The South African Threat Agenda:
Between Political Agendas, Perceptions and Contradictions*

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Abstract: The article traces the intricacies of the South African threat agenda since 1994. Historically, the South African threat agenda at various times had to contend with the influence of European powers in Africa, the possibility of a landward invasion from Africa, and the risk of an internal uprising. Since democratisation in 1994, the ruling elite's threat perception has been shaped by the idea of human security. The harsh realities of the African security environment together with various bureaucratic challenges made operationalization of human security a daunting task. The article concludes by arguing that South Africa finds it increasingly difficult to balance the need for nuanced relationships with its traditional economic partners in the West, with constructive engagement and political ambitions in Africa and the global south, and the historical partnerships of the governing African National Congress as a political party.

Keywords: South Africa, security, threat perception, defence
Schlagworte: Südafrika, Sicherheit, Bedrohungswahrnehmung, Verteidigung

1. Introduction[1]

Strategy, and by implication the threat agenda, is adversarial in nature; it is developed with an opposing and destabilising security entity in mind.[2] That does not imply that the setting of the threat agenda is a straightforward, logical process derived from any complexity. Developing a list of possible threats to a country and generating appropriate responses to address those threats are only limited by time and imagination.[3] Thus, the threat agenda, like security, must be given content or substance; it must be defined.[4] Annette Seegers points out, "…power defines security"[5] and "…all regime types define security in a self-interested, often anti-democratic manner".[6] How was the South African threat agenda defined since 1994, and what was its content? South Africa has always been a complex strategic entity because of its geographical, historical, ethnic and political diversity. The article aims to provide some insight into the management of this strategic complexity by the South African government in constructing and conceptualising the country's threat agenda. The discussion is informed by a consideration of the historical context, the conceptual drivers of the threat agenda since 1994, the concrete strategic realities that confronted the country, and the role of Africa as the primary geographic focus of the threat agenda.

2. The Historical Context

In spite of strategic complexity, the drivers of South Africa's threat perception, since the creation of modern South Africa through the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, remained fairly consistent. South African security thinking and defence preparation were, firstly, always influenced by a non-African power or powers with the ability to project force in Africa. At various times before the First World War, South African threat perception had to contend with the intentions of different European powers. After the Second World War, the South African threat perception was dominated by the growing Soviet presence in Africa and the Cuban military support for the MPLA government in Angola. Britain and France, as the main suppliers of armaments to the South African government, also influenced South African defence preparation at the time. Secondly, the possibility of a landward invasion from Africa seems to be a constant feature on the South African threat agenda. Immediately after the creation of the Union, there was the possibility of an invasion by a colonial power with imperial intentions. After the First World War, the focus shifted to the possibility of an African revolt against colonial rule. In the Cold War era, there was the threat of "… a possible Pan-African army formed by a coalition of newly liberated states".[7] Thirdly, the possibility of an internal uprising has been a constant feature of the South African threat perception. The people or groups involved and their motivations shifted over time – from the Afrikaners to the English, the poor white working classes, the black population and various ethnic groups. Of course, the priority assigned to each one of the threats over time was largely influenced by the ruling elite's outlook on security.

Before the end of apartheid and democratisation in 1994, the South African security and threat agenda was dominated by what one may call the 'three-war framework': the Cold War, the wars of decolonisation in Africa and the anti-apartheid struggle. South African military involvement in the Angolan Civil War and Mozambique unfolded against the backdrop of the Cold War in Africa. As a colonial and occupying power in Namibia, the South African counterinsurgency campaign against the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) inside Namibia was conducted against the backdrop of the process of

decolonisation in Africa. Whilst these two wars were fought outside South Africa, the real threat to the apartheid regime unfolded inside the country in the fight against apartheid.[8] From a threat perspective, the struggle against apartheid was the key factor in the development of the idea of a 'total onslaught' by the apartheid government and, as a consequence, the formulation of the so-called 'total strategy' to counter such an onslaught.[9] Both the ideas of 'total onslaught' and 'total strategy', as a matter of irony, necessitated a comprehensive (total) understanding of security. However, the securitisation of all sectors of society and programmes of government led to the militarisation of the South African society in general and its government in particular.

3. Democratisation and the Threat Agenda

Since democratisation in the 1994, the South African definition of security, the country's threat agenda and, as a consequence, its defence preparations has predominantly been shaped by, firstly, the reconceptualisation of security as a scholarly and policy construct and, secondly, as a result of this, a reconfiguration of the role of the military in society. The theoretical reconceptualisation of security coincided with the end of the Cold War, the publication of the United Nations (UN) Human Developmental Report 1994[10] and the process of democratisation in South Africa. The reconceptualisation of security in the late 1980s and early 1990s was informed by a need to broaden and deepen the thinking about the threat agenda to include both domestic and non-military threats; in fact, to demilitarise the idea of security. The UN publication of the Human Development Report 1994 introduced the concept of human security as an emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities and people-centred development as an alternative to the more traditional notion of national and military security. The report argues, firstly, that the search for human security lies in development, not in arms,[11] and, secondly, that threats to human security are no longer just personal, local or national; they are becoming global.[12]

In South Africa, with its history of armed conflict, human rights abuses and societal dysfunctionalities under apartheid, the new African National Congress (ANC) government provided fertile ground for "…the new compulsions of human security".[13] The ANC government had to contend with the same challenges as outlined in the report as part of the human security agenda. "For most people today", it is noted in the report, "a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime – these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world."[14] This line of argumentation was also reflected in the 1994 ANC election manifesto.[15] The Military Research Group (MRG), the Institute for Defence Policy (IDP) and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) were the key drivers of the new security agenda in South Africa. Motivated by the demands of a government requesting assistance and the supply of activists and donors seeking influence, the military became a key driver of the new security agenda. In the end, the new security agenda – and now largely accounting for human security – was presented in African language as different "… calabashes of security".[16]

Since 1994, a wide variety of policy and strategic documents have been approved by the South African policy makers to effect the necessary changes in the South African security outlook. These include, amongst others, the 1996 Defence White Paper, the two Defence Reviews published since 1994, the working documents of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), and the White Paper on South African Participation in Peacekeeping. Of these, the 1996 Defence White Paper is of particular interest. It was not only the first policy document in the security domain since democratisation in 1994; it also clearly articulated the security outlook and threat perception of the newly elected ANC government.

For the purposes of this article, two key issues from the 1996 White Paper on Defence should be highlighted. Firstly, there is an inward-focused approach to South Africa's national security that "… is no longer viewed as a predominantly military and police problem. It has been broadened to incorporate political, economic, social and environmental matters. At the heart of this new approach is a paramount concern with the security of people."[17] This demarcates human security as the new framework for the defence establishment in South Africa. Secondly, South Africa is pursuing peaceful relations with other states through political, economic and military cooperation and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) is primarily defensive in orientation and posture.[18] In fact, the White Paper deliberately downplayed the need for a warfighting capacity in the SANDF through an emphasis on the principles of non-offensive defence and non-threatening defence.[19]

In 1994, the ANC inherited a country in which militarisation had been institutionalised in the European part of the population. The European (i.e. white) part of the population was not only the constituency on which the apartheid system was built; it also had full control over the weapon arsenals, the security forces and structures of government. The biggest part of South Africa's white population served and received military, paramilitary or police training in one way or another and most of them were still involved in the reserve and security forces. Even the police was regimentalised and employed in counterinsurgency operations

8   *Moorcraft, PL*, African Nemesis: War and Revolution in Southern Africa, 1945-2010, Brassey's, London, 1990.
9   *Alden, C*, Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1996.
10   *United Nations Development Programme*, UN Developmental Report 1994, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994. Available online at <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf> Accessed 25 Aug 2015.
11   Ibid, p. 1.
12   Ibid, p. 2.
13   Ibid, p. iii.
14   Ibid, p. 3.
15   The manifesto is available on the webpage of the African National Congress at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=262> Accessed 25 August 2015.
16   *Seegers, A*. op.cit. pp. 269 and 272.
17   *South African Government*, "White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa – Defence in a Democracy", Chapter 2: The Challenge of Transformation, Paragraph 11.1, May 1996. Available online at <http://www.dod.mil.za/documents/WhitePaperonDef/whitepaper%20on%20defence1996.pdf> Accessed 28 October 2015.
18   Ibid., Chapter 2: The Challenge of Transformation, Paragraph 11.4.
19   See *Jordaan, E and Esterhuyse, AJ*, "The European Development and the South African Application of the Concept of Non-Offensive Defence", Strategic Review for Southern Africa, Vol. XXX, No 1, May 2008, pp 28–48.

in South Africa and Namibia. That is not to say that the South African security forces were an all-white security outfit; a large group of volunteers from the other population groups did serve in the military. The point to make, though, is that part of the South African society was highly militarised.

The predominantly non-European African part of the South African population, in contrast, had been exposed to widespread violence, firstly, in the fight against apartheid and, secondly, in violence between different ethnic groups inside the country. Ethnicity was exploited by both the apartheid government and those fighting the apartheid system in an effort to divide and rule in the case of the former and to make the country ungovernable for the apartheid regime in the case of the latter. Since the Soweto Uprising in 1976, a whole generation of predominantly black youth has been exposed to and has grown up in communities in which very high levels of violence were a reality. Many were absorbed in the underground structures of the revolutionary movements; other were just swept away by waves of continuous violence in the various neighbourhoods as *klipgooiers* (stone throwers) and as part of the process of mass mobilisation to destabilise apartheid in South Africa. Needless to say, for those fighting against the apartheid government, there was very little restriction on violence. Weapon smuggling, crime, gangsterism and drugs often served as a means to an end in the fight against apartheid.

As a result, in the period immediately after 1994, the Mandela administration was confronted with the reality of taking control of a country that was on the one hand highly militarised and on the other hand conditioned by very high levels of institutionalised violence. The ANC was also confronted with the reality of change from being a populist revolutionary movement to a democratic political party; from making a country ungovernable to governing a deeply divided South African society. Given the ruling ANC's background and history, it was expected to take control of the South African security forces and demilitarise those they considered to be opposing them. There was, at the same time, an implicit acceptance that, as a political movement, it had control over its own cadres and constituency. In reality, though, the security forces had control over their weapon arsenals and were relatively disciplined and professional in terms of international standards. However, the military had been deployed inside the country and was ethnically based, i.e. not representative of the South African society in general.

In the interest of regime security, the Mandela administration deliberately had to restructure the military, change the white top structure, and end the domestic deployment of the military.[20] The demilitarisation of society was endeavoured through the new security agenda. Human security became the new security buzzword for government and those involved in the study and operationalisation of security in society. Embedded in the acceptance of the human security paradigm was the implicit belief by the South African government that, firstly, never again will South Africa be a military threat to its African brothers who assisted them in the struggle against apartheid; nor will South

Africa be threatened militarily by Africa in general.[21] The ANC government assumed that military power, and the destructive manner in which it was used by the apartheid government in particular, had lost its utility for the post-1994 New South Africa. The role for the military in operationalising both the domestic and the foreign policy of the country was downplayed to the level of nonexistence. Secondly, given the country's foreign policy construction around the persona of President Mandela at the time, the country's security challenges were framed predominantly in the context of non-military domestic socio-economic vulnerabilities.

4. The Strategic Realities of Post-Apartheid Security Thinking

It is generally accepted that the Mandela era was a "honeymoon period" for post-1994 democratic South Africa.[22] For the military, the strategic reality turned out quite differently and, from a threat and security perspective, in two particular ways. Firstly, the country quickly turned peace into an export product and its military became an important carrier of the message of peace in Africa. Peace missions in Africa became an important feature on the South African defence agenda. It is somewhat idealistic to think a country will be involved in peace missions without being seen by some as part of the problem; turning destabilising actors into enemies – as was clearly demonstrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the M23 rebel movement.[23] The idea that the SANDF can be a military without an offensive, force projection, intervention and expeditionary capability, as alluded to in the 1996 *White Paper on Defence*, turned out to be an illusion. This had disastrous consequences for the military in the 2013 so-called Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic in which 15 South African paratroopers and special force soldiers were killed.[24]

Secondly, the post-1994 domestic security situation quickly turned out to be a major challenge for the South African security forces. The government tried to demilitarise society through efforts such as the dismantling of the commando system[25], the implementation of highly bureaucratic gun-ownership regulations, and the ending of military involvement in border control and other domestic security endeavours. However, enough illegal guns were available in society in general that, together with drivers such as the deeply ingrained culture of violence, economic and income inequality, and a feeling of relative deprivation in many sectors of the South African society, South Africa was turned into a utopia for criminals.

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20 See my discussion of these processes in *Esterhuyse, AJ*, "Getting the Job Done. Transformation in the South African Military", Strategic Review for Southern Africa, Vol. XXXII, June 2010, pp. 1–30.

21 This was explicitly outlined in the 1996 Whitepaper on Defence and is still implicit in the working documents of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). See for example South African Government, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Strategic Plan, 2015-2020. Available on the web at <http://www.dirco.gov.za/department/strategic_plan_2015_2018/strategic_plan2015_2020.pdf> Accessed 21 October 2015

22 See, for example, *Munusamy, R*, "SA's 20-year review: From Mandela to Zuma...", Daily Maverick, 12 Mar 2014, Available online at <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-11-sas-20-year-review-from-mandela-to-zuma/#.VieLMn4rJD8> Accessed 21 October 2015

23 See the most recent paper by *Chris Alden* and *Maxi Schoeman* on dichotomies of South Africa's foreign policy in Africa. Alden, C and Schoeman, M, "South Africa's Symbolic Hegemony in Africa", International Politics, 2015, Vol. 52, No 2, pp. 239–254.

24 *Heitman, H*, "The Battle in Bangui: The untold inside story", Parktown Publishers, South Africa, 2013.

25 Before 1994, the territorial forces in South Africa was referred to as the commandoes as a legacy from the Boer Commandoes of the Boer War era.

Extremely high levels of violent and well-organised crime quickly became a challenge for the police to handle on their own. This was augmented by a paranoiac fear by the government for a possible white right-wing uprising. The 2010 Soccer World Cup, in particular, facilitated the return of military involvement to the domestic security agenda. However, the role of the military in domestic security operations is very carefully managed and restricted to operations such as highly specialised organised crime operations, counter-poaching operations, and border protection.[26] Border protection, in particular, became a key role for the armed forces given the political instability of certain countries[27] in the region, the increase in illegal migration, and the growth in cross border organised crime link to the illicit trading of arms in the region.

For the South African military, three particular trends influenced its threat perception and strategic outlook. The first is the drastic cut of the defence budget as part of the demand for a peace dividend in the 1990s. There is general agreement in society that the South African military is underfunded.[28] The second is the SANDF's inability to downsize the huge bureaucratic structures that were developed for the large reserve army of the apartheid military. The unionisation of the SANDF, together with the general juridicratic[29] and mediacratic[30] nature of modern militaries in democratic societies, led to an increase in bureaucratic structures and an inability to implement an up-or-out personnel management system. The result is a very small deployable footprint, a general lack of operational agility and the SANDF's inability to project force and sustain multiple operational deployments over extended periods of time.[31]

Both these factors were exacerbated by a third consideration – the military in South Africa became one of the most progressive advocates of the human security paradigm in society. More specifically, the military institutionalised the human security agenda through the Executive National Security Programme (ENSP) of the South African National Defence College (SANDC) in Pretoria. The ENSP is to a large extent designed with human security as its foundational concept. Like the total onslaught and total strategy constructions of the apartheid military, human security became the defining notion in conceptualising the South African threat agenda and in thinking about security in the SANDF. For more than ten years, senior officers were inculcated with and had their minds shaped by the theory of human security. It is quite interesting, for example, to attend the annual briefing by the students on Exercise SIVUKILE, the capstone exercise of the ENSP at the SANDC. The findings of the exercise, which is

supposed to integrate all the deductions and conclusions of the briefings and discussions of the ENSP in one final presentation, are almost exclusively of a non-military socio-economic, and sometimes also political, nature. The question pertaining to what human security means for the mandate and equipment and the institutional, cultural, personnel and operational formation of the South African military is not entertained. It is one thing to understand that South African threat and security agenda is of a human security nature; it is another to debate what it actually means for the defence establishment, i.e. what the role for the Defence Force should be in supporting that particular agenda, and how it should organise and equip itself for that role.

The human security agenda had a number of far-reaching consequences for the South African armed forces. Firstly, there are limitations to the military's ability to contribute to the human security agenda. In fact, Henk and Ferreira argue that the apartheid conscript military, made up of a wide spectrum of civilian professions and with its counterinsurgency mind-set, was better equipped for human security operations and peace support operations than the current SANDF.[32] Thus, the SANDF paid lip service to the idea of human security, but its ability to operationalise the idea was practically non-existent; restricted almost to the employment of as many people as possible, irrespective of whether they are medically fit and operational deployable. Within the South African military, anything robust, hard power, selective, tough and demanding – linked to offensive use of the armed forces – is pushed to the periphery.

Secondly, the notion of human security provided the South African military with a political mindset and safe haven within which the military leadership could hide from the need to present a clearly defined and explicitly motivated military mandate for the SANDF to government. The political legitimacy and acceptability of human security became the converging notion in the interplay between the somewhat politically minded military leadership of the SANDF,[33] the ANC as a political party, i.e. Luthuli House[34], and the ANC as the government of South Africa. Stated differently, human security tied the SANDF into government without the need for government or military leadership to make important decisions about military trade-offs in strategic focus, institutional realignment, procurement, ethos, force preparation and military effectiveness.[35] Conceptually, human security presented both the SANDF leadership and the political office bearers in South Africa with a sanctuary to hide from tough decisions about defence. The result is an alarming ignorance of the nature, role and utility of military force.[36] Moreover, one cannot expect the military to place a high emphasis on the non-military dimensions of security and the domestic security agenda and, at the same time, expect the institution and its members, especially its leadership that has been specifically oriented towards human security, to remain aloof from

26 E-mail correspondence with a senior officer of the Joint Operations Division of the SANDF, 15 October 2015.
27 Zimbabwe and Lesotho are the most prominent in this regard.
28 See, for example, *AAFonline* "SANDF Underfunded, Needs Drastic Injection of Funds and Commitment for Turnaround", Thursday, April 24, 2014. Available online at http://www.aafonline.co.za/news/sa-sandf-underfunded-needs-drastic-injection-funds-and-commitment-turnaround Accessed 21 October 2015; Anon, "Underfunded South Africa military in ‚critical decline': review", Africa Review, 21 October 2015, Available online at Accessed 21 October 2015.
29 Demarcating the increasing influence and role of the courts and the judiciary in general in the governing of modern democracies.
30 Demarcating the expanding influence and role of the media – in all its formats – in the governing of modern democracies.
31 This is one of the key themes in the 2014 Defence Review of the Department of Defence and Military Veterans. See South African government, South African Defence Review 2014, Available online at http://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-defence-review-2014 Accessed 21 October 2015.

32 *Ferreira, R* and *Henk, D*, "'**Operationalizing' Human Security in South Africa**", *Armed Forces & Society*, April 2009, Vol.. 35, Issue 3, pp. 501–525.
33 The logical result of the SANDF's senior leadership military background in the revolutionary forces fighting the apartheid government and the inherent nature of revolutionary forces around the world.
34 Luthuli House is the political headquarters of the governing ANC in Johannesburg.
35 I need to thank a senior official in the South African Secretariat of Defence for bringing this important matter to my attention, 20 October 2015.
36 My colleagues, Prof. Francois Vreÿ and Mr Evert Jordaan, were very helpful in the development of this argument.

domestic leadership, political and other disputes. Impartiality and non-partisanship are unlikely, if not totally impossible, in such a scenario.[37] Thus, and as a consequence, human security increasingly began to bow the knee before regime security.

The third trend influencing the threat perception and strategic outlook: the human security agenda had political consequences for the military, and the military presented political office bearers with divergent appreciations and images of the role and function of the military. On the one hand, the military communicated a strong message, rooted in the human security agenda that South Africa's problems are of a non-military and mostly socio-economic and socio-political nature. In a sense, the military justifies its own marginalisation and the relatively small size of the current defence budget; the underlying message being that the military has only a small role, if any, to play in securing the South African society. On the other hand, though, the military's primary responsibility was constitutionally defined as territorial defence. As a result, the SANDF tried to maintain its conventional warfighting capability and, at the same time, became involved in peace operations in various African countries. These are two extremely expensive activities – both in their operational and capital dimensions. The extent and nature of these expenses are not accounted for in the current defence budget. These expenses led the military into a continuous process of political lobbying for a bigger portion of the national budget for defence, but without the security and threat agenda to justify such a budget. The result is a military that is falling apart between over-commitment, lack of capability and a conceptual framework that does not correspond with operational realities.[38] This not only led to a situation within the armed forces that can be described as institutional paralysis; it also affects the standing of the military in society and, more specifically, the perception of the South African public of the effectiveness of the SANDF.

5. But Africa Is No Threat!

Since 1994, Africa features most prominently in the South African foreign policy outlook and, by implication, defines the country's threat agenda. Pronouncements by the senior political officials of the ruling African National Congress, political office bearers and South African policy documents are, firstly, quite explicit that Africa is at the centre of South Africa's foreign policy.[39] Secondly, the need for South Africa to play a leading role "… that will promote regional cooperation, peace and security"[40] through conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction on the African continent is a key guiding principle of South Africa's Department of International

Relations and Cooperation (*DIRCO*).[41] Thirdly, South African foreign policy guidelines place a strong emphasis on steering South Africa away from unilateral approaches and actions in Africa towards, not only a preference, but a demand or requirement for bilateral and multilateral action. Fourthly, and in line with the preference for bilateral and multilateral action, there is a strong policy preference for regional, continental and global political, economic and security structures and actors when engaging with and acting in Africa. South Africa, it is noted in DIRCO's strategic plan for 2013-2018, is committed to multilateralism and a rules-based international order and to this end promotes global security, sustainable development, human rights and international law through its participation in international forms, notably the UN system and its specialised agencies, funds and programmes.[42]

South Africa's foreign policy is highly value-driven with its emphasis on Africa's renaissance, good governance, peace and stability. Schoeman describes it as a foreign policy of peace.[43] However, foreign policy decision making is not simply a matter of applying ethics and values. It is also about complex decisions based on the trade-offs between domestic and international imperatives and between short and long term interests;[44] mediating and navigating the tension between values and interests. In the case of South Africa the trade-offs specifically concerns the tension between the country's African agenda and its commitment to the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This inability to reconcile an inclination towards respect for other countries' sovereignty on the one, and towards human rights and democracy on the other hand, seems to provide some explanation of the critique of a general pattern of inconsistency in South Africa's foreign policy. Some argue that this inconsistency tends to erode South Africa's reputation as a regional and continental power whose foreign policy influences events across the continent.[45]

Moreover, South Africa's foreign policy priorities are seen to be ambiguous[46] with many who are of the opinion that what precisely is directing the country's foreign policy has become obfuscated over time. The storyline seems to run from Mandela's emphasis on the promotion of human rights; via Mbeki's anti-colonial, anti-imperialist rhetoric tied to the active pursuit of the African agenda and high involvement in African issues; to confusion, lack of strategic direction and an inability to correctly envisage and predict South African foreign policy under Jacob Zuma.[47] The inconsistency argument should also be tied to Alden and Schoeman's view that South Africa's foreign policy is constrained by the structural weaknesses of

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37 *Seegers, A.* op.cit. p. 278.

38 An issue that was discussed between myself, Prof. Roland Henwood from the University of Pretoria and a member of the Directing Staff of the SANDC at the 2014 briefing on Exercise SIVUKILE, Pretoria, 3 December 2015.

39 *South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation*, Strategic Plan 2013-2018, p. 2 Available at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/department/strategic_plan_2013-2018/strategic_plan_2013-2018.pdf>.

40 See *Hengari, AT*, South Africa's Regional Policy: The Link Between Normative Anchors and Economic Diplomacy in SA*DC*, Occasional Paper No 186, South African Institute for International Affairs, AIIA, May 2014, p. 8-9 for an outline of South African successes in this regard. Available on the web at <http://www.saiia.org.za/doc_download/560-south-africa-s-regional-policy-the-link-between-normative-anchors-and-economic-diplomacy-in-sadc> Accessed 22 October 2014.

41 *South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation*, Strategic Plan 2013-2018, p. 2 Available at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/department/strategic_plan_2013-2018/strategic_plan_2013-2018.pdf>.

42 *South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation*, Strategic Plan 2013-2018, p. 3 Available at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/department/strategic_plan_2013-2018/strategic_plan_2013-2018.pdf>.

43 *Schoeman, M*, "Foreign Policy and the Military", in Neethling, T and Hudson, H (eds), Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa: Concepts, Role-players, Policy and Practice, UCT Press, 2013, p. 214.

44 *Lalbahadur, A*, "Moving beyond 'Trophy Diplomacy': How to consolidate South Africa's Position in the World", SAIIA South African Foreig Policy Perception Survey,

45 *Dudley, A*, "South Africa's Foreign Policy: Striving towards Mandela's Ideals", Policy Brief, Africa Institute of South Africa, No 89, June 2013, pp. 2 and 4.

46 *Saunders, C*, "South Africa and Africa", The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No 652, 2014, p. 222.

47 *Lalbahadur, A*, "Moving beyond 'Trophy Diplomacy': How to consolidate South Africa's Position in the World", SAIIA South African Foreig Policy Perception Survey,

the country's own economy, a declining administrative and political capacity to tap South Africa's resources for strategic purposes and the legitimacy of its persistent claims to represent Africa's interests.[48] From a different perspective it brings the unresolved issue of South Africa's identity, a host of domestic limitations linked to material capabilities and internal politics, and the divided continental reaction to South African leadership into sharp focus.[49] The contentious appointment of a South African, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, as chairperson of the African Union Commission clearly illustrates the point.

Though foreign policy is almost always about mediating and navigating between tensions, threats, values and interests, it remains difficult to discern South African foreign policy interests and threats. Some argue that economic development, security and stability in the Southern Africa, and peace and conflict resolution within Africa writ large seem to dominate these agendas.[50] Another view holds that South African interests are defined by a domestically-driven material imperative and its external role conceptions – particularly the need to be anti-imperialist; to disrupt the US and Western hegemony; and to free Africa from any form of external imperialism. The policy gist seems to be guided by the notion that South Africa should be the 'gateway' to Africa as a secure financial and political platform for exploring economic opportunities in Africa.[51] Even the country's membership of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) group of countries is portrayed by President Zuma in terms of the country's assumed position as the gateway into Africa, South Africa's supposed role as the natural leader of Africa, and its so-called ability to speak on behalf of the continent as a whole.[52] Three key considerations, thus, seem to shape South Africa's interaction with the African continent: firstly, the importance of the country's domestic interests; secondly, the need to grow African markets for South African goods; and, thirdly, the need for peace and stability in Africa.[53] Tim Cohen described this in more realist terms when he argues that the South African approach "… reflects domestic politics: duplicitous, Machiavellian and surrounded by a vague odour of corruption".[54] Given this fluid and perhaps uncertain policy environment, it nonetheless acts as the guiding intelligence for South African decision-makers involved in matters of strategy and one such decision-making hub involves those who must bring the South African armed forces into the policy-strategy equation.

The strategy division of the South African military categorises the whole of Africa as an area of strategic importance, whilst the area

that makes up the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is described as an area of strategic influence. A further distinction is made between what is euphemistically referred to as strategic partners, working partners and symbolic partners. Strategic partnerships are rooted in long-term strategic interests such as South Africa's memberships of BRICS and states that constitute important and key interests. Economic relations, specifically those with countries in Europe, seem to shape ideas on working partnerships. The most interesting of the categories and sometimes the most visible is the symbolic category; relations that are defined by what is called pragmatic political decisions and debates and that involve the weaving of historical political considerations into the fabric of foreign relations. For the ruling ANC government these are demarcated by the historical relationships build up during the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The countries making up these partnerships often lack strategic resources, are of a geographical position in close proximity to SA, or have historical ties dating before 1994.[55] It is relations that, in the view of the ANC government, directly affect South Africa's international standing and prestige. Of course, South Africa's relationship with many countries in Africa is of a symbolic nature. Their relationships are historical in nature and driven by the political identity of the ruling ANC as a political party to demonstrate solidarity in the struggle for Africa. Historical solidarity, comradeship and shared political worldviews, instead of political, economic and security interests and concerns, shape relations in this context. These realities, Hengari argues, "… resulted in [the ANC] having less space to pursue a strong regional policy that marries good governance and democracy with South Africa's regional economic agenda".[56] Symbolic relations often complicate South Africa's relationship with Western countries in particular.

Thus, and as a matter of irony, South Africa has a strange love-hate relationship with Africa – almost as if the country is not part of Africa[57] and as if South Africa needs to prove its "Africaness".[58] The National Development Plan, for example, deems it necessary to declare for some strange reason that "We are Africans … We are an African country … We are an essential part of our continent".[59] Like many countries from outside Africa, South Africa tends to deal with "Africa" from a foreign policy perspective as if Africa does not consist of different countries with a huge diversity of nations and peoples, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, who have a variety of interests, opinions, and prejudices; as if it is a single country. Moreover, South Africa encourages and enforces this image of "Africa" in its own search for status and positions in the UN and elsewhere; to be seen as Africa's voice and a country that can speak on behalf of Africa. What is often missing from, not only the South African political, but also its administrative and

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48 *Alden, C* and *Schoeman, M*, "South Africa in the company of giants: the search for leadership in a transforming global order", International Affairs, Vol. 89, nr 1, 2013, pp. 119-120.

49 *Alden, C* and *Schoeman, M*, "South Africa in the company of giants: the search for leadership in a transforming global order", International Affairs, Vol. 89, nr 1, 2013, p. 111.

50 *Lalbahadur, A*, "Moving beyond 'Trophy Diplomacy': How to consolidate South Africa's Position in the World", SAIIA South African Foreig Policy Perception Survey,

51 *Alden, C* and *Schoeman, M*, "South Africa in the company of giants: the search for leadership in a transforming global order", International Affairs, Vol. 89, nr 1, 2013, pp. 118-119.

52 *Saunders, C*, "South Africa and Africa", The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No 652, 2014, p. 230.

53 *Saunders, C*, "South Africa and Africa", The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No 652, 2014, p. 233.

54 *Cohen, T*, "Wheel of foreign policy has turned full circle", Business Day Live, 4 April 2013. Available online at <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2013/04/04/wheel-of-foreign-policy-has-turned-full-circle> Accessed 13 June 2014.

55 See *Hengari*, AT, South Africa's Regional Policy: The Link Between Normative Anchors and Economic Diplomacy in SADC, Occasional Paper No 186, South African Institute for International Affairs, AIIA, May 2014, p. 10-13 for an outline of South Africa's approaches in this regard. Available on the web at <http://www.saiia.org.za/doc_download/560-south-africa-s-regional-policy-the-link-between-normative-anchors-and-economic-diplomacy-in-sadc> Accessed 22 October 2014.

56 Ibid., p. 14.

57 It is interesting to listen to South African politicians talking about their visits to 'Africa' as if South Africa is not part of Africa!

58 *Saunders, C*, "South Africa and Africa", The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No 652, 2014, p. 222.

59 *National Planning Commission*, National Development Plan: Vision for 2030, 11 November 2011, p. 42. <http://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan/> Accessed 28 July 2014.

bureaucratic spheres, is a nuanced understanding and approach in conceptualising, engaging and dealing with specific African countries. The South African political approach to Africa seems to be somewhat dogmatic; an Africa-at-all-cost approach that does not necessarily allow for a nuanced and flexible interpretation of threats emanating from Africa and of South Africa's various interests in specific African countries. It is a conceptual approach that does not seem to make provision for the fact that South Africa may have political and other type of rivals, competitors and even enemies in Africa. This truth was physically, hard and clearly demonstrated by the undeniable reality of the casualty list in the March 2013 Battle of Bangui.[60] The South Africa threat agenda, thus, often seem to be based on the naïve assumption that South Africa, like Nelson Mandela is welcomed with enthusiasm and open arms by every single individual and country in Africa. It is possible to argue that this is not a policy approach that often eschews judgement in application. The motto seems to be "Africa at all cost".

The emphasis on peace and security in Africa in the strategic documents of both DIRCO and the Department of Defence and Military Veterans (DODMV), by definition, underlines the military as an important instrument of South Africa's foreign policy in Africa. The recently published 2014 Defence Review, specifically, makes provision for a layered defence approach as a driver of South Africa's military strategy. The first layer defines the need to influence the international security agenda through integrated diplomacy efforts and the pursuit of national objectives. It also highlights the need for strategic engagement of the United Nations and the African Peace and Security Architecture, to pursue defined multi-lateral security objectives, promote the deepening of democracy on the African continent, and to promote peace, security and development on the continent. However, it also outlines the need to pursue "strategic bi-lateral objectives". The second layer speaks to the need to "safeguard" the South African people and its territory, to "collaboratively or deliberately" protect vital South African national interests, and to contribute to South Africa's developmental agenda. The third layer highlights the importance to "defend and protect the territory, sovereignty and people of the Republic of South Africa".[61] Threats closer to home seems to bring a preference for armed coercion to the fore, whilst the approach to the outer layers seems to rely much more on softer constructive roles and collaborative ways.

6. Conclusion

Since democratisation in 1994, a deliberate effort was made to institutionalise the human security thinking as the primary security paradigm for conceptualising security and defence in South Africa in general and its military in particular. In general, the outcome of the security definitional process is highly unpredictable. South Africa experienced the policy-driven idea of total security turning its society into a highly securitised and militarised entity, and the scholarly-driven idea of human security increasingly being transformed into regime security. The

suitability and appropriateness of human security as organising framework for the armed forces are highly problematic – and in the case of the South African military, for two specific reasons. Firstly, the South African armed forces did not at any time critically question how a military should be organised, trained and equipped for human security operations. Secondly, the SANDF has never questioned its own operational deployments through the human security perspective. As a result, human security was accepted by the SANDF as basis and *input* of the security debate and threat construction – to understand the nature and context of security threats. But it did not inform, frame and direct the *output* of the defence establishment in South Africa – the nature of the military establishment or its employment.

In the domestic security environment the threat agenda is increasingly shaped by the divergent needs of societal and regime security. The need for societal security is rooted in the interplay between economic inequality and virtual stagnation, growing levels of violent crime, the uncontrolled entry of illegal migrants from the rest of Africa and the rising inaptitude of the security forces. The need for regime security is directed by the increasing isolation of the South African ANC government because of the growing bureaucratic inability of government to provide basic services on grassroots level and the growing opposition within the country against widespread corruption and the system of patronage that came to characterised the appointment of public servants and the allocation of business contracts by government.

From an external threat perspective South Africa finds it increasingly difficult to balance the need for:

- nuanced relationships with its traditional economic partners in the West;
- constructive engagement and political ambitions in Africa and the global south, and
- historical partnerships of the governing African National Congress as a political party.

The strategic interface of these three categories of potential external drivers of instability is difficult to assess. The difficulty of reconciling these three categories is linked, firstly, to the declaratory commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law and, secondly, the need of government to be anti-imperialist; to disrupt US and Western hegemony; and to free Africa from any form of external imperialism.

Bringing the various domestic and foreign policy contradictions together in a meaningful and tangible manner, is difficult. Making sense of the South Africa threat agenda is therefore nothing but an exercise in contradiction.

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60 See *Heitman, H*, "The Battle in Bangui: The untold inside story", *op.cit.*
61 *South African Government Online*, South African Defence Review 2014, 25 March 2014, p. 3-10. Available online at http://www.gov.za/documents/detail.php?cid=402524 Accessed 14 April 2014.