

Book Reviews

***South African Foreign Policy: Identities, Intentions and Directions.* David R. Black and David J. Hornsby (eds). 2017. Routledge, Oxon, Index, pp. 140. £100.00 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-1-138-20802-5 .**

The contribution of this book is significant for its focus on bilateral relations, moving beyond much of the literature that has so far focused on South Africa's broader foreign policy development and implementation, particularly in the multilateral system of governance. Given the number of bi-national commissions (BNCs) and strategic partnerships that South Africa has agreed, this is indeed an area that is in need of further interrogation in terms of its strategic value. This is what this volume aims to do in exploring the "nature and trajectory of key bilateral relationships" (preface), with countries from both the geopolitical North and South. In bringing together analysis of South Africa's bilateral relations with selected countries, the book highlights the "cross-pressures", and how Pretoria "is pulled in different directions due to its layered history ... competing interests, and desired ideological positioning" (p 9).

The seven chapters assess relations between South Africa and the African Union (AU), and International Criminal Court (ICC), Japan, China, Brazil, Iran and the United Kingdom (UK). The first chapter by the editors provides the context for the subsequent chapters in addressing the role of bilateral relations and South Africa's position as an emerging middle power. Here they highlight the challenge of perceptions, held both by South Africa and internationally, of the role the country plays as a "rising power or pivotal state, a moral actor, and a middle power" (p 1). They argue that the idea of an emerging middle power, which is discussed in detail as a concept, does not adequately address the "different and contradictory levels at which South Africa identifies and operates" (p 3). By unpacking South Africa's bilateral relations, the scope is provided for a deeper understanding of South Africa's role and conception in international relations.

In chapter two J Andrew Grant and Spencer Hamilton assess South Africa's bilateral engagement with the multilateral intergovernmental organisations of the AU and the ICC. This is a complex task as South Africa has positioned itself as an integral part of these organisations. While South Africa's relations with the OAU/AU and the ICC are often discussed in the context of the foreign policy emphasis on multi-

lateralism, this chapter sets out developments in the bilateral relationship South Africa has with these institutions and the challenge of aligning stated foreign policy principles with practice, particularly in its position on the ICC.

The long standing bilateral relations South Africa has with Japan is assessed in chapter three by Scarlett Cornelissen. She considers the macro, meso- and micro-levels in explaining the changing dynamics between South Africa and Japan through the role conceptions held by foreign policy elites. This includes assessing the symbolism emphasised during the Mandela administration, the focus and collaborative approach under Thabo Mbeki, particularly when it came to economic diplomacy and African peace and security, and the more distant relationship between the two countries under Jacob Zuma. The chapter draws on interviews with officials which brings the role of perceptions to the fore in shaping foreign policy positions.

Chris Alden and Yu-Shan Wu consider relations between South Africa and China in chapter four which, as they point out, is "one of the most remarked aspects of [South Africa's] expanding international relations" (p 53). They present a detailed history of the bilateral relations including the move by South Africa to establishment diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1998 and the subsequent development of a bi-national commission. Alden and Wu assess the developments in detail through the different presidential administrations considering bilateral diplomatic, economic and military-to-military, trade and investment and people-to-people relations. They also assess how the bilateral relations fare in the multilateral settings of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the G20.

In chapter five Janis van der Westhuizen unpacks an often emphasised, but little analysed relationship between South Africa and Brazil. The analysis highlights the differences in approach when it comes to relations at the bilateral and multilateral levels. While at the multilateral level both countries have pursued the reform of international institutions through their role in "soft-balancing" (p 92), at the bilateral level trans-national linkages remain fairly limited in people-to-people relations and in trade. It is, however, pointed out that there are stronger relations when it comes to military security and defence, with joint operations in the South Atlantic and in the field of technology.

South Africa's bilateral relations with Iran is the focus of chapter six. Michal Onderco argues that this captures "many of the dilemmas of

South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy" (p 102), especially when it comes to human rights and engaging on Iran's nuclear programme. The chapter is a little short in the discussion, although it does raise a point about the role of the African National Congress (ANC) and its ideological stance in shaping foreign policy decision making. This is a subject that needs more detailed analysis in the South African foreign policy literature. The chapter also considers the challenges facing South Africa in its position on Iran's nuclear programme and the MTN debacle.

In the final chapter David Hornsby and David Black look at the complex twists and turns in South Africa-UK relations from the colonial past to the post-*apartheid* period. The authors argue that on the surface this is a relationship of divergence, that there is "a dynamic of ongoing tensions and fissures at the diplomatic and geo-strategic level of high politics, combined with robust, ongoing linkages in the various 'functional' dimensions of low politics" (p 119). This creates a multi-layered approach in bilateral relations. Like the preceding chapters there is a good historical context provided on the developments in these relations, followed by analysis of key areas of what the authors call the 'high politics' of foreign policy divergence – Libya, Syria, Zimbabwe – as well as a discussion on perceptions of BRICS and the G7. This is followed by a look at the 'low politics' of economic relations, aid, and trans-societal links. Of course, what is considered 'low' and 'high' politics is ever-changing as the diplomatic spat over the decision by the UK to end official development assistance (ODA) to South Africa (as a middle-income country) demonstrates.

Highlighted through the chapters is a need for a deeper understanding of bilateral relations in South Africa's foreign policy and its implementation. Certainly, one needs to look more closely at South Africa's relations with Africa given the importance placed on the African agenda. While the publication includes important insights for those looking to build a fuller picture of South Africa's international relations the price places it outside of what many South African scholars can afford. The chapters are however also available through a special issue of *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol 54, No 2, 2016, which is noted at the outset of the book.

Lesley Masters

**Senior Researcher and Senior Lecturer, SARChI
Chair in African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy
University of Johannesburg**
