

## INFORMATION SERVICES: RESEARCH

First Floor, 90 Plein Street, WS1/068, Cape Town, 8000.

S Ngubane Telephone: 403 8174 Fax 403-8118

E-mail address: sngubane@parliament.gov.za

28 February 2007

### Foreign Affairs and the 2007 State of the Nation Address<sup>1</sup>

This chapter deals with the implications of the 2007 State of the Nation Address for South Africa's Foreign Policy. Moreover, the chapter delves on the role that Parliament, through its relevant committees, can play in overseeing and monitoring the implementation of activities as identified in the State of the Nation Address.

The 2007 State of the Nation Address, similar to that of 2006, was an affirmation of the already existing goals, objectives and programmes of work for South Africa in the sphere of international relations.

The issues identified in the State of the Nation Address can be associated with some of the key strategic areas identified in the Department of Foreign Affairs' Strategic Plan 2006-2009. These strategic areas are: a) the consolidation of the African Agenda; b) Influencing Global Governance.

- Consolidating the African Agenda

The above is one of the core elements of South Africa's Foreign Policy towards the rest of Africa. The 2007 State of the Nation Address highlighted the need to continue with South Africa's contributions towards the creation of a better Africa. In this regard, the State of the Nation Address seemed to have focussed on the Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) aspects of contributing towards a better Africa. Accordingly, it singled out the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Comoros archipelago and the Sudan as the countries that would require Africa's collective assistance and support.

Furthermore, the State of the Nation Address further pledged South Africa's commitment towards contributing to 'general peace processes' in the Sudan (particularly in Darfur), Cote d'Ivoire and Somalia<sup>1</sup>. While all these identified remaining theatres of conflict in Africa are important and equally deserving of South Africa's attention, particular focus is necessary when it comes to Somalia, a State whose people have not enjoyed stability and a capable centralised government for almost two decades<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Draft for a forthcoming Parliamentary Publication entitled Strategic Imperatives for South Africa as set out in the 2007 State of the Nation Address.

Lastly, the State of the Nation Address re-affirmed Government's commitment towards working with other African States to ensure continued implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programmes. Concomitant to this, the State of the Nation Address also indicated that the African Peer Review Forum would, in the course of 2007, complete South Africa's review. Among other things, it confirmed that the Government would, in partnership with other role-players in the country, ensure that it takes the 'necessary steps to implement the required programmes of action that will emerge as a result of the peer review mechanism'<sup>3</sup>.

- **Influencing Global Governance**

The matters raised in the State of the Nation Address under this theme can be grouped into international political governance and international economic governance. The main issue under political governance was South Africa's non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Expectedly, the State of the Nation Address committed the Government to focus its work to the furtherance of the objectives of international peace and security.

Concomitant to the above, the State of the Nation Address indicated that the Government of South Africa would continue playing its part in finding solutions to the volatile Middle East and Persian Gulf regions by engaging with the leaders of Palestine, Israel, Iraq and Iran.

On the other hand, the State of the Nation Address touched on the issue of international economic relations. On the one hand, it emphasised the importance of strengthening South-South relations by strengthening relations with countries such as India and Brazil (IBSA), the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Japan. On the other, it committed Government to work with its partners from the North especially the European Union (EU) and North America. However, the most critical aspect of engagements with the North in 2007 would be around the DOHA Development Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The State of the Nation Address expressed hope that a 'solution to the logjams currently being experienced can be found'<sup>4</sup>.

## **Impact on Foreign Affairs**

- **Consolidating the African Agenda**

It is commendable that the 2007 State of the Nation Address drew attention to the important task of post-conflict reconstruction in Africa particularly in the DRC, Burundi and the Sudan. A 2005 UN report of the Secretary General observed that many countries coming out of conflicts have a tendency to slide back into chaos within five years if nothing is done to support their re-building efforts<sup>5</sup>. It goes without saying that post-conflict reconstruction is indeed one of the most difficult and fragile tasks to accomplish especially in the African context where most countries coming out of conflict have weak institutions of government, weak or non-existent infrastructure and lack internal sources of revenue<sup>6</sup>. It therefore calls upon countries with the means and political will to

lend their support in ensuring that the conditions that led to war in the first place are not visited once more upon the peoples of those countries.

The PCR challenge is further compounded by the fact that, more often than not, affected countries have to rely on external donor funding in order to meet the myriad of the challenges that they face. If history is anything to go by, then Africa is littered with examples of donor agencies making pledges to make funds available to offset post-conflict reconstruction but falling short of meeting the commitments they made.

Therefore South Africa is expected to continue with its all-important task of leading the efforts to bring support for Sudan's post-conflict reconstruction while at the same time identifying strategies for the reconstruction in Burundi, DRC and Comoros as among the countries identified in the State of the Nation Address. Within this context, the African Union (AU) Policy framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) ought to be the guiding framework within which South Africa engages with these tasks.

Thus, the recent signing of a general co-operation agreement between South Africa and Burundi in February 2007 is a step in the right direction. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this agreement is important because it has the potential to "unlock possibilities for both countries in the area of nation-building and economic development"...<sup>7</sup> This agreement, together with South Africa's role as the Chair (on behalf of the AU) of the PCR initiative for the Sudan, confirms South Africa's commitment towards ensuring that countries coming out of conflict receive the necessary impetus to re-build themselves.

The situations in Darfur, Ivory Coast and Somalia continue to reflect that while a peaceful society is something desirable, it is not easily attainable. As such, South Africa's foreign policy would continue to be geared towards seeking Africa's collective resolve to deal with these challenges. In the case of Ivory Coast, South Africa would have to deal with the question of its role. Following the country's appointment to the UNSC, South Africa decided to cease its facilitation role in Ivory Coast because, as stated then, the country did not want to affect its role in the UN<sup>8</sup>. However, it would appear that some of the parties are still calling for the involvement of South Africa.

The situation in Somalia has further challenged Africa's collective efforts to stabilise the continent. South Africa has indicated that it would not be in a position to deploy troops to Somalia<sup>9</sup>; however, it would remain engaged to efforts aimed at finding peace in that country.

With regards to NEPAD, the question of its full integration into the AU ought to be finalised. Related to this, a matter that has received attention from African political leadership is the question of rationalisation and harmonisation of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa. Not only would this project require continued focus from South Africa it is also key because, among other things, the success of NEPAD programmes rests primarily on there being effectively functioning RECs.

With regards to the AU, although no specific mention was made in this regard, the project to strengthen the AU and its organs continues. Of significance is to ensure that the AU's technical committees are set up and become functional. Moreover, South Africa's commitment to the AU and NEPAD would be enhanced by the country's finalisation of the national strategy for NEPAD. It would also be strengthened by the finalisation of the country's Peer Review Process (APRM), which is void of any controversy. In the recent past, South Africa had to deal with negative media coverage regarding the submission of its Peer Review Report to the APRM Forum. Such a situation does not augur well for a country that is seen as one of the vanguards of the NEPAD process. Lastly, South Africa should be able to finalise its secondment policy in order to be able to effectively deploy South Africans in specific African structures (AU, SADC) to further contribute to Africa's development.

- Global Governance

South Africa's Foreign Policy appears to be paying greater attention to issues of economic diplomacy. However, while this is not new, it has to receive renewed focus given the fact that if Foreign Policy efforts fail to ameliorate the African condition, they would remain nothing but hollow shells. Thus, increasing support for NEPAD would improve Africa's economic condition and, by extension, that of South Africa. Strengthening South-South co-operation would enhance the voice of the South in multilateral forums, therefore initiatives such as IBSA are important. Engaging with States such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), should be seen within the context of enhancing South Africa's economic diplomacy given the huge economic potential that derives from having strong relations with such countries. Furthermore, another key aspects to economic diplomacy would be to ensure that the DOHA Development Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) yields desired result especially for the countries of the South.

At a political level, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf appear to be regions that are at the centre of international challenges. South Africa's Foreign Policy strengths in this regard rest on its call to deepen dialogue in order to end conflicts and challenges. Thus to the question of Israel and Palestine, a two prong approach of ensuring that the Palestinian parties are able to co-operate and cease from fighting among themselves is important. At the very same time, the challenge remains of ensuring that no one loses sight of the existing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The looming showdown over Iran's nuclear power, which emerged in 2006, would also be of concern to South Africa. As one of the few countries from the South represented in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) South Africa's role would be enhanced in 2007 given the fact that the country would serve as the Chairperson of the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2007/08.

Lastly, the country's non-permanent seat in the UNSC should serve as another opportunity to strengthen South Africa's role on matters of international peace and security. This role comes at a time when there is renewed focus towards issues of UN Reform aimed at strengthening its mandate as the only multilateral structure charged with international peace

and security. Therefore South Africa's role and the manner in which it carries out its mandate would be closely watched simply because the country has been vocal on many international challenges. Key among these would be the ability to effectively communicate the country's positions within the UNSC in order to avoid a situation where it receives criticism, justified or not, about the manner in which it conducts itself<sup>10</sup>.

## **Implications for Parliament in 2007**

As a matter of fact, very few legislatures in the world can claim to be centrally involved in their country's foreign policy formulation and execution and South Africa's legislature is no exception to this rule. Given that, and noting South Africa's ever-increasing role and importance in matters of global governance, Parliament is required to tackle vexing questions. In this context, the time is perhaps more opportune now to raise questions on whether Parliament has been able to engage in effective oversight over the country's foreign policy machinery.

Among other things would be whether Parliament should not consider having direct engagements in some of the theatres where the country's foreign policy has been said to be successful. For instance, should Parliament not consider having direct interactions with the peoples and Parliament of Burundi where South Africa has played a significant role in that country's peace process? Should Parliament not consider engaging with the peoples of Comoros, where South Africa has also played a leading role?

Accordingly, Parliament's role has to focus on some of the following issues in its oversight work in 2007:

- The finalisation of the country's deployment policy in order to give meaning to the country's objective of consolidating the African agenda.
- Monitoring the finalisation of the country strategy for NEPAD, especially given the fact that South Africa is increasingly being seen as one of the leading countries within the NEPAD configuration.
- Monitor South Africa's role in the process to rationalise and harmonise the RECs. In this regard, perhaps pay particular attention to the fact that RECs are all encompassing and they include the political, the economic matters. In this vein, matters such as the creation of a SADC-Parliament becomes very key and what South Africa does with it very important.
- Better understand South Africa's role in the UNSC by having regular briefings on the work being done by the country in this regard. Among other things, regular interaction would ensure that Parliament is not caught off-guard when matters relating to how South Africa conducts itself are raised.
- Monitoring South Africa's role in the renewed international debate on the development and use for nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. This role is made important by the fact that South Africa would hold the Chairpersonship of the Nuclear Suppliers Group for 2007/08.

## **Progress on issues raised in the 2006 State of the Nation Address**

Progress has been made in a number of areas that were addressed in the 2006 State of the Nation Address. Some of the areas worth highlighting include:

- **Country Strategy for NEPAD**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held discussions with the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), with the aim of finalising the national strategy for NEPAD<sup>11</sup>.

- **African Diaspora**

The role of the African Diaspora has received much attention from the African political leadership. In September 2006, the Africa and Diaspora Conference was held and culminated in the adoption of a Plan of Action that would guide the implementation of activities aimed at bringing this influential sector of Africans closer to initiatives to develop Africa<sup>12</sup>.

- **International Migration**

The challenge of migration was at the top of the 61<sup>st</sup> High Level Summit of the UN in September 2006. South Africa did not only form part of the AU's discussion, which led to the adoption of a Draft African Common Position on Migration and Development, but as chair of the G77-China, it represented the G77+China at the Summit where it called for a comprehensive and balanced approach in the implementation of migration policies<sup>13</sup>.

- **Strengthening of SADC**

In line with the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held its extra-ordinary Summit in October 2006. Among other things, the Summit adopted the SADC Free Trade Protocol, which, is it hoped, would enhance intra-regional trade and address other related challenges such as regional infrastructure.

- **Peace in Africa**

South Africa continued in its role as the facilitator of the Burundi Peace Talks and 2006, saw renewed efforts to bring on board the last remaining rebel movement, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL. This was done through the signing of a Comprehensive Cease-fire Agreement that was facilitated by South Africa<sup>14</sup>.

- **India-Brazil South Africa (IBSA)**

The IBSA initiative has been one of the flagship projects aimed at consolidating South-South co-operation. In 2006, the first IBSA Summit was held which ended with the adoption of a Joint Declaration and the signing of five trilateral agreements between the IBSA members.

## References

Annan, K. (2005) *In Larger Freedom: Security, Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. New York, United Nations.

Department of Foreign Affairs (2007) *Media Release: Minister Dlamini Zuma Signs a General Co-operation Agreement with Burundi at Franco-Africa Summit*.

International Crisis Group Report (2002) *Salvaging Somalia's Chance for Peace*. 9 December. [Online]. Available at: [www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1822](http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1822)

Mbeki, T. (2007) *State of the Nation Address at the Joint Sitting of Parliament*. Cape Town, 9 February.

Minister of Defence (2007) *Parliamentary Media Briefing: International Relations, Peace and Security Cluster*. Cape Town, 14 February.

Murithi, T. (2006) *The AU/NEPAD Post Conflict Reconstruction Policy: An Analysis*, *Conflict Trends*, 1, ACCORD, Durban.

Reuters News Agency (2006) *South Africa's Mbeki Ends Ivory Coast Mediation Role*, 18 October. [Online]. Available at: [www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L1828338.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L1828338.htm)

South African Government Information (2007) *Government's Programme of Action – 2006: International Relations, Peace and Security Cluster*. [Online]. Available at: [www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/poa/report/irps06.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/poa/report/irps06.htm)

---

<sup>1</sup> Mbeki, T. (2007).

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group (2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Mbeki, T. (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Annan, K. (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Murithi, T. (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs (2007).

<sup>8</sup> Reuters News Agency (2006).

<sup>9</sup> Minister of Defence (2007).

<sup>10</sup> One matter that relates to this was the criticism that the country received following its vote against a UNSC resolution on Myanmar.

<sup>11</sup> South African Government Information (2007).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*