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**Full Length Research Paper****South Africa's Relations with International Organizations with special reference to ASEAN: A Review****N. Surjitkumar**

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is now a respected international citizen. South Africa was also one of the founding members of the United Nations. After South Africa held its first multiracial election in April 1994, most sanctions imposed by the international community in opposition to the system of apartheid were lifted. The UN is an important arena for South Africa's rapid reintegration into the world and in the twelve years since its full re-entry into the General Assembly, South Africa has sought to increase its profile in the body, with varying success. The political and economic relations between South Africa and the ASEAN countries have been improved in the post-apartheid period. The present article discusses about South Africa's involvement in the United Nations in the post-apartheid period. In the later part of the article, Afro-Asian resurgence in the context of South Africa- Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) relation is discussed.

Introduction

South Africa is active in the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth of Nations. South Africa is now a respected international citizen.¹ South Africa was also one of the founding members of the United Nations, with its Prime Minister of the time, Jan Smuts, having written the preamble to the UN Charter. As a result of the country's apartheid policies, its UN membership was suspended in 1974.

In 1990, as part of the reformist policies undertaken by president F.W. de Klerk in South Africa, Namibia was granted independence, with the exception of the enclave of Walvis Bay, which was reintegrated into Namibia in March 1994. After South Africa held its first multiracial election in April 1994, most sanctions imposed by the international community in opposition to the system of apartheid were lifted. On June 1, 1994, South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth of Nations, and on June 23, 1994, it was readmitted to the UN General Assembly. In 1994, it joined the Organization of African Unity (OAU)², the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). From 1998 to 2002, South Africa chaired the NAM and continued to promote South-South cooperation as a member of NAM's troika³ until 2006 when it assumed the Chairmanship of the G-77. South Africa also advanced the North-South dialogue with the European Union and the G8.⁴ In its outreach to Asia at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the New Asian African Strategic Partnership, both founded in 2006, South Africa tries to build strategic partnerships for the discussion of UN-topics based on a shared vision of developmental challenges. South Africa's strategic partnership with India and Brazil⁵ has a particular power to further the agenda of the South in dialogue with the North. South Africa was a non-permanent

¹ DFA, Department of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign relations of South Africa", URL: www.dfa.gov.za, (2007).

² OAU was replaced by the African Union (AU) in 2002.

³ The troika consists of the representatives of the past, present and future Chair of the NAM.

⁴ Stephane Kage, "New powers for global change: South Africa at the UN", *Dialogue on Globalisation*, FES, New York, (2007), p.1.

⁵ The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum was founded in 2003.

member of the United Nations Security Council since October 2006 till 2008. South African votes in the UNSC have not been without controversy. The present article discusses about South Africa's involvement in the United Nations in the post apartheid period. In the later part of the article, Afro-Asian resurgence in the context of South Africa- Association of South-East Asian Nations(ASEAN) relation is discussed.

South Africa and the UN

The United Nations (UN) has historically posed a challenge to South Africa's international relations. South Africa featured prominently on General Assembly (GA) agendas for a great portion of the latter's existence and Assembly resolutions were an important instrument through which international admonishment of apartheid South Africa was expressed. However, by the 1990s, the GA was one of the most important forums through which the international community's approach towards South Africa manifested itself as the country embarked on its path of democratization.

For South Africa, reacceptance into the community of sovereign states was contingent upon resuming its place in the UN. In this light, the UN can be said to have occupied a distinctive position in South Africa's early post-apartheid international relations.⁶The GA accepted South Africa's credentials only after the ending of apartheid in 1994. In the same year, Nelson Mandela stated that the elaboration of a new world order must centre on the UN and that the UN's challenge will be to ensure that democracy peace and prosperity prevail everywhere. South Africa actively participated in the design of new UN institutions while coordinating its positions with other member states, especially those of the African Union (AU). The AU supported the creation of the Peace-building Commission and the Human Rights Council (HRC). South Africa will reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - one of the major challenges being to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁷

At the same time, the UN was itself emerging from the bipolar rivalry of the Cold War. By the beginning of the 1990s, the UN, like South Africa, faced the challenge of grafting a new role for itself. In the twelve years since the end of institutionalized apartheid, South Africa has sought to do this by defining itself as a leader of the developing world. A strong focus on multilateralism in its foreign policy propels this. The post-apartheid South Africa's involvement in the UN can be examined into two areas. Firstly, South Africa's overall orientation to, and participation in, the various UN organs since 1994, and secondly the connections and contrasts with its wider multilateral foreign policy. These include the strong attempts by South Africa to use the UN as a forum to project or showcase itself as a representative of the developing world, and of Africa more specifically.

South Africa's UN involvement is strongly shaped by its desire to increase its global stature as a progressive and African power.⁸ The UN is an important arena for South Africa's rapid reintegration into the world and in the twelve years since its full re-entry into the General Assembly, South Africa has sought to increase its profile in the body, with varying success.

Thus in 1996, South Africa assumed leadership of the United Nations' Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) IX. In 1997, it was elected a vice-president of the UN General Assembly. In the same year, it became Chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights and Pretoria was elected to the council of the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whilst also chairing the Session of the Preparatory Commission for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.⁹South Africa's Chairmanship of UNCTAD IX can be seen as the first expression of the country's active reintegration into the world organization and of its intentions at the UN.

In 2001 and 2002, South Africa hosted two major UN conferences, respectively, the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), Racial Intolerance, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Given the size and high profile of the conferences, hosting them proved a major diplomatic feat for South Africa.¹⁰ The two conferences provided Pretoria with the opportunity to cast itself as a leader of the developing world and a campaigner for a transformed world order. South Africa's framing of itself as a leader of the developing world through such events as the conferences is part of an emerging tendency in its involvement in UN bodies and initiatives.

Next important South Africa's participation in major, middle power projects such as, the Global Campaign to Ban Landmines (or the Ottawa Process,) and the Kimberley Process, the nature, motives, dynamics, effectiveness and implications of its UN involvement can be examined. Pretoria's participation in the Ottawa and Kimberley Processes¹¹ is a good example of middle

⁶Scarlett Cornelissen, "Displaced Multilateralism? South Africa's Participation at the United Nations" in Donna Lee, Ian Taylor and Paul D. Williams (eds.), *The New Multiculturalism in South African Diplomacy*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.25.

⁷UNAIDS estimates that in 2005, 5.5 million persons (18.8 percent) were living with HIV in South Africa.

⁸ Ibid, p.26.

⁹In addition to this, South Africa had also been elected member of the executive board of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Population Fund (1998-2000) and several other UN bodies.

¹⁰Cornelissen, n.6, p. 28.

¹¹The Kimberley Process began with NGOs, primarily based in Canada, pushing the issue of conflict diamonds as a major concern for human security. Actors from the non-governmental sector, the corporate world and state governments then came together to try and resolve what was fast becoming a major scandal in international commerce. South Africa, along with Botswana and Namibia, has economies heavily linked to the global diamond industry and Pretoria was keen to play a leading role in heading off any potential boycott of the diamond industry. The Kimberley Process was Chaired by South Africa and then quickly it became a major vehicle in seeking to clean up the world's diamond industry.

power activism. With regard to the Ottawa Process, Pretoria played a leading role in many of the state negotiations that followed the initial campaigning by NGOs.

South Africa and UN Security Council Reform

The AU claims two permanent seats for African countries with veto rights, arguing that Africa is the only continent not being represented by the receptive to powers in the Security Council (SC). It has not presented candidates, but South Africa was a clear favorite along with Nigeria and Egypt. In 2007, South Africa was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the first time. Here, South Africa joined China and Russia in their opposition to a resolution on Myanmar; it is debatable whether it was a matter of principle or real politic when it did so.¹²

The reform of the UN has been one of the issues that developing countries have collectively pursued in recent years. This has also been an issue on which South Africa has attempted to take a leading position, seeking not only to direct the debate and prioritize certain goals, but also aiming to gain a permanent seat on the Security Council. Pretoria first entered the debate on UN reform in 1997 when at the opening of the fifty-second session of the GA, the then Foreign Affairs Minister argued the necessity to 'redress existing imbalances and transform (the UN) into a transparent organization accountable to its broader membership.'¹³

South Africa adopted the position held by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that proposed an expanded Security Council with Africa gaining at least two permanent and five non permanent SC seats and the elimination or extension of the veto. In recent years, more attention has been given to reforming and democratizing other elements of the UN, on improving the role of the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) and redefining the relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN system. More emphasis has also been placed on the 'revitalization' of the GA. South Africa's efforts to advance the Assembly's role and authority are aimed at offsetting what it perceives as a shift towards unilateralism, triggered by the US-led war on Iraq and the increasingly peripheral position of the UN in the wake of this war.

The divisive impact of the competition for SC membership was demonstrated in an AU summit held shortly before the Millennium Review Summit, where several influential African states (such as Kenya, Egypt and Algeria) declared as 'non-negotiable' an expanded Council with the extension of veto rights to all new permanent, including African, members.¹⁴ Recently some African countries have started to criticize South Africa's participation in the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA)¹⁵ Dialogue Forum, a tripartite body set up to lobby for the eradication of global economic and social injustices and a more humane face to globalization.

In Africa, leaders have taken Thabo Mbeki's attendance at the inauguration of the Brazilian president, rather than that of the newly elected Kenyan presidential candidate (which took place at the same time), as a negation of his professed allegiance to the continent's renaissance.

In this context, it is significant that South Africa has to date not actively sought to gain a non-permanent seat on the Council. This could be read as one means by which the country attempts to placate African fears while at the same time increasing support for its claim to a permanent seat. Overall, Pretoria's contribution to the deliberations on UN reform has been significantly shaped and constrained by the broader processes of intense political bargaining and jostling for positions of influence.¹⁶ South Africa will remain keenly interested in one area of the UN decision making: the possible reform of the Security Council to include new permanent membership. In this context, South Africa can be expected to be a strong competitor disputing, for example, Nigeria's claim on the seat.

South Africa and UN Environment Programmes

South Africa is committed to maintaining the political momentum gained in the sphere of sustainable development, through the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). Comparing the goals of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) to the MDGs, it asks for a monitoring of countries' performance in the realization of the JPOI goals. South Africa argues that desertification, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and deforestation are major threats to security and stability in Africa. South Africa is an active participant in the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and has ratified the Convention on Biological Safety, the Basel, Stockholm and the Rotterdam Conventions as well as the Kyoto Protocol.¹⁷ Various UN conventions for the environment, such as the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity are used by South Africa to meaningfully reduce poverty and, in so doing, meet the aims of the MDGs.¹⁸ South Africa is

¹² Kage, n.4, p.2.

¹³ Cornelissen, n.6, p.37.

¹⁴ This is in opposition to what is proposed by Germany, Japan, India and Brazil, the so-called G4 – the grouping that had thus far gained the greatest level of support in the GA for its reform vision.

¹⁵ IBSA was created on the premise that the three states are major players in the developing world and in their respective regional spheres, and that combined, they will have a greater ability in shifting international policy.

¹⁶ Cornelissen, n. 6, p.38.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.2

¹⁸ South Africa Year Book, Department of Foreign Affairs, (2008/09).

firmly committed to the protection of the oceans and the sustainable management of its marine resources.¹⁹ It is seen that South Africa has an important role to play in these mentioned areas of the UN environment programmes.

South Africa and Human Rights at the UN

A commitment to promote human rights is one of the central considerations in the implementation of South Africa's foreign policy. South Africa is a major player in the development of international human-rights law at the UN. South Africa played an active role in the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, which replaced the former Commission on Human Rights.²⁰ South Africa was one of the first countries to sign and ratify both the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol, becoming a state party to the Convention in November 2007. South Africa's foreign policy interventions on migration are guided by its adherence to the major international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the various refugee conventions and conventions related to, among other things, the rights of women and children. Human right is a further issue on which South Africa has sought to increase its prominence in the UN. A strong commitment to human rights is one of the professed cornerstones of the country's foreign policy. Yet, as with many other elements of its foreign policy, its attempt to advance human rights internationally has been fraught with contradictions. The theme of divisions between South Africa and other African and developing countries that counteract the country's claims to being a representative of the developing world is also one that pervades South Africa's activities concerning human rights at the UN. An early example of such discord was Pretoria's decision in 1997 to vote against a key measure by the People's Republic of China (PRC) that aimed to prevent its censure by the Human Rights Commission of its human rights record.²¹

South Africa's vote against the PRC's blocking measure was significant in that Pretoria broke from the NAM, which voted in support of China. In the same year, South Africa broke ranks with other African countries by voting in support of a motion to have a UN investigation of human rights abuses in Nigeria.²² Under Mbeki, South Africa's human rights policies at the UN have been much more in line with wider African and NAM standpoints, to the extent that it actively promoted the election of Libya as Chair of the Human Rights Commission in 2003 and rarely speaks out against human rights abuses in the developing world. South Africa, itself a member of the Commission until 2006, took the lead in nominating and garnering the votes in support of the North African country. In defense of widespread international criticism, the South Africa government justified its actions in terms of the goals of the African Renaissance, of which having Libya Chair the Commission was an important symbol of Africa's ability to transcend past failures. Its activism on the International Criminal Court (ICC) notwithstanding, on the whole South Africa's participation on human rights at the UN has been informed and constricted by its larger political ambitions in other multilateral for such as the AU, and as a consequence it has been ambiguous and has not enhanced its claim as an ethical leader. Indeed, a criticism of Mbeki's diplomacy is that he has allowed South Africa's commitment to human rights and democracy to be undermined by often cynical real politik.²³ It is seen that despite various issues, South Africa has been contributing a major role in the promotion of human rights at the UN.

South Africa and ASEAN²⁴

South Africa's relation with ASEAN countries is another important aspect of South Africa's foreign policy in the post apartheid era. It can be seen from the background of Asia-Africa resurgence. The Afro-Asian Conference of 1955 in Bandung was the important beginning of Asia-Africa relations. Again in early 1990s, African countries particularly South Africa started bilateral relations with ASEAN countries. South Africa's foreign policy towards ASEAN Countries can be examined two ways: (1) South Africa and the 8th ASEAN Summit, 2002 and (2) South Africa's Trade Relations with ASEAN Member States.

Before we go into details of the South Africa and ASEAN relations, let's examine a brief background of the ASEAN. ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 through the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Five further members have since been added, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. The guiding principles of ASEAN are consensus and non-interference in the internal affairs of individual member states. Many of the ASEAN countries experienced explosive economic development in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, which led to the description of them as "Asian Tigers".

South Africa and ASEAN relations in the post apartheid period

The political and economic relations between South Africa and the ASEAN countries have been improved in the post apartheid period. South Africa maintains embassies and high commissions in six of the 10 member states of ASEAN - Indonesia, Malaysia,

¹⁹It has ratified all the major treaties dealing with maritime, fisheries and Antarctic matters, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and its related instruments, the International Maritime Conventions, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation Compliance Agreement, and the Antarctic Treaty.

²⁰South Africa Year Book, Department of Foreign Affairs, (2008/09).

²¹Cornelissen, n.6, p.39.

²²Pretoria in fact advocated the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. Such stances were part of a more principled human rights-driven foreign policy, characteristic of Mandela's presidency.

²³Cornelissen, n.6, p.39.

²⁴ASEAN- Association of South East Asian Nations is a regional organisation of Southeast Asian countries. It was formed in 1967 by five original members and now it has ten members (ASEAN-10).

Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Philippines. These six ASEAN states and Myanmar (Burma) also maintain embassies and high commissions in South Africa. Singapore is an important member of the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) of which South Africa is a member. Singapore has also played a leading role in formulating the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP).²⁵This partnership mandated all Asian and African countries to give expression to their political relations by expanding trade and economic relations.

Vietnam plays an increasingly important role in South-east Asia and has vast economic potential and opportunities for mining, infrastructure development, and agricultural and manufacturing companies.²⁶Economic relations with Malaysia and Indonesia remain important, due to Malaysian investment in South Africa and the size of the Indonesian market. Malaysia has indicated its support for NEPAD and has sought to promote the Malaysian-initiated Langkawi International Dialogue aimed at expanding co-operation among countries of the South, including those in southern Africa.

South Africa and Indonesia were instrumental in the launch of the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP) in Bandung in 2005 on the 50th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which cemented Afro-Asian solidarity.²⁷There have been a number of exchanges of visits between South Africa and ASEAN countries since the end of the apartheid period.

South Africa and the 8th ASEAN Summit, 2002

The 8th ASEAN Summit, 2002 is one major milestone in the relations between ASEAN and African countries particularly South Africa. The ASEAN has invited to the African Union to address the important 8thASEAN Summit, 2002. That was an invitation which has ensured to further strengthen the relations between two regions of Africa and South East Asia.

Looking back to history, Asian leaders came together with their African counterparts in Bandung, Indonesia at the historic 1955 Afro-Asian Conference, to define a common future for respective people.²⁸They sought to shape that common destiny by ensuring that together act on the basis of Afro-Asian solidarity, cognizant of the need for people to improve their lives and determine their place within the global community of nations through joint action, based on reliance on resources and collective strength. They projected the important vision of South-South cooperation as a central factor in the construction of a new world order. Thabo Mbeki addressed at the 8th ASEAN Summit as "I believe that it is these same principles that have brought us to the 8th ASEAN Summit today. The challenge remains that we intensify our work together, to achieve the common objectives of the eradication of poverty, the building of developed societies and the occupation of our rightful place in a world that continues to be characterized by unequal relations between a developed North and a developing South".²⁹ The Summit gave the report of the important recent developments in Africa that bear on the pursuit of common objectives, to convey a message of solidarity to the ASEAN countries and to find ways by which can further deepen the cooperation between two regions. The Summit also discussed the progress made by the ASEAN countries in the effort to achieve regional economic integration, driven by the common objectives to intensify solidarity, peace and friendship among themselves and to act jointly to provide a better life for people.³⁰ Mbeki also expressed that South Africa will also greatly improve the capacity of the African Union to cooperate with ASEAN to respond to the universal threat of terrorism. The continued marginalization of Africa from the globalization process and the social exclusion of the vast majority of its people constitute a serious threat to global stability.

South Africa's Trade Relations with ASEAN Member States

The trade relation between South Africa and ASEAN Member States is another aspect of South Africa's foreign policy.³¹The ASEAN Countries are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The trade between South Africa and Brunei is minimal, with South African exports to Brunei for 2000 totaling R 9 181 584 and exports during 2001 R 7 734 081. No import from Brunei during this period was recorded. South Africa's main export items to Cambodia for 2002 included tobacco, mineral and chemical fertilizers, orthopedics appliances and hand tools. South Africa's main import items from Cambodia for 2002 included mainly garments such as overcoats, jerseys and pullovers and plastic articles. South Africa's main exports to Indonesia include prepared foods, pulp and paper, while importing the following products from Indonesia: vegetable products, fats and oils, plastics and rubber, timber, pulp and paper, footwear, stone and plaster. The biggest imports from Indonesia are textiles, which in 1998 amounted to approximately US\$ 26 million.³² The Laos economy is very small, mainly due to the country's small population, low level of development and lack of infrastructure. Trade and

²⁵South Africa Year Book, Department of Foreign Affairs, (2008/2009).

²⁶South Africa Year Book, Department of Foreign Affairs,(2008/09).

²⁷NAASP, in the spirit of Bandung, represents a commitment by heads of state and governments to help build closer economic ties between Africa and Asia.

²⁸ These early developments, which reflected common determination to take destiny into own hands in the period after the collapse of the system of colonialism, emphasised the reality that the people of Asia and Africa share a common destiny.

²⁹ Address by the President of South Africa and Chairperson of the African Union, Thabo Mbeki at the 8th ASEAN Summit, Phnom Penh, 5 November 2002.

³⁰ It also expressed the believe that it would be important for that two organisations, ASEAN and the African Union (AU) initiate a process of the systematic exchange of experiences to assist the Union as it strives to achieve its objectives.

³¹ Total trade between ASEAN and South Africa (2001) is R 12988349809

³² South Africa Department of Trade and Industry (figures in R'000)

investment with South Africa is insignificant.³³ Trade balance in Malaysia's favor by R924 million. South Africa is following a policy of constructive engagement towards Myanmar and is neither discouraging nor encouraging economic cooperation. Trade and investment between the two countries is relatively insignificant. However, opportunities for South African companies to invest in Myanmar abound, especially in infrastructure development, mining, steel, machinery, etc.

South Africa's main exports to the Philippines consist of base metals and minerals, paper and pulp, spirits and beverages. To South Africa, the Philippines exports fish products, footwear, electrical appliances, tobacco, etc. Philippines's trade with South Africa (2001) is R 694 million.³⁴ The exports and imports between South Africa with Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore has also been an important part of trade relations with these countries.

In 2008, ASEAN nations with the diplomatic representation of South Africa forged the ASEAN- Pretoria Committee (APC) to boost trade and investment with South Africa. ASEAN presents an opportunity for South Africa to explore more economic opportunities outside the traditional markets of the USA, the EU and China. Tensions in the global trade arena, constrained markets and the post Covid-19 world portend a shift in geopolitical and economic relations.

Conclusion

To conclude, South Africa has been playing an important role in different International Organizations. South Africa had started its role in these organizations particularly in the post apartheid period. In the UN, the issue of permanent membership to Security Council is an important agenda for new government in South Africa. South Africa has been actively involved in the human rights issues, environment and other development programmes of the UN. It has been seen that the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955 in Bandung was the important beginning of Asia-Africa relations. South Africa has been a key supporter of the Afro-Asian co-operation under umbrella of AU and ASEAN. It is also found that the political and economic relations between South Africa and the ASEAN countries have been improved in the post apartheid period till today.

Recommendation

The present article recommends that new research can be carried out the study of South Africa and ASEAN relations in the context of new avenues and post Covid -19 since 2020.

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³³ However, being resource-rich but infrastructure-poor, due to the country's geographic position and water resources, there are opportunities in road construction, railways, electricity development and mineral exploration.

³⁴ Trade Statistics (all figures have been given in South African Rand)