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South Africa at the Crossroads

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(Photographs top to bottom)

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa waves as he leaves after being sworn-in at Loftus Versfeld stadium in Pretoria, South Africa on May 25, 2019. Source: CTV News

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. Source: NDTV

South African President Jacob Zuma (L) and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping (R) attend a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on December 4, 2014. Source: Daily Mail

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South Africa at the Crossroads

by
Vedika Rekhi

As a major political and economic power in Africa, South Africa occupies a dominant position on the continent. After the end of Apartheid in 1994, a visionary campaign banking on the notion of 'African Renaissance' was launched. The focus became to restructure the continental institutions in line with domestic and international needs and interests. Today, a democratic South Africa which has taken the lead in Pan-Africanism¹ is being seen as a reliable partner for a just and peaceful world.

The post-Apartheid South African political system is based on democracy and democratic institutions. This has provided a boost to South Africa's foreign policy, emerging out of international isolation witnessed prior to 1994. The country is emerging as a regional hegemon and an important global actor. However, it faces certain problems both at the domestic as well as the external front that need to be managed tactfully by the newly elected President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa. Also, China's engagement with South Africa needs careful consideration.

South Africa is playing an important role in many global negotiations and forums. It is the current chair of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). With the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new strategic geography, South Africa needs a balanced sovereign strategy that will not only consolidate its domestic political landscape but also promote its international interests.



President Cyril Ramaphosa waves to supporters of his ruling African National Congress (ANC) at an election victory rally in Johannesburg, South Africa. Source: Council on Foreign Relations

¹ Pan Africanism is a worldwide movement that aims to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between all indigenous and diaspora ethnic groups of African descent.

Political legacy post-apartheid

The demise of the apartheid state and the ushering in of democracy in 1994 represented a new beginning for South Africa. There were widespread expectations and hopes regarding progressive alleviation of poverty and inequality. South Africans saw democracy and democratic institutions as a means to wage a struggle against deep seated inequality, rising unemployment and violent crimes.

The ruling party of post-apartheid South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) had waged a long and harsh struggle for freedom. It had committed itself to building a non-racial and democratic South Africa and emphasised upon the need to honour workers' rights, to eliminate rural poverty and to prioritise education, housing and health services. It came to power after the first democratic elections held in 1994 and on May 9 that year; Nelson Mandela was elected the first black President by the National Assembly of South Africa. Since 1994, no other party other than the ANC has governed South Africa and thus, it has shaped the way the country has developed both, domestically and internationally.



Jacob Zuma resigns as South Africa's President on February 14, 2018 after corruption charges were levied against him, putting an end to his standoff with the ANC, the ruling party. The resignation came one day after the ANC ordered him to step down or face a vote of no confidence in the Parliament. Source: NDTV

In the time period 1994-1999, the ANC had embarked on reforming economic policy. Problems in the areas of health, sanitation and housing had improved as well. Mandela's Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who was sworn in as President in 1999 had reiterated the ANC's commitment to continued economic growth as well as elimination of crime and corruption. He was sworn in on April 27, 2004 for a second unopposed term, the day South Africa celebrated a decade of multiracial democracy.²

In 2009, the ANC once again came to power under Jacob Zuma. His election campaign emphasised upon the progress that the ANC- led government had made over the past fifteen years in terms of economic development and the deepening of democracy. However, unable to meet his election promises he was forced to resign by his party members on February 14, 2018 after his office was embroiled in corruption, scandals, money laundering and fraud cases. In the nine lost years under Zuma's rule, the state was badly plundered as honest watchdogs were sacked, economic growth stalled, public debt soared, unemployment rose and the investors fled. Eskom, the public utility firm was looted and faced a huge financial crisis, thus indicating an erosion of democratic institutions.

South Africa election results



African National Congress (ANC)

58%



Democratic Alliance (DA)

21%



Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)

11%

Source: South Africa Electoral Commission

BBC

The turnout in 2019 general elections was about 65% in the twin parliamentary and provincial elections - a drop compared to the 73% registered five years ago. Source: BBC

² "The South African general elections: 2004", South African History Online. Access at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-african-general-elections-2004>

Following Zuma's resignation, the Acting President of ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected as President of South Africa in an indirect presidential election and then re-elected in the general elections in 2019. Despite Zuma's term being marred by corruption scandals and democratic challenges, the ANC's return to power in 2019 signals a lack of credible opposition in the country. The main opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), are ideologically fragmented and even with an increased vote share, it will take some effort for either party to mount a serious challenge in the 2024 general elections.

Domestic Politics and Economy Under Ramaphosa

The main challenges to Cyril Ramaphosa's presidency include reforming the economy, rooting out corruption, creating jobs, prosecuting wrongdoers, and most importantly, redistributing land without inviting fury from the 'whites'. Ramaphosa has to undertake the task of resolving policy uncertainty in the mining sector and has to speed up reforms in the public power utility 'Eskom' and other state-owned entities. Thus, his major goal is to embark on economic reforms to counter income and wealth disparities.

Land reform has been the key feature of the ANC's political campaign since 1994 and remains a focal point of debate within the country. The whites own 72% of the land in South Africa and the issue of land redistribution in favour of the disadvantaged black population spells the broader difficulty of finding practical solutions to "redress historical injustices". Land redistribution, if not done in a proper legal manner might lead to violence in an economy that is greatly dependent upon the white community. The 'Zimbabwe land-redistribution crisis'³ was a warning for South Africa on the need to deal with the impending crisis in a peaceful manner.

South African President Ramaphosa has started bringing in important political reforms. He has trimmed his cabinet from thirty-six to twenty-eight ministers, focusing on quality rather than quantity. Half of the new cabinet ministers are women, making South Africa one of three African countries, along with Rwanda and Ethiopia to achieve gender parity among ministers. He has maintained important allies in key ministries while side-lining some top officials of the ANC who have been accused of corruption.

³ In 2000, Zimbabwe's Mugabe government had expropriated white farmers without compensation with their fast-track land reforms, giving away land to the disadvantaged. This was followed by hyperinflation, food shortages, destruction of pension funds and a decline in foreign investment. This had disastrous consequences for the whole economy and serves as a warning for the South African land reform.

Under Zuma's rule, South Africa experienced an average GDP growth rate of 2.1% and inflation was averaged at 5.41%. The commodity prices were also low. Since, South Africa's economy was facing a ruin, investments started declining and the South African currency started weakening. Unemployment increased by 3.5%. As a result, President Ramaphosa inherited an economy marred by sluggish economic growth and wasteful expenditure.

In spite of this, South Africa has been able to retain its investment-grade credit rating as the eleventh-ranked country out of the forty-seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is primarily due to significant policy improvements under President Ramaphosa. His government has restored macroeconomic stability in South Africa despite facing public debt, inefficient state-owned enterprises, and spending pressures that have reduced the country's global competitiveness. President Ramaphosa has promised to bring in significant political and economic reforms. He has guaranteed radical land reforms and reassured investors of tackling the issue of "land grabs" by the government. Other than this, his government plans to bring in social-insurance reforms aimed at providing comprehensive income security and universal health coverage.

Therefore, the current reform agenda of President Ramaphosa is being banked upon to revitalize South Africa's economy and restore ANC'S lost support base.

South Africa's Regional and Global Relations

Regional Relations

Post-apartheid South Africa has tried to differentiate itself from the West but it is still regarded with uncertainty by many African states who view South Africa as a pawn of Western imperialism. This insecurity is exacerbated by the rivalry with countries such as Nigeria, Angola and Libya which also aspire to play leading roles in the continent. On the other hand, the weaker African states are nervous about South Africa being the hegemon in their midst. However, South Africa is a major force in its continent and its political and economic prowess provides legitimacy for it to function as a regional hegemon.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a contested territory with South Africa and Nigeria being at the helm of most affairs. However, even though Nigeria has significant economic capabilities, the role of a regional hegemon consists of it being influential in other terms as well. These include representation and advocacy of the region in international organizations, maintaining peace within their region, being a reliable trading and investment partner, and providing development assistance for the less developed countries. While there was great

political and economic turbulence witnessed under Zuma's presidency, South Africa continues to occupy the position of Africa's natural leader, principal conflict manager as well as the chief interlocutor on international issues, fulfilling the role required of a regional hegemon.



South Africa's President, Jacob Zuma (R) with King Mswati of Swaziland (L), while taking over the SADC chairmanship in August 2017. Source: News24

Regionally, South Africa is a member of South African Customs Union (SACU), South African Development Community (SADC)⁴ and the African Union (AU). It is the current chair of SADC which is regarded as the leading regional economic organisation in Africa. South Africa's leadership is crucial for the success of SADC at both economic and political levels. South Africa is thus also regarded as the most suitable candidate for leading regional integration in Southern Africa, primarily due to its advanced infrastructural development, superior economic strength and peace enforcement capabilities in conflict-ridden areas of the continent. It is the largest capital contributor and the biggest investor in individual states in the SADC region. Thus, its role in the southern region of Africa cannot be contested. It is an important member of the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone and has signed a declaration affirming the South Atlantic as a 'nuclear-weapons free zone' as well as agreements on

⁴ The Southern African Development Community (SADC), founded in 1992 is an inter-governmental organization headquartered in Gaborone, Botswana. Its goal is to further socio-economic cooperation and integration as well as political and security cooperation among 16 southern African states. South Africa is the current chair of SADC and its leadership role is critical. The country is also the gateway to foreign direct investment to the developing world.

trade and environmental protection in the region. South Africa has also effectively sought to ease capital controls in the region to bolster regional trade. Ramaphosa also visited Mozambique as South Africa and Mozambique enjoy good economic, political and cultural relations dating back to apartheid years. Mozambique was among the SADC countries that President Ramaphosa visited soon after he assumed Presidency in 2018, engaging in a continuation of cordial high-level talks to improve the bilateral relations between them.

Evidently, Africa has a vast number of regional economic communities (RECs) with overlapping membership and policy aims. South Africa has an increasingly important role to play in the continental body, the African Union (AU), especially for its revitalisation in the globalised world. Chairing the AU in 2020 will be a unique opportunity for South Africa. Through this, the country would be in a strong position to represent AU's concerns on an international stage and also gain precedence in regional affairs. The interaction of these regional organisations with global bodies such as the EU and UNO has wide-ranging implications for Africa and its people.⁵



President Cyril Ramaphosa (R) meets the African Union (AU) Chair and Rwandan President Paul Kagame (L) on the eve of the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina on November 30, 2018. Source: GovernmentZA/Flickr

South Africa has also taken the lead in the realisation of Pan-Africanism and is trying to strengthen its ties with Jamaica and other countries of the Caribbean

⁵ SAJIA Special Issue: International Organisations in Africa. Access at : <https://sajia.org.za/news/sajia-special-issue-international-organisations-in-africa/>

in efforts to extend African solidarity. The two sides are pursuing increased government and people-to-people relations, banking on music, art, education and sport for fomenting stronger ties.

South Africa – United States

After the bloom of the post-apartheid process faded and Nelson Mandela relinquished power, U.S.-South Africa relations were caught in a downward spiral. President Thabo Mbeki's policies on various issues like HIV/AIDS and position on Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Libya were in stark contrast to that of the US. Similarly, myriad disagreements on trade cooperation with the U.S., cropped up under the Zuma administration. These factors acted as irritants in the South Africa-US relations.

There is military and counterterrorism collaboration between U.S. and South Africa and laudable U.S. initiatives in health programming have benefited millions of South Africans. Apart from this, South Africa has been the largest beneficiary of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the US which allows duty-free access to 141 items. Over 600 U.S. firms have offices in South Africa and provide a strategic and secure platform to grow U.S. commercial interests on the African continent.⁶

While observing the relationship that South Africa shares with the US, it is also important to note that Ramaphosa and the Trump administration remain at loggerheads with each-other on certain issues. The two countries differ on the Trump administration's foreign policy moves with respect to Iran and Jerusalem. President Ramaphosa has publicly opposed the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, and under him South Africa is pursuing stronger economic ties with Iran.

South Africa – EU

With regard to the European Union, South Africa is one of its ten Strategic Partners and the EU is South Africa's first investment, trading and development partner, accounting for a quarter of South Africa's trade and three-quarters of its foreign direct investment. This partnership is broad and comprehensive and is dominated by mutual political, trade and development interests. Since 2004, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has also supported development and economic activity in South Africa with loans and equity investment worth over

⁶ Campbell John, "Renewing U.S.-South Africa Relations under President Ramaphosa", Council on Foreign Relations. Access at : <https://www.cfr.org/blog/renewing-us-south-africa-relations-under-president-ramaphosa>

€2.5bn. This has been a significant marker of the good economic relations between South Africa and the EU.



*President Cyril Ramaphosa (L) with President of the European Union Parliament, Antonio Tajani on a working visit to the European Union on November 14, 2018.
Source: Daily Maverick*

The “SA–EU Strategic Partnership” was established in 2006. This was followed by a Joint Action Plan in 2007 as a forward looking platform that facilitates the wide ranging cooperation between the two parties. The bilateral dialogues between them focus on areas like peace and security, human rights, good governance, migration, social cohesion, energy and innovation.

EU and South Africa have strong cultural and historical links. Both partners are committed to strengthening multilateralism, peace and security, democracy, human rights, rule of law, free and fair trade and sustainable development. They are together playing a significant role in multilateral forums on climate and environment. The cooperation between them in spheres like education, science, technology, health, culture and development is extremely significant with regard to South Africa’s foreign relations.

South Africa- Russia

Russia has been an important partner for South Africa since the Cold War period. During the period of apartheid in South Africa, the erstwhile Soviet Union provided military training and arms to liberation movements like the ANC.

Both are important BRICS member countries and the two countries have energy strategies that have proven to be complementary, opening up opportunities for enhanced intra-BRICS energy co-operation to foster domestic energy security and stimulate economic growth within the bloc. Zuma and Putin attempted to engage in a \$76 billion Russian nuclear deal, however, the deal fell through due to environmental and livelihood concerns. There has also been co-operation in intelligence and defence and South African spies and air-force pilots are believed to have received Russian training.⁷

Multilateral Organisations

Internationally, South Africa has been a long-standing member of the UN, GATT and WTO. South Africa has a prominent role in the IMF and is currently a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Besides its membership of the G20, South Africa is also, together with India and Brazil, a member of the development-oriented organisation IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa).⁸ Since 2011, South Africa has also been a member of BRICS.

South Africa is serving as the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), a twenty-two member regional organisation with significant potential to contribute to enhanced collaboration within the Indian Ocean region. South Africa's membership of powerful blocs like the BRICS and the G20 ensure that its voice is heard on the global stage. With the rise in globalisation and the growing importance of South Africa in the global affairs, these international and regional organisations are going to act as catalysts of change in South Africa's role as an influencer.

⁷ "South Africa's love-affair with Russia", The Economist. Access at : <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2017/03/16/south-africas-love-affair-with-russia>

⁸ Founded on June 6, 2003 in Brasilia, Brazil, IBSA is a unique Forum which brings together India, Brazil and South Africa, three large democracies and major economies from three different continents, facing similar challenges. All three converging partners are developing, pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious nations.

In 2007, South Africa became one of five key partners to the OECD, along with Brazil, China, India and Indonesia and this is a beneficial relationship for South Africa. South Africa also took up a non-permanent seat at the UNSC for the third time at the start of 2019. South Africa has indicated that as member of the UNSC, making peace on the African continent is one of its topmost priorities.

Globally and regionally, South Africa has the potential to become a powerful voice and a democratic trade partner and Ramaphosa's tenure is being looked at with great expectation, given the fact that he was Nelson Mandela's 'Chosen One'.⁹ There is a lot of hope banking on Ramaphosa to inspire confidence into his people and repair the tattered image of the ANC while preventing South Africa from falling into democratic decay.

South Africa and China

The diplomatic relations between South Africa and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were not a high priority under the Mbeki administration as he had reservations about China's trade interests. The formulation of a 'Bi-National Commission' and signing of a 'Strategic Partnership' took place two years after he assumed power in May 1999. However, South Africa's engagement with China strengthened with an announcement of upgrading relations to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' on Zuma's state visit to China in 2010. China clearly intends to continue increasing this bilateral engagement through military training, funding, defence and strategic exchanges.

Since, South Africa's relations with US have not prospered under both the Obama administration and the Trump administration, China has reaped benefits from it and emerged as a key actor in South African foreign policy. China is the second largest economy in the world and South Africa's partnership with China is beneficial for advancing its national interests, setting the AU Agenda 2063 and enhancing the South-South cooperation.

China became South Africa's largest trade partner during Zuma's presidency, mainly importing raw materials from South Africa and exporting manufactured goods. The 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' (FOCAC) has also been beneficial for the relationship and China has pledged billions of dollars in Chinese loans, grants and investments. China's role in peace and

⁹ "Cyril Ramaphosa: the return of Nelson Mandela's chosen one", The Guardian. Access at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/20/cyril-ramaphosa-return-nelson-mandela>

security has also grown in the past decade, rapidly through arms sales, military cooperation and peacekeeping deployments in Africa.



South African President Jacob Zuma (L) and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping (R) attend a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on December 4, 2014. Source: Daily Mail

Chinese investment in the African continent has been increasing at a steady rate. The primary motivations behind China's push toward increased investments in African nations particularly, South Africa includes the desire to secure a solid base of raw materials to fuel China's rapidly growing economy and increase its global political influence. A major growth opportunity is also presented by emerging market economies in Africa. Judging by the experiences of Maldives and Sri Lanka with Chinese 'debt-trap' diplomacy, South Africa too should be concerned about the potentially adverse consequences of being a beneficiary of Chinese loans.

China and South Africa signed a MoU in December 2015 to jointly build the "Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road". It aims to create opportunities for mutual learning and exchange of goods, technology, capital and personnel between the two countries. This is a major Chinese initiative to establish its footprint in the African continent.

South Africa and India

The South Africa-India bilateral relationship had remained strained for a long time due to South Africa's apartheid government. India had imposed political and economic sanctions on South Africa and re-established trade and business

ties only in 1993, after South Africa ended its institutionalised racial segregation. Subsequently, both countries established diplomatic and consular relations with each other.

The relationship between India-South Africa is progressive and forward looking. The bilateral relationship is based on strong people to people contacts and historical cultural relations. India and South Africa's shared common experiences and collective strength have shaped how they both view the world together. As two nations who have shared their struggle for freedom, India-South Africa partnership is vital in the context of Africa's development, especially to provide a viable alternative to the China model.

Tata and Mahindra are amongst the 150 Indian companies that have invested in South Africa. The relationship is moving from traditional areas of trade and investment to a more forward-looking economic agenda covering emerging sectors like healthcare, technology and skill development. Both India and South Africa are seeking to focus on joint production of defence and naval equipment as well as enhancing maritime security to give a fillip to their defence relationship.

Within India, many policy makers routinely emphasise the need for India to counter China's growing influence on the African continent by building closer links with South Africa and other African countries. 'China's deep pockets' in the region have to be managed tactfully by India which shares a fundamental and unique relationship with South Africa dating back to the 20th century, anchored in ideas and icons like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. Source: NDTV

The Modi government has made the African continent a foreign policy priority. With an increase in China's economic engagement in the region, there are new avenues and opportunities for India to consider in order to enhance its profile with a more equitable partnership with South Africa that will be mutually beneficial for both.

Given the centrality of the Indian Ocean in emerging geopolitics and geo-economics, IORA needs full support from India and South Africa to strengthen its institutional footing. The South Africa – India relationship is based on strong bilateral trade and investments, the huge Indian diaspora in South Africa and partnership in various multilateral forums like BRICS, IBSA and G20. There have been a large number of MoUs signed between both countries and the high level visits exchanged including Ramaphosa's visit to India in January 2019 validate the significance that South Africa holds for India. These ties give confidence that India will not lose out to China.

As a new order evolves and strategic geographies are getting redefined in global politics, New Delhi and Pretoria need to join other stakeholders to shape the future of the Indo-Pacific. Ramaphosa's presidency and the amicable relations between the leaders of the two countries bode well for the future of ties between them.

Ramaphosa's International Strategy

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa emerged from decades of international isolation. The first two democratically elected presidents were preoccupied with the task of transforming South Africa's foreign identity from a pariah state to an international actor. While Mandela advocated the promotion of moral values such as human rights, Mbeki, on the other hand seemed to prioritise material values like economic strength and military capacity.

Under Zuma's presidency, perhaps the most notable achievements were South Africa joining the BRICS grouping in 2011, as well as strengthening South Africa's relationship with China through the 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement'. It continuously engaged with global multilateral institutions like the WTO and UNSC. However, a significant development was that South Africa decided to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC), and defended its decision arguing that the ICC is an instrument used unfairly against African countries and fails to hold western powers like the US (that is not an ICC member) accountable. The country during his tenure was also engaged in various peacekeeping operations in several African countries including Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan.

Ramaphosa's presidency has promised the "New Dawn of South African strategy". This idea transcends the preceding era and this promised "New Dawn" is being viewed with a lot of hope. Despite the formal commitment to a revival of Mandela's 'idealism'¹⁰, Ramaphosa's foreign policy is likely to prioritise commercial ties with other countries like increasing trade flows and defence cooperation. His active engagements with multilateral organisations like SADC, BRICS forum, the AU¹¹ and other international partners have showcased a renewed push to advance South Africa's interests through foreign policy. Foreign Minister Lindiwe Sisulu has underscored the continued serious nature of South Africa's foreign policy approach to engage with Africa through the commitment of advancing resources and increased trade activity.

In January 2019, Ramaphosa visited India and declared that South Africa's foreign policy would be driven by "democracy, justice, human rights and good governance"¹². However, this approach contradicts South Africa's reaction to the election controversy¹³ in the Democratic Republic of Congo which was one of the biggest frauds in electoral history.

In the period before Ramaphosa came to power, there was an unwillingness to confront authoritarian governments and human-rights abusers on the continent. Human rights abuses in South Africa were swept under the rug. Ramaphosa is focusing on an ethical foreign policy based on advocating human rights.

¹⁰ South Africa's foreign policy during Mandela's term could be seen as 'idealism' i.e. the importance of moral values and universalism.

¹¹ South Africa last chaired the rotational chair of AU in 2000 under Thabo Mbeki.

¹² "The reality of South Africa's foreign policy under Ramaphosa", IISS. Access at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/02/south-africa-foreign-policy-ramaphosa>

¹³ Following the December 30, 2018 elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the electoral commission declared Felix Tshisekedi the winner on January 10, 2019 prompting speculation that the outgoing president Joseph Kabila had cut a deal with Tshisekedi after his anointed successor came a distant third. Leaked data from within the electoral commission itself, and from the Catholic Church's 40,000-strong observer mission, indicated that the runner-up, Martin Fayulu, had won by a landslide, gaining around 60% of the vote. This has been one of the biggest electoral frauds in election history.

South Africa failed to support a proposed UNSC press statement criticizing the DRC government for cutting off internet access in the aftermath of the poll, on the grounds that the statement would only 'inflamm' the situation. At a meeting of the UNSC on January 11, South Africa sided with Russia and China in opposing criticism of the election by the US and France. It commended the work of the DRC's electoral commission and stated that the country had worked hard in their quest for peace and security.



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa waves as he leaves after being sworn-in at Loftus Versfeld stadium in Pretoria, South Africa on May 25, 2019. Source: CTV News

With a paradigm shift in South Africa's governance and governing principles under President Ramaphosa, a new era is being ushered in. This presents an opportunity for the United States to re-engage with a strategic ally after nearly two decades of eroding relations. He has engaged in improving bilateral relations with its strategic ally, the EU. According to him, "Africa can draw lessons from the European Union's path to integration, economic and political union, and achieving social progress".¹⁴ President Ramaphosa is also looking forward to engaging with Putin's Russia. His focus is on preventive diplomacy that needs to be supported through closer coordination and partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations such as the AU.

The current geopolitical scenario worldwide, offers new opportunities and challenges to South Africa to reposition it as a credible actor in global affairs. Ramaphosa, unlike his predecessor Zuma is trying to advance national interest and perpetuate representative global governance by presenting a sovereign embodiment of international norms and values. He has emphasised on the importance of a more proactive approach to the maintenance of international peace and security.

¹⁴ "Africa can learn from EU: President Ramaphosa", SA News.gov.za. Access at : <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/africa-can-learn-eu-president-ramaphosa>

Conclusion: Future Dynamics

Though Mr Ramaphosa is a significant improvement on his predecessor, Jacob Zuma, he still faces huge challenges. He has to restore the battered public institutions while embracing radical reforms to the economy and public services. As South Africa advances towards the third decade of its democracy, and as Mr. Ramaphosa tries to undo the decay in the South African democracy, its regional and global interaction also needs to improve.

South Africa's trade is greatly dependent on China, with China being South Africa's top export destination (\$17.1 billion) as well as top import origin (\$15.6 billion).¹⁵ Chinese President Xi Jinping promised \$14.7 billion of investment in July 2018 during a state visit to South Africa at a time when President Ramaphosa was trying to kick-start the stagnant economy, thus giving China leverage in the South African economy. Therefore, given Africa's huge reliance on China as a source of funding, there is concern that African states will suffer a similar fate as that of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. China's "debt-trap diplomacy" and financing will turn out to be predatory in the long run and African states like South Africa will unwittingly become pawns in China's global strategic agenda.

Hence, Ramaphosa's South Africa needs to work more transparently with other governments, multilateral organisations and civil society to address problems that are arising out of its proximity with China. This is needed to prevent South Africa from falling into the vicious cycle that the people endured under colonialism and apartheid. Ramaphosa needs to act strategically to develop South Africa's footprint in the African continent and the world at large.

¹⁵ "South Africa", OEC. Access at : <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/zaf/>



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