, Zambia and, notably, Angola, the first African country visited by the South African president, along with a delegation of 150 businessmen, the largest number in an official visit until then. Another example of economic relations are the projects carried out by the Zuma administration: the strengthening of SADC *Free Trade Area* (SADC-FTA) – inaugurated during the Mbeki administration – and the construction of a free trade zone based on the integration of SADC, *East African Community* (EAC) and the *Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa* (COMESA). In terms of infrastructure, such initiatives were followed by the *Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative* (PICI) and the *Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa* (PIDA)<sup>6</sup>.

Still in economic terms, however, South Africa's relation to the rest of the world was different with Zuma in its positioning towards commercial partners. Evidently, the European Union is still South Africa's main commercial partner, but from 2005 to 2015 China surpassed the United States and became the African country's second largest commercial partner. In fact, while in 2005 South African exports to the U.S. and China were, respectively, ZAR\$ 30,456,024,154 and ZAR\$ 8,456,249,474; in 2015, they amounted to ZAR\$ 78,570,360,988 and ZAR\$ 94,375,122,871, respectively. Besides, during the same period South African imports from the United States corresponded to ZAR\$ 30,259,829,171 in 2005 and from China ZAR\$ 32,070,892,524; while in 2015 they were ZAR\$ 76,283,766,177 (USA) and ZAR\$ 199,392,013,145 (China) (DTI 2017).

In general, China's transformation into South Africa's second main commercial partner can be understood as a result of the African Agenda, since from the Mbeki administration there was the goal of establishing closer ties with emerging powers. With Zuma, the main result of this orientation was South Africa's joining of the BRIC group, which became BRICS after its admission. Although economically South Africa lags behind the other BRICS members, its status as regional power with a sophisticated

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<sup>6</sup>According to PIDA (2012: 1-2), "Africa's infrastructure needs are starkly apparent: power demand will increase from 590 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2010, to more than 3,100 TWh in 2040, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of nearly 6%. To keep pace, installed power generation capacity must rise from present levels of 125 gigawatts (GW; comparable with the United Kingdom) to almost 700 GW in 2040. Transport volumes will increase 6–8 times, with a particularly strong increase of up to 14 times for some landlocked countries. Port throughput will rise from 265 million tons in 2009, to more than 2 billion tons in 2040. Water needs will push some river basins—including the Nile, Niger, Orange and Volta basins—to the ecological brink. Information and communications technology (ICT) demand will swell by a factor of 20 before 2020 as Africa catches up with broadband. Demand, around 300 gigabits per second in 2009, will reach 6,000 gigabits per second by 2018".

infrastructure network, as well as its commercial, technical and financial dynamics (Kornegay 2010) and its geographic position (bi-oceanic) were all qualities that demonstrated its relevance for the group.

In a way, South Africa's joining of the BRICS had an impact on its view of the Southern Atlantic region. An example can be found in Pretoria's commercial relations with MERCOSUL member countries. Although South Africa's trade with Asian partners is much more intense, with exports in 2016 reaching ZAR\$ 56,220,593,206 and imports reaching ZAR\$ 49,657,068,748 (DTISA 2017), its trade with MERCOSUL are increasingly growing. According to DTISA (2017), while in 2009 South Africa's exports to the bloc were of ZAR\$ 4,170,128,695, in 2016 they corresponded to ZAR\$ 9,269,141,468. Besides, South African imports also increased, from ZAR\$ 19,034,871,129 in 2009 to ZAR\$ 36,455,821,023 in 2016, showing how the Southern Atlantic region is still an important commercial route for both sides.

The tendency to value the South Atlantic basin can also be observed in South Africa's Security and Defense policies, which, in line with its foreign policy, also represent a continuity of a process started by the former administration. On the one hand, an initial resemblance is the decrease of resources available to SANF. In fact, while Mbeki's administration invested less than 2% of the GDP in the Armed Forces, Zuma would invest even less, reaching the lowest levels from 2011, with only 1.1% (SIPRI 2016).

On the other hand, even though there was a smaller amount of resources available, a second resemblance to the Mbeki administration was the maintenance of the *Maritime Doctrine for the SA Navy* (MDSAN) and, notably, the refurbishing of the *South African Navy* (SAN), through an increase in the number of contingents and the acquisition of new ships and submarines. Since the first year of Zuma's administration, 2009, the contingents were reaching 6.000, with three submarines, four new frigates, two *gun-boats (ex-strike craft)*, three *mine-hunters*, one *combat support ship* and one *hydrographic survey ship* (Wessels 2010).

Aside from this refurbishing being relevant for the protection of the country's strategic environment, it is fundamental for the country's interest in becoming more active in IBSAMAR exercises, initiated during the Mbeki administration in Cape Town (2008), which have continued in the Zuma administration. IBSAMAR II, III and V, carried out in 2010, 2013 and 2016, respectively, happened in the South African coast. In parallel, a second initiative adopted during the Zuma administration which indirectly involves the Southern Atlantic is *Operation Phakisa*, created in 2014, which, although focused on Education and Health, also comprises four projects directed at the South Atlantic coast.



The first one refers to aquiculture, with the main goal of obtaining a greater use of natural fishing resources of the South African coast<sup>7</sup>. The second refers to improving the flow of ships to the South African coast, with the objective of benefiting the industrial sector that handles the maintenance of ships at the ports. The third project is aimed at the prospection and exploitation of *offshore* petroleum and gas, since researches demonstrate the existence of reserves that could reach 9 billion barrels of oil and 11 billion of natural gas – numbers which would make South Africa self-sufficient of these resources for, at least, 40 and 350 years, respectively. Lastly, the fourth project is related to South Africa's intention of protecting this region legally by creating means (around ten) to promote maritime environmental protection of illegal activities (Operation Phakisa 2014).

## Final Thoughts

When we analyze Mandela (1994-1999), Mbeki (1999-2008) and Zuma (2009-) administrations, it becomes clear that there is a South African ambition for a new international insertion, marked by a rupture with the foreign policy adopted by the *apartheid* regime. In the regional setting, the ANC administrations have tried to transform South Africa into an element for the provision of continental stability, engaging with peace operations and dialogue, fighting underdevelopment and its maladies, trying to change Africa's condition as a marginalized continent in the globalization process and breaking with its own previous regional isolation by participating in the renovation of the continent. A result can be seen in South Africa's increased diplomatic relations with diverse African countries, as well as its active role in the creation of NEPAD and in the transformation of the OAU into AU.

In parallel with changes in the regional level, post-*apartheid* South Africa has looked for a greater political insertion internationally, supported not only by North-South relations but also by South-South relations. Although it values its partnerships with the United States and the European Union, two of Pretoria's main economic partners, it has become clear, especially since the Mbeki administration, that South Africa is interested in strengthening its economic and political ties with countries such as Brazil, India, China and Russia. Such goal has led the country to change its view of the South Atlantic Ocean.

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<sup>7</sup>“The Aquaculture work stream has underlined the high growth potential of South Africa's aquaculture sector due to increasing demand for fish. While aquaculture contributes to almost half of the global fish supply, it contributes less than 1% of South Africa's fish supply” (Operation Phakisa 2016).

Evidently, there are variations in the ANC administrations. It is clear, for instance, that the Mandela administration did not show a greater interest on the Southern Atlantic basin. However, administrations since Mbeki have shown the tendency to change this perspective. Initiatives such as the IBSA, the interest in developing maritime exercises such as IBSAMAR, the goal to strengthen economic ties with South America and South Africa's admission to BRICS are some of the elements that show a greater appreciation of the Southern Atlantic region.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at analyzing the importance of the Southern Atlantic region in South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy and raises the hypothesis that the increase of South Africa's interest on the South Atlantic in fact is a result of its appreciation of South-South relations. The methodology was worked through a revision of a variety of bibliography.

### KEYWORDS

South Africa post-apartheid; Southern Atlantic; Foreign Policy.

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