South Africa

Africa's Reluctant and Conflicted Regional Power

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This article enquires into South Africa's regional role in Africa from the dissolution of apartheid in 1994 through the end of Thabo Mbeki's presidency in 2008. South Africa was widely expected to play a major role throughout the African continent with the end of apartheid and Nelson Mandela's election to the South African presidency. Both South Africa's economic clout and Mandela's standing as a global embodiment of forbearance and patient statesmanship made South African leadership on the continent seem inevitable. Yet, by most accounts, South Africa has failed to live up to its promise of leadership. In general, that country has much more often and successfully played the role of Africa's global representative than it has that of a continental hegemon or leader. As described below, it is in fact quite difficult to characterize or label South Africa's continental role although there is no denying that it is a "regional power."[1] This article asks, then, why South Africa has failed to live up to its promise as a regional leader.

The study proceeds as follows. First, it outlines South Africa's potential as a leader beginning in 1994. Across several dimensions, the country has had unique potential to provide strong regional leadership since that time. Second, the article offers an outline sketch of South Africa's foreign policy in several key areas during the period in question. It obviously cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of the country's record, depending mostly on secondary literature to summarize South African behavior. Although South Africa clearly did become embroiled in many of the continent's most treacherous conflicts and controversial issues, it rarely proved decisive in setting agendas, resolving conflicts, or establishing and enforcing new norms of behavior. The third section begins by reconsidering how South Africa's role as a regional power can best be characterized and then enquires into the sources of its foreign policy behavior. After examining a number of hypotheses, the article argues that one can best understand South Africa's failure

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to lead by focusing on the country's domestic politics—especially the legacy of its ruling African National Congress (ANC).

South Africa's Potential as a Regional Power

There is little doubt that South Africa was the preeminent regional power in sub-Saharan Africa in 1990, the year of Mandela's release from his 27-year imprisonment. During the dark years of apartheid, South Africa had built up a formidable military machine anchored by the Armaments Corporation of South Africa, established in 1968. This state enterprise produced a wide array of military equipment that included armored vehicles, tanks, self-propelled artillery, and a variety of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. These weapons were produced in considerable quantity and deployed by South Africa's armed forces, which gained major operational experience in fighting the foes of apartheid abroad, especially the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola government. Indeed, Angola surely would have been overrun by the South African defense forces in 1975 or in subsequent years had it not been for the massive deployment of Cuban troops and Soviet weapons and advisers to that country. The total numbers in the "South African Defense Forces" numbered only about 80,000 during the 1980s, but they were the most capable in sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa even developed chemical, biological, and atomic weapons in the 1970s.[2]

Following Mandela's election in 1994, his administration and subsequent South African governments have allowed the quality and budget of the (renamed) South African National Defense Forces to decline. This fact is altogether understandable given (a) the domestic development focus of the postapartheid governments and (b) the termination of South Africa's conflicts with its neighbors. Nonetheless, in 2015 that country's defense forces remained the fourth most powerful military in Africa (behind those of Egypt, Algeria, and Ethiopia) and the second most powerful in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a leading website.[3] Further, if one compares South Africa with its leading military competitors (Nigeria and Ethiopia), it is clear that South Africa is the only one of the three with the ability to *project* power reliably within the continent. The table below provides a snapshot of the basic military strength and ability to project force of sub-Saharan Africa's three regional powers. The figures clearly indicate that South Africa has some limited ability to project power, making it a potentially significant partner in peacemaking missions and a nation capable of engaging in "forceful diplomacy," if not one able to dominate the subcontinent.

Table. Armed forces of sub-Saharan Africa's leading regional powers, 2015

	Personnel	*Total Aircraft*	*Transport Aircraft*	*Attack Aircraft*	*Frigates and Submarines*
Ethiopia	182,500	81	38	22	0
Nigeria	130,000	98	42	19	2
South Africa	88,565	209	106	29	7

Source: "African Countries Ranked by Military Power (2015)," Global Firepower, 15 August 2015, http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-africa.asp.

In terms of economics, South Africa was and remains sub-Saharan Africa's undisputed leader, with a gross domestic product (GDP) standing at $351 billion in 2014.[4] This status was as much the case in 1994 as in 2014: the country has been the subcontinent's undeniable leader since the advent of majority rule there. South Africa's only rival among black African countries was Nigeria, which claimed to have a GDP topping $500 billion in 2014. The next highest ranking GDP in Africa in 2014 was Angola's—only slightly more than one-third that of South Africa. As for Nigeria, no one can really say what its real GDP is, given the chaotic nature of the country's public institutions and the absence of reliable data.[5] GDP per capita in South Africa was roughly six times that of Nigeria. Further, South Africa is a significant manufacturing country whereas Nigeria mainly exports oil. South Africa has leading banks (notably Standard Bank of South Africa, Sanlam, and FirstRand) with branches in several other African countries, but Nigeria has no such peer. South Africa has major multinational companies in the areas of telecommunications (MTN, Vodafone), mining (DeBeers, AngloGold), chemicals and fuels (Sasol), and brewing (SABMiller). Accordingly, it boasts a foreign investment potential that far exceeds that of Nigeria or any other African peer.

Finally, one should not underestimate South Africa's moral authority in sub-Saharan Africa, although this asset may be wasting. The heroic struggle of black, "colored," and white foes of apartheid over more than 30 years and the freeing of Mandela remain an unparalleled epic of liberation in the African consciousness. Not only are most Africans proud of the ability of South Africans to liberate themselves from racial tyranny, but also many of them feel that they contributed to that cause. Mandela, of course, embodied the courage and extraordinary character of South Africa's freedom fighters, but following his departure from power, the ANC party continues to represent the historic quest for freedom in that nation. Accordingly, all of South Africa's successive governments have enjoyed an unequalled voice in African continental affairs on this moral basis. Even if its military and economic power had been less, South Africa should naturally have

exerted considerable diplomatic leverage with its African peers following the end of apartheid.

The most important qualification that one should make about South Africa's outsized potential for regional leadership is that concerning geography. Its capability for regional or subregional hegemony would have been increased considerably if the country had been physically situated elsewhere on the continent. In military terms, a nation located where the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is found would have more potential to intervene readily in the conflicts of most of the states of the continent. Even in terms of foreign investment, South Africa naturally finds it much easier to invest in Mozambique, for instance, than in Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, or Gabon. Indeed, South Africa has invested far more on a per capita basis in the states it borders than those thousands of kilometers further north. Only South Africa's moral suasion is unaffected by its location on the southern African extremity.

South Africa's Performance as a "Regional Power"

The evidence presented above suggests that South Africa is a "regional power" and might have seriously tried to act as a continental hegemon if it had wished to do so. The corroboration presented below, however, suggests that it has not done so. Yet, South Africa has sometimes taken an important role in regional affairs. This ambiguity leaves us wondering how one could best characterize South Africa's regional role. One good place to begin is the excellent work of Miriam Prys, who has created a valuable typology of roles played by "regional powers." According to her, they may play one of three relatively more active or passive roles:

> At the one extreme, we have "regional dominators": A clear characteristic of domination is its one-sidedness. The state at a center of such a constellation, the regional dominator, commands and extracts involuntary tributes from the secondary states under a constant threat of force. A "hegemon," in contrast, carries most of the burdens in the region and, at most, collects contributions from the secondary states, which are mostly used for the production of common goods. Furthermore, dominating or imperialistic states directly infringe on the external and internal sovereignty of other states, whereas a hegemon, in the ideal case, refrains from doing so. On the other end of the continuum, we can find "detached regional powers," induced either by insufficient resources or, for instance, by a lack of identification with the region. Such an actor will focus largely on domestic and/or on global politics, instead of on its regional role. The three ideal-types of regional powerhood thus capture a fairly complete spectrum of different roles a regional power can play.[6]

Considering this tripartite typology, one would have to say that South Africa has more often been a "detached regional power" than a hegemon. It has never tried to be a regional "dominator" in any context except perhaps that of the Southern African Customs Union, which groups South Africa with Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland.[7] In that venue, South Africa has dominated without much effort and has often tried not to appear as a bully in asserting its prerogatives. In the larger context of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), however, South Africa's tentative efforts to establish hegemony have been "contested."[8] Although it overshadows all other states of this subregion economically and makes considerable financial investments in several states, outside powers are greater investors in Angolan oil, Congolese copper, and Tanzanian gas, for instance. In the greater subcontinent, South Africa has often been a passive regional power. As Prys suggests, that country has been far more focused on domestic politics (and development) and secondarily on playing a global role as Africa's chief representative. At the regional level, South Africa's rhetoric has gained some currency, but it has hardly "carried most of the burdens," and it has certainly not "collected contributions" unless one counts some investment returns. One would expect a regional hegemon to *create norms* that other states would follow. As Chris Alden and Garth le Pere contend, to act as a hegemon "mean[s] managing the challenges of organizing institutions and inculcating new regimes amongst African states as well as disciplining errant states and/or their policies which contradict or challenge these authoritative structures."[9] In this area, South Africa has made only a modest contribution. It does not fit neatly, then, into any of Prys's three categories of regional powers.

To gain a clearer picture of South Africa's regional role, let us examine the ensemble of its behavior in that arena. We should address the country's roles as (a) a propagator of regional political norms, (b) an advocate for positive social transformations around the continent, (c) a broadcaster of economic ideology and an enforcer of certain economic norms that could drive economic development, and (d) a practitioner of forceful diplomacy in the region's conflicts. A sampling of South Africa's activities in these areas will help us better understand how to characterize its regional role.

Starting with South Africa's activities in propagating and inculcating political norms within Africa, its part has been distinctly and surprisingly limited. At the rhetorical level, Mbeki has famously pronounced on the inevitability of an "African Renaissance." In broad terms, the idea of such a renaissance suggests many overlapping and reinforcing notions: that a new period of African unity was at hand; that Africa would soon play a much larger and positive role in world affairs; that governance with African states was on the verge of becoming more

democratic; and that the fulfillment of the economic needs of Africa would soon be realized, among others. Yet, serious analysts of the idea of an African Renaissance have savaged it for its vagueness and impracticality. Notably, Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko have pointed out that "South Africa's idea of an African Renaissance is abstruse, puzzling, even perhaps mysterious; more promise than policy." They go on to assert that "notwithstanding claims that the idea of an African Renaissance now stands at the very centre of South Africa's entire diplomatic endeavor, its essential features remain deliberately vague; it is high on sentiment, low on substance."[10]

In terms of concrete outcomes, democratization has not fared well in Africa since the advent of majority rule in South Africa. A majority of the democratic experiments that began shortly after the conclusion of the Cold War in Africa had failed by the end of the 1990s.[11] South Africa has generally seemed insouciant about the decline of African democracy; it has rarely if ever made an issue of the death of democratic regimes on the continent. Similarly, it has not objected to such notorious dictators as Denis Sassou-Nguesso (2006–7), Mu'ammar Gadhafi (2009–10), and Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (2011–12) becoming chairperson of the African Union (AU). Even several African states that are geographically close to South Africa and which opened their political space to political competition in the early 1990s (including Angola, Mozambique, and Madagascar) have generally failed to make any progress toward real democracy. Meanwhile, and most spectacularly, South Africa's immediate neighbor Zimbabwe has gone in the opposite direction. Whereas Zimbabwe still enjoyed relatively open and peaceful political competition in 1994, it has since become a personalist authoritarian regime. South Africa has also done little or nothing to promote pluralism in Swaziland, a politically premodern kingdom that offers few rights to its citizens and treats women abysmally.

One might object that South Africa does have a political vision for African states but simply that it is not one of multiparty democracy. Some African regimes, notably that of Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, have occasionally argued that multiparty democracy is the wrong political formula for Africa. Implicitly, some African regimes have suggested that the Chinese one-party model may be better suited to African class development or political culture. South Africa, however, has not articulated any such alternative political vision for Africa in place of multiparty democracy. Instead, it is largely silent on the question of what form the domestic politics of African states should take.

Nor has South Africa taken a strong stand in favor of human rights on the African continent. To the contrary, much of the world has been disappointed in its apparent indifference to the large-scale human rights abuses perpetrated by the

regime of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Yet, South Africa's behavior on human rights in Africa (and beyond) goes beyond mere indifference. One scholar studying its behavior in the United Nations Human Rights Council has "concluded that South Africa has become a defender of unpalatable regimes and an obstacle to the international promotion of human rights."[12] Within the council, South Africa has presented itself as one of the leaders of the African bloc, along with Egypt and Algeria, and has proved itself "one of the more obstructive states in the Africa Group" when it comes to punishing or condemning human rights abusers.[13] Other African states, including Zambia, Mauritius, and Ghana, on the other hand, have sometimes dissented from opinions of the African Group, which has often ignored or apologized for regional human rights abuses.[14]

At the level of interstate norms or relations among African states, South Africa *has* played a somewhat more positive role, but it has failed to reinforce the principles that it appears to have advanced. Africanists widely understand that Mbeki, along with Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and Libya's Mu'ammar Gadhafi, was instrumental in developing the "blueprint" for the new AU.[15] In recognition of this role, the inaugural meeting of the new organization took place in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. In turn, the Constitutive Act of the new AU made two important advances (from the liberal internationalist point of view) on the old Charter of the Organization of African Union. First, Article 4(h) asserted "the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity."[16] This new principle accorded the AU the right of collective intervention in cases of grievous human rights abuses, including genocide, by member states. The second innovation is Article 4(p), which provides for the "condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments."[17] This principle would seem to reject the participation in the AU of African governments that had come to power by coup d'état.

South Africa's part in the insertion of these two principles in the AU's constitutive act remains unclear since deliberations over the act were not public. Certainly, though, neither one of these new principles has been respected in practice.[18] The AU has authorized only one collective intervention: restoration of the sovereignty of the government of the Comoros over one of its constituent islands that attempted to secede under the leadership of a rogue governor. It has not intervened in any serious way against the mass atrocities of Sudan and the eastern DRC, to name the two most egregious cases. Nor has the AU taken any serious action against those who overthrew existing leaders through coups d'état (i.e., "unconstitutional changes of government"). In the years that succeeded the adoption of the Constitutive Act, there were coups in Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005

and 2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), and Niger (2010).[19] However, South Africa took no substantive action to have these states suspended from the AU. Typically, the new regimes of the states in which coups occurred were initially condemned by the AU, and some suffered brief suspensions from the Union. Once a new "constitutional order" was restored under the same coup-making regimes, however, they were all allowed to retake their places in the AU. Thus, the new principles enshrined in the organization's constitutive act have not been respected in practice. In fact, they make the body appear to have no respect for the rule of law, since it does not respect its own principles. South Africa has raised no objection to these hypocritical practices.

Turning to South Africa's efforts to improve socioeconomic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa, let us consider its policies on AIDS as an illustrative example. One early book on South Africa's foreign policy by a highly respected Africanist includes not a single mention of HIV/AIDS in the entire volume.[20] This neglect reflects not only the author's possible lack of interest in the subject but also the absence of HIV/AIDS as a subject of South Africa's foreign policies, even when millions of Africans were infected in South Africa and in neighboring countries. With respect to Mbeki, of course, the former South African president's "denialism" about the true source of AIDS is well known. A great many of his own fellow citizens were outraged by Mbeki's policies on HIV/AIDS within South Africa, policies that followed his extremely heterodox—and frankly disastrous—views. The Young Communist League of South Africa even called for a "judicial commission of inquiry with prosecutorial powers" to investigate whether his policies made him "guilty of mass murder."[21] Since Mbeki did not accept that HIV was the cause of AIDS at home, he unsurprisingly undertook no campaign to battle HIV in continental Africa.[22] Although South Africa's lack of action on HIV/AIDS is only illustrative, no other significant initiatives in favor of social improvement were evident in the country's foreign policy over the same years.

A third potential area of hegemonic activity for South Africa would be as a broadcaster of economic ideals or as an enforcer of economic norms that could drive economic development. Critics of both Mandela and Mbeki on the left have decried the alleged sellout of South Africa's majority-rule leaders to global capitalism. Characteristic of this view, Patrick Bond remarks that "Mbeki and his main allies have already succumbed to the class . . . limitations of post-independence African nationalism, namely acting in close collaboration with hostile transnational corporate and multilateral forces whose interests are directly opposed to those of Mbeki's South Africa and African constituencies."[23] Many others on the South African left share this view.[24] At home, both Mandela and then Mbeki abandoned the ANC's long-held commitment to socialism and pursued

promarket-oriented economic policies as well as conservative fiscal policies. Instead of following policies of redistribution, both sought "black economic empowerment" within the liberal market system, leavened with modest doses of affirmative action for nonwhites.[25]

At the regional level, however, one cannot discern the systematic dissemination of any coherent economic ideology. Alden and le Pere claim that South Africa's economic ideals are not embedded in continental institutions, limiting its influence. Further, they argue that the country's ideas do not resonate much with other leaders of African people: "The ideas promulgated by the South African state—principally in the form of the 'African renaissance' and its programmatic NEPAD [New Partnership for African Development] initiative—have only limited traction amongst regional elites and seemingly are unrecognized by the masses."[26] South Africa has certainly, and hardly surprisingly, sought to promote the investment activities of its own companies throughout the Africa continent, including many of the leading ones mentioned above. Ideologically, though, South Africa has *not* sought to replicate its "close collaboration" with capitalist forces within the African continent; on the contrary, it has competed with them. South Africa might quite reasonably have promoted any one of three distinctive economic models for its Africa peers: (1) the quite orthodox promarket policies that it generally pursues at home; (2) the kind of socialist and redistributionist policies that marked the rhetoric of former president Mbeki when he condemned the capitalist West; or (3) the kind of state-directed and nationalist policies that have been so successfully pursued in East Asia.[27] In practice, South Africa has not articulated any specific model for the development of its less-developed African peers, and in this regard it has been distinctly nonhegemonic.

Finally, let us consider the country's record as a practitioner of forceful diplomacy in the regional context. One important analyst of South Africa's foreign policy has claimed that the country began to emerge as the key diplomatic player during negotiations to end the epic war of the DRC that broke out in 1998. According to Chris Landsberg, "It was through that move [intervening in the DRC conflict as a mediator] that Pretoria decisively emerged as a regional power outside of the SADC area. Pretoria effectively upstaged the external great powers such as the United States, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom as the new regional power on the block."[28] Several years later, the same scholar reaffirmed his view that South Africa had become a regional hegemon with respect to resolving regional conflicts:

> [Under President Mbeki] South Africa played key mediatory and peacekeeping roles in Lesotho, where it helped to end a coup d'état, and in the [DRC] and Burundi. It helped to negotiate global peace agreements, albeit fragile ones, based

> on power-sharing arrangements, in Cote d'Ivoire, Comoros, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Mbeki was at pains to ensure that South Africa executed this role under the auspices of multilateral authority of, variously, the [SADC], the African Union (AU), and the UN Security Council.[29]

Yet, considerable evidence makes us doubt this conclusion about South Africa's role in the DRC. Landsberg himself seemed to have reservations in 2002, writing "*regionally*, within SADC, the reviews on Pretoria's diplomacy were decidedly mixed. While some observers saw an emerging regional power, others witnessed an ambivalent regional power that did not know how to wield influence" (emphasis in original).[30] Indeed, that view extends outside the SADC region. First, South Africa took no significant action during the crisis of 1994–96 in eastern Congo while hundreds of thousands of Rwandans took refuge in Congolese territory. The continuing presidency of Mobutu Sese Seko had become a problem for the entire Great Lakes region as well as for Angola. In this great crisis, Mobutu was defeated and removed from power by (chiefly) Angola, Rwanda, and Uganda while South Africa essentially stood by with Mandela engaging in naïve attempts at negotiation. After the installation in power of Laurent Kabila, this ruler, too, soon proved both ineffective and menacing to his neighbors. Again, South Africa played no major part in his ouster, although it did host talks that led to the December 2002 "Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the D.R. Congo." Even in those talks, however, Ketumile Masire, the former president of Botswana, served as the "neutral mediator" rather than Mbeki.

Alas, the 2002 Agreement on the DRC hardly ended conflict in that country. Although Angola, Rwanda, and Uganda officially withdrew their troops, fighting continued in the east of the country, including the two Kivu regions (North and South) and in the Ituri province of the Équateur region. Rwanda periodically dispatched its troops into the Kivu regions while also funneling arms and material to various Tutsi-led militia groups. The last and most notorious of these was the M-23 rebels, a group that periodically took control of Goma, capital of North Kivu. Meanwhile, to the extent that anyone was "enforcing" the 2002 Global and Inclusive Agreement, that task fell to the "International Committee in Support of the Transition."[31] The ambassadors to the DRC of 15 leading states and international bodies (including the European Union [EU] and AU) composed this unparalleled diplomatic creation. South Africa's ambassador was among the group of 15, but he was hardly the leading figure.[32] Its main purpose was to keep the peace in the DRC leading up to the (surprisingly) free and fair elections of 2006. These were mainly funded by the EU, individual EU member states, and the United States. South Africa did not play a major part either in imposing peace on the DRC or in getting the difficult elections organized.

In the following years, the activities of various rebel groups in the Kivus and Ituri erupted periodically, and neither the Forces Armeés de la République Populaire du Congo (FARDC) nor the large United Nations (UN) mission in Congo (successively, MONUC [UN Organization Mission in the DRC] and then MONUSCO [UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC]) was able to tame them. The two UN missions, in fact, had no mandate to do so. The murderous activities of eastern Congo's rebels was an outrage to the world and a major irritant to all of the states of the Great Lakes region save Rwanda, which continued to sponsor the Tutsi-dominated groups. Finally, several of these states had had enough, especially the president of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete. According to the former Dutch military commander of UN forces in eastern Congo, "The strategy of deploying a military force to offensively engage with the rebel groups in eastern DRC was conceived and agreed to by African regional powers in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in July 2012."[33] This group did not include South Africa, which apparently had no role in the decision to throttle eastern Congo's rebels once and for all. Later, a UN "intervention brigade," attached to the larger UN mission in Congo, received a mandate to engage in offensive actions against eastern Congo's rebels, and South Africa did contribute forces to this remarkable group.

Vale describes Mbeki's foreign policy as a "riddle," pointing to the myriad contradictions rife in his foreign policy initiatives.[34] Among these were South Africa's instinct for solidarity with its African peers on the one hand and its recognition of liberalism as the dominant global ideology on the other. A parallel contradiction was South Africa's resistance to the West's resolve to impose its human rights standards on certain rogue regimes (like that of Myanmar, where Aung San Suu Kyi replaced Mandela as "the world's most famous detainee" after 1990)[35] while also hoping to live up to the human rights aspirations embodied by Mandela.

Much of Vale's analysis focuses on Zimbabwe, which experienced extreme sociopolitical violence following the elections of 2008 and a complete economic collapse thereafter. South Africa had contradictory impulses about Zimbabwe that it never resolved: many South African elites were troubled by the extremely violent measures that President Mugabe resorted to after the elections; however, those same elites seem to have valued their loyalty to Mugabe, based on his steadfast support of the ANC prior to 1994, more highly than they did the lives of Zimbabwean citizens. They also apparently had no desire to intervene outright in Zimbabwe. Accordingly, South Africa declined to cooperate with Western efforts to sanction Mugabe but also was reluctant to apologize for his violence. In short, South African policy was contradictory. In the end, the country helped negotiate

the ill-fated power-sharing agreement between Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai in September 2008. The upshot of this deal was that Mugabe maintained real power in Zimbabwe whereas Tsvangirai was politically delegitimized as an opposition figure. The latter agreed to become a powerless prime minister, presiding over a "unity" cabinet and thus losing legitimacy as an opposition leader. In a weak neighboring state where South Africa might have brought down a despot or even provoked a deeper crisis to bring change, it instead practiced a "quiet diplomacy" that led to a deceitful and doomed diplomatic compromise—hardly the behavior of a determined hegemon.

These observations about South African behavior on the continent, of course, are only illustrative. A comprehensive analysis would require a book-length study. Such a fuller analysis might include some more examples of "hegemon-like" behavior. On the whole, though, the analysis above suggests that South Africa failed to perform the roles characteristic of regional hegemons: it generally did not try to propagate political norms for the continent; in the case of HIV/AIDS, it was virtually the opposite of an advocate for positive social transformations across the continent; and, as an economic actor, it failed to either broadcast or embody an economic model that other African states might emulate. In the important arena of diplomacy, it must be said that South Africa's record was more mixed. The country did often make itself available as a mediator of critical conflicts in the region, particularly in the DRC. It was not generally willing to back the diplomatic deals it brokered with military force, though, except in the case of the UN's "intervention brigade." In this instance, however, other actors had taken the lead.

South Africa: A Reluctant and Conflicted Power

This analysis leaves us with two difficult questions. First, how can we best characterize South Africa's regional behavior in Africa? One might be tempted to refer to South Africa as a "passive hegemon," a phrase sometimes used by international relations theorists to describe reluctant great powers, but South Africa is neither (completely) passive nor hegemonic beyond its very immediate environs. Nor, on the other hand, do any of the labels suggested by Prys ("regional dominator," "hegemon," and "detached regional power") accurately capture South Africa's behavior.[36] It is quite clear that the country lacks either the military might or the will to be a "regional dominator." Nonetheless, as Alden and le Pere note, "The African renaissance, the formulation and launch of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the construction of the African Union, not to mention efforts to broaden the trade and security agenda at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) level, all speak to South Africa's *ambitions* to

realize a hegemonic presence on the continent" (emphasis added).[37] These activities and some of the high-level diplomacy in which South Africa has frequently engaged show that it cannot be described as either a "detached regional power" or a "passive hegemon."

Unfortunately, no clear set of descriptors serves to describe well the role that South Africa has played in Africa since the end of apartheid. By virtue of both its objective power capabilities and its ambitions for regional leadership, South Africa can be fairly described as a "regional power." Oddly, it has much more often tried to act as spokesperson for the African continent on the global stage than it has a hegemon on the continent; in turn, the international community has also accepted South Africa in this role. This behavior bespeaks its regional power status. In its regional behavior, however, South Africa has been a *reluctant and ambivalent regional power*. This conclusion again raises the question posed by Alden and le Pere: "Why is South Africa falling short of fulfilling the requirements of hegemony, especially when it appears to meet all the conventional conditions for dominance of the continent?"[38] Their own work gives no clear answer and ends with an inward-looking lament about South Africa's continuing domestic difficulties.[39]

Let us briefly consider five different possible causes of South Africa's "underperformance" as a regional power. For one, there is the obvious issue of geography, referenced above. South Africa's peripheral location in relation to the geographic center of continental Africa certainly limits its ability to respond in a military fashion to crises around the continent. Its intervention in Lesotho (under cover of a SADC mandate) in 1998 suggests the possibility of more South African hegemonic behavior if it bordered other crisis areas. Yet, its inaction in Zimbabwe, a neighboring country whose internal instability has had major consequences for South African society in the form of hundreds of thousands of Zimbabwe refugees, suggests otherwise. Nor has South Africa taken any notable action to shape the politics of its other neighbors—Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, and Swaziland. Moreover, hegemonic influence does not usually require either military force or proximity. South African (hypothetical) policy statements on such phenomena as "unconstitutional changes of government," mass murder in the Darfur region of Sudan, the advent of Salafist groups in northwest Africa, and other troubling issues would have been as important to establish a clear role for itself as a continental leader. In short, geography is not the main key to South Africa's reluctant and ambivalent behavior.

Second, one might reasonably consider whether some state or organization at the global level has constrained South African hegemonic behavior in Africa. Yet, all of the prima facie evidence suggests otherwise. Nothing more clearly sig-

nals the readiness of the "international community" for South Africa to play the role of continent hegemon than its inclusion in the G-20 group of nations in 1999 as the sole African member. For its part, the United States has long sought "African solutions to African problems," less as a principled ideological stand than as expediency in the face of threats perceived to be greater. The Clinton administration infamously stood by in 1994 as the genocide unfolded in Rwanda, keeping its gaze firmly averted from Africa; it was hardly even mobilized to act when two US embassies were destroyed (in Kenya and Tanzania) in 1998; the George W. Bush administration focused squarely on Afghanistan and then Iraq in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks; and President Barack Obama has sought to avoid foreign action anywhere abroad, except by drone. China also demurs when it comes to taking political leadership in Africa and has no logical reason to oppose South African assertiveness.

Three other factors account for South Africa's reluctant and ambivalent behavior on the continent. First, the African continental environment is one over which even a highly capable and legitimate state would have difficulty ever exercising hegemony. Compared to Latin America, for instance, Africa is extraordinarily diverse, both socially and politically. The number of different identity communities ("ethnic groups") far surpasses that of any other continent, and the diversity in worldview among them is remarkable. The main source of social unity in Africa derives from a sense of common and collective victimhood at the hands of European slave traders and then colonizers. This "negative" source of collective identity is far weaker than that provided by, say, the Catholic Church in Latin America. Moreover, South Africa remains somewhat apart from the common African identity that does exist despite the erstwhile solidarity of black Africa with the ANC during its long years of repression. Not only South Africa's white racial minority but also many of its elite blacks consider themselves apart from the rest of Africa.[40]

Politically as well, Africa was marked by great diversity at the moment that South Africa emerged from its long ordeal of minority rule. Exercising hegemony over the continent's international norms was surely easier in the era when the de jure one-party state was the rule, and the intervention of one state in the internal affairs of its neighbors was the exception. By the advent of the Mandela presidency in 1994, Africa was populated by a wide array of polity types: a handful of states were in the early stages of democratic consolidation, following democratic transitions; in others, new democratic experiments were beginning to fail, and disorder was taking hold; in still others, old autocrats were in the process of turning their former one-party states into "electoral autocracies." Even two kingdoms (Morocco and Swaziland) survived on the margins of the continent. Although

Western states, including both the United States and Africa's former colonizers, were generally pushing for "democracy" or at least some form of "multipartyism," their efforts proved limited. South African elites observed this chaotic scene from a closer vantage than any outsiders and surely soon realized that the imposition of a single form of domestic rule was out of the question. Meanwhile, this new diversity of domestic political forms following the collapse of the legitimacy of the one-party model drew into question the *interstate* norms that had prevailed since the advent of the Organization of African Unity in 1963.[41]

Second, South Africa is far weaker as a continental power than it seems on the surface. As described in the first section, above, South Africa has all of the tangible elements it requires to serve as a continental hegemon for Africa, but it decidedly lacks the essential *intangible* elements that allow a "regional power" to play hegemonic roles. Above all, South Africa has no common sense of national identity or of continental purpose. Bluntly stated, South Africans are not sufficiently united as a people for their own government to act on their behalf in a coherent way. The divides that cleave South African society, of course, are primarily racial, but ethnic divides within the black community also remain important. South Africa's *11* official languages reflect this reality. Class cleavages are also very deep.

This lack of coherence of the national population is reflected in the only partially integrated quality of South Africa's public institutions. Within the South African public service, the challenge of integration has arguably degraded the organizational effectiveness of the bureaucracy.[42] Within the armed forces, the integration of six different "statutory" and two "nonstatutory" military organizations in the country as of 1990 has proved a daunting challenge that has been only partially overcome.[43] As a result, the contemporary armed forces of South Africa are far less capable as a military machine than those of apartheid-era South Africa. Neither the military's declining budget nor the diminution of the country's weapons stock has weakened it most; rather, its fundamental sense of identity and purpose has eroded. This is hardly regrettable, given the circumstances.

Third, and most critical, is the nature of domestic politics in South Africa that limits the country's hegemonic potential in Africa. Since the nation is politically dominated by the ANC—a party with enormous historical legitimacy and international status as the body that brought freedom to the country's majority—it might seem at first glance to be well set politically for a vigorous external role. Instead, the ANC is beset with a number of problems that limit its effectiveness in both foreign and domestic policy. Ironically, one of them is the ANC's dominance of the South African political landscape. The ANC has won each of the five parliamentary elections between 1994 and 2014 with a relatively steady percent-

age of the vote, ranging from 62 percent (in 2014) to 70 percent (in 2004). Because of the ANC's 20-year dominance of South African politics, democracy has never been fully "consolidated" in the country. More significantly, all ANC leaders of the current generation continue to feel a "comradely" debt of gratitude toward their former (and continuing) supporters in other African countries. Many of the foreign ruling parties, and even individuals, that supported the ANC under apartheid remain in power across Africa. Thus, it is hardly surprising that South Africa might be reluctant to employ forceful diplomacy with countries like Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, or Zimbabwe. These former "frontline" states are all still ruled by the parties that ran them during apartheid, and all supported the ANC.

The ANC's political dominance of South Africa is also problematic for the country's foreign policy because the party has become rife with bitterly opposed factions. The ANC's infighting is hardly surprising, given the inevitable fashion in which the party of Mandela dominates the political space. Cleavages within the party prevent it from developing a unified and coherent foreign policy that it might implement on behalf of the nation. Meanwhile, the ANC's political domination also makes many of South Africa's weak opposition parties reluctant to fully support its foreign policies. Both black-dominated parties to the left of the ANC and white- and/or "colored"-dominated parties to the right resent the ANC too much to support it fully in foreign affairs.

Finally, the ANC is rather schizophrenic in its internal economic policy positions, and this "disease" is reflected in South Africa's failure to articulate a coherent ideology of economic development for the African continent. The fundamental economic policy dilemma of the ANC is clear, simple, and completely understandable. On the one hand, it has long been a party that staked its claim to power on "economic justice" as well as on racial justice. That is, the ANC implicitly promised its constituents rapidly improving economic conditions, based on state control of the economy and forcible redistribution of wealth, if necessary. On the other hand, the ANC has never been in a position to carry out this threat vis-à-vis the capital-owning classes of the country. If it had adopted such policies in the 1990s, large-scale capital flight from the country would have been immediate, and most foreign investment would have ceased. This in turn would have sent the economy into an immediate spiral downwards, making its desire to improve the welfare of the country's black majority even more difficult. Moreover, in the 20 years since majority rule, the formerly tiny class of capital-owning blacks in the country has expanded considerably. Many of these, in turn, have direct ties with the ANC. Consequently, the ANC is more reluctant than ever to apply confiscatory economic policies to South Africa's elite in pursuit of social justice. This ex-

istential dilemma of South African domestic economic policy is reflected in the country's foreign policy: it hardly knows whether to recommend liberal market economics or socialist redistribution to its African peers, and it ends up having no coherent economic message at all.

It seems most unlikely that South African society or politics will experience a sudden coalescence of national identity or national unity in the near future. The cleavages wrought by centuries of racism and a half century of formal apartheid have bequeathed the benighted country a politics fraught with suspicion and antagonism. Whereas the ANC's political ascendency seems assured for the coming decades, a deeper integration of the society seems even further away than it did shortly after the incomparable Mandela took power in 1994. The dream of true unity in the "Rainbow Nation" remains firmly on the horizon. Until that dream becomes more of a reality, it is impossible that South Africa will exercise the level of influence over the affairs and ideals of the African continent that its military might and economic prowess would otherwise suggest.

Notes

1. See Miriam Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood," *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (November 2010): 479–504.

2. Helen E. Purkitt and Stephen F. Burgess, *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

3. "African Countries Ranked by Military Power (2015)," Global Firepower, 15 August 2015, http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-africa.asp.

4. "South Africa: Economic Indicators," Trading Economics, 11 December 2015, http://www.tradingeco nomics.com/south-africa/indicators.

5. Further, the halving of petroleum prices in late 2014 and early 2015 has surely reduced the notional size of Nigeria below that of South Africa again.

6. Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment," 489.

7. Chris Alden and Garth le Pere, "South Africa's Post-apartheid Foreign Policy: From Reconciliation to Ambiguity?," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 100 (2004): 150–52.

8. SADC groups together 15 African states, including all of those in southern Africa; the DRC and Tanzania; and the island states of Mauritius and Seychelles. Alden and le Pere, "Post-apartheid Foreign Policy," 152–56.

9. Ibid., 148.

10. Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko, "Thabo Mbeki, South Africa, and the Idea of an African Renaissance," in *Thabo Mbeki's World: The Ideology and Politics of the South African President*, ed. Sean Jacobs and Richard Calland (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 124 and 125.

11. Leonardo A. Villalòn and Peter VonDoepp, eds., *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

12. Eduard Jordaan, "South Africa and the United Nations Human Rights Council," *Human Rights Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (February 2014): 90.

13. Ibid., 94.

14. Ibid.

15. Chris Landsberg, "Thabo Mbeki's Legacy of Transformational Diplomacy," in *Mbeki and After: Reflections on the Legacy of Thabo Mbeki*, ed. Daryl Glaser (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 220–21.

16. Constitutive Act of the African Union, 7, accessed 11 December 2015, http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ConstitutiveAct_EN.pdf. For an early analysis, see Ben Kioko, "The Right of Intervention under the African

Union's Constitutive Act: From Non-interference to Non-intervention," *International Review of the Red Cross*, no. 852 (2003): 807–25.

17. Constitutive Act of the African Union, 7.

18. On the nonimplementation of Article 4(h), see Dan Kuwali and Frans Viljoen, eds., *Africa and the Responsibility to Protect: Article 4(h) of the African Union Constitutive Act* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2014).

19. Eki Yemisi Omorogbe, "A Club of Incumbents? The African Union and Coups d'État," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 44, no. 123 (January 2012): 137–52, http://www.vanderbilt.edu/jotl/manage/wp-content/uploads/omorogbe-cr.pdf.

20. Ian Taylor, *Stuck in Middle GEAR: South Africa's Post-apartheid Foreign Relations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

21. Mark Gevisser, "Why Is Thabo Mbeki a 'Nitemare'?," in Glaser, *Mbeki and After*, 63.

22. Ironically, it was (conservative) George W. Bush, in the form of his Presidential Emergency Plan for Aids Relief and other extracontinental donors and activists, who came to the assistance of Africa's HIV-infected multitudes.

23. Patrick Bond, "Thabo Mbeki and NEPAD: Breaking or Shining the Chains of Global Apartheid?," in Jacobs and Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World*, 53.

24. John Saul, "Cry for the Beloved Country: The Post-apartheid Denouement," in Jacobs and Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World*, 27–51.

25. William Mervin Gumede, "Down to Business, but Nothing to Show," in Jacobs and Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World*, 206–17.

26. Alden and le Pere, "Post-apartheid Foreign Policy," 151.

27. For a description of such policies, see for instance Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

28. Landsberg, "Impossible Neutrality?," 180.

29. Landsberg, "Thabo Mbeki's Legacy," 217.

30. Landsberg, "Impossible Neutrality?," 180.

31. Meike de Goede and Chris van der Borgh, "A Role for Diplomats in Postwar Transitions? The Case of the International Committee in Support of the Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *African Security* 1, no. 2 (2008): 92–114.

32. Personal communication with one of the former ambassadors, January 2015.

33. Maj Gen Patrick Cammaert, retired, "Issue Brief: The UN Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," International Peace Institute, 5, July 2013, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20UN%20Intervention%20Brigade%20in%20the%20Democratic%20Republic%20of%20the%20Congo.pdf.

34. Peter Vale, "Thabo Mbeki and the Great Foreign Policy Riddle," in Glaser, *Mbeki and After*, 254–61.

35. Ibid., 257.

36. Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment," 483.

37. Chris Alden and Garth le Pere, "South Africa in Africa: Bound to Lead?," *South African Journal of Political Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 148.

38. Ibid., 149.

39. Ibid., 166–67.

40. Indicative of this perhaps surprising observation was the remark of a (black) South African aide to Mbeki attending a conference in Angola that "this is my first trip to Africa." This story was recounted to me by a diplomat who wished to remain anonymous.

41. John F. Clark, "A Constructivist Account of the Congo Wars," *African Security* 4, no. 3 (September 2011): 147–70.

42. Although compare Sergio Fernandez and Hongseok Lee, "The Transformation of the South African Public Service: Exploring the Effects of Racial and Gender Representation on Organizational Effectiveness" (paper presented at the 14th International Winelands Conference, Stellenbosch, South Africa, April 2014).

43. Terence Jackson and Elize Kotze, "Management and Change in the South African National Defence Force: A Cross-Cultural Study," *Administration & Society* 37, no. 2 (May 2005): 168–98.

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