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# Middle Powers as Stabilizers? An Analysis of South African Involvement in Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Abstract

The fears and concerns about the future of the international order call for middle power cooperation and collaboration. Although the research on middle powers has increased, African middle powers are understudied. This study addresses this research gap by focusing on South Africa's strategies in dealing with the Second Congo War. These strategies were analyzed using a framework that comprises material, normative and ideational considerations and led to two major findings. First, Pretoria has moved from Mandela's non-intervention approach to a combination of soft and hard measures under Mbeki, making South Africa the principal peace negotiator and peacemaker in the conflict. A combination of factors such as efforts toward African revival, conformity to self-conceived roles, and other economic and material concerns explain this shift. Second, South African strategies under Mbeki were a combination of multilateral and bilateral initiatives. While the country has supported UN-led and regional efforts, it has also individually assisted the DRC in capacity building. Despite the skillfulness of its leaders in mediating the conflict, suspicions about South Africa's intention and handling of regional crises are still a matter of concern. The country needs to reassure the skeptics to take heed of the global call for middle power coalitions.

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, middle powers have contributed in diverse ways to deal with global challenges. During the Cold War, middle powers played functional roles focusing on limited issues such as peacekeeping. They tended to act as intermediaries and legitimizers of the existing global political structure because of the benefits such roles can generate (Cooper and Dal, 2016; Walton and Wilkins, 2019).

Freed from East/West bipolarity constraints and energized by the rise of a normative culture on rights and responsibilities, the middle powers have concentrated their efforts toward redefining their ideational and entrepreneurial roles in the post-Cold War period. As a result, they led many initiatives such as campaigns against anti-personnel mines, child soldiers, small arms, and the promotion of the new norms and institutions such as Responsibility to Protect and the International Criminal Court, together with civil society groups (Cooper and Dal, 2016).

However, the hopes at the end of the Cold War have been recently challenged by the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia with revisionist agendas to reshape the global order according to their interests (Panda, 2021), and the relative decline of U.S. influence and commitment, notably under the Trump regime. Recent issues such as the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the Rohingya issue, and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused paralysis in the UN Security Council (UNSC) reminiscent of the Cold War–and have thus raised fears and concerns about the future of the existing international order. The feeling of uncertainty has increasingly called for middle power cooperation (Rachman, 2018; Andersen, 2019; Nagy, 2020; Paris, 2019;).

These concerns and uncertainties about power transition and the future of the liberal international order have also revived the academic interest in the middle powers (Gilley and O'Neil 2014; Walton and Wilkins, 2019; Giacomello and Verbeek, 2020). Nevertheless, except for a volume edited by Gilley and O'Neil (2014), studies on African middle powers are rare. This reality is unfortunate because, with the increasing Chinese and Russian involvement, the African continent will be one of the places where challenges toward the liberal international order may be the most apparent. Besides, as a continent with weak capacities and prone to different problems and crises, Africa may need middle power mobilization more than any other region in the world. Thus, it is crucial to assess African middle powers' capacity and willingness in building a coalition both within the African and worldwide contexts.

This paper is a historical analysis of the South African intervention strategies during and after the Second Congo War (August 1998 – July 2003) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It analyzes South Africa's conflict resolution strategies–the driving factors behind them and the consequent impact these strategies have on the current call for middle power cooperation and collaboration. We argue that while South Africa has positively contributed to conflict resolution in

the DRC, its move from a principled approach toward more realist considerations in its strategy, notably under the Zuma administration, may have weakened its reputation as a neutral and reliable peacemaker in the region.

South African involvement in the DRC has been the subject of various research projects, often concerning the foreign policy of South Africa toward the African continent (le Pere, 2006; Sidiropoulos, 2007, 2008; Alden and Schoeman, 2013; Landsberg, 2014). Some scholars have focused on the drivers of South African intervention in the DRC (Landsberg, 2002; Adetiba, 2017). However, the impact of South Africa's strategies on its image as a peacemaker has been rarely studied, with a few exceptions, such as the work of Alden and Schoeman (2013). Therefore, this study mainly deals with the drivers of the South African intervention and their impact on the country's image in the DRC and the continent. Using insights from policy documents issued by the South African government, scholarly literature, news reports, and observation of the war and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, this study deepens the understanding of the challenges that an eventual middle power cooperation may face.

This paper, following this section, consists of six sections. The second section introduces the middle power status and role of South Africa. The third section provides our theoretical framework for the analysis of South Africa's strategies in the DRC. After introducing the Second Congo War in the following section, the fifth section details the South African strategies. The penultimate section analyzes these strategies, and the conclusion emphasizes the implications of the study.

## 2. South Africa as a middle power

The concept of middle powers is well recognized in the international system and has been widely used, as many researchers studied their role and behaviors. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on the definition of middle powers (Behringer, 2012; Gilley and O'Neill, 2014). Middle powers are generally identified based on three factors: their position in the international system, their foreign policy behavior, and their identity (Gilley and O'Neil, 2014). However, it is theoretically problematic to put many countries with few commonalities regarding their foreign policy in one category (Jordaan, 2017).

Therefore, Jordaan (2017) called for limiting the use of the term for more clarity and contended that the contribution to the stability of the liberal international order be a criterion to identify middle powers. Furthermore, he suggested dropping adjectives such as "emerging" or "Southern" middle powers and restricting the term to mid-range states that play active roles in the liberal international order. The term middle powers would then be limited to countries such as Canada, Nordic Countries, and the Netherlands, traditionally considered as such, and to a few

others, like South Korea, Mexico (Jordaan, 2017), and Indonesia (Jordaan, 2019).

Akin to how Andersen (2019) agreed with the call of Jordaan (2017), this study approaches South Africa's middlepowership from the perspective of the country's efforts for regional stability. Although its anti-hegemonic rhetoric and its attempt to develop parallel institutions such as the New Development Bank of the BRICS may be a matter of concern, its efforts toward conflict prevention and resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction, make it a potential middle power candidate. Using the typology of middle power's role developed by Giacomello and Verbeek (2000), South Africa can be considered a middle power that plays the role of a regional power, considering its economic and military capacities and its commitment to developing the African continent.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Why states intervene as third parties in conflicts or peace operations is a question that has garnered the keen interest of international relations scholars. The neorealist scholars such as Mearsheimer (1990) and Waltz (1979) argue that in an anarchic world where security is the predominant matter, states intervene as third parties only when their interests are at stake. Liberal theorists, on the other hand, believe that democracies should avert the spread of war and tackle its root causes. For liberal peace theorists, democracy, human dignity, and economic freedom support each other, and thus liberal intervention through multilateral institutions can be an option (Lebovic, 2004).

In studying the implication of rising powers such as India, China, and Brazil in conflict management, Dal (2018) suggested four aspects that can be explored in analyzing their motivation. First, as third parties, rising powers might search for a peaceful resolution to the crisis that affects their interests and preferences. Second, rising powers might engage in conflict resolution for status purposes or soft power strategies. Third, rising powers are inclined to calculate costs before engaging in a new normative initiative. Thus, rising powers might prefer complying with the existing structures or improve the existing institutions instead of undertaking new initiatives. Fourth, since rising powers tend to focus on regional issues because of their limited institutional and normative capabilities, they are more inclined to deal with conflicts whose negative security externalities are high (Dal, 2018). It can be argued from these hypotheses that material and security considerations and the search for status are essential factors in assessing the behavior of rising powers toward conflict management.

In his article "Interests or Ideas? Explaining Brazil's Surge in Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding", Charles Call (2018) used different theories to assess Brazil's increasing activism in peacebuilding since the 2000s. He explored classic realist views of power-seeking considerations

or liberal commitment to global trade and order. Call further investigated whether post-colonial theories and identity-based approaches might have influenced Brazil's strategies. Despite arguing for interest-based theories such as realism and liberalism, he added that constructivist and post-colonial theories should also be considered to get a fuller picture of middle powers' engagement in peacebuilding.

As the works of Dal (2018) and Call (2018) put forward, middle powers' attitudes toward a conflict can be understood by looking into the material, normative and ideational considerations. South Africa's strategies concerning the DRC conflict may be explained by interest-based considerations, and to some extent, ideational factors. We will thus apply this framework to analyze conflict resolution strategies adopted by South Africa.

## 4. The Second Congo War (August 1998 – July 2003)

The origin of the Second Congo War can be traced back to the First Congo War (1996–1997), when the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), a rebel group led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, overthrew President Mobutu, receiving direct military support from Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Angola (Zachariassen, 2017). However, a few months after he had seized power, President Kabila ended his cooperation with his allies and asked their advisors and their soldiers to leave the country within twenty-four hours (Hesselbein, 2007; Zachariassen, 2017). On August 2, 1998, a new rebellion, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), started in the Eastern Part of the DRC, and on August 4, the second front opened in the South-West, about 600 kilometers from the capital Kinshasa. The RCD was composed of many former members of the national army and spearheaded by Rwanda and Uganda (Sweet, 2021).

Contrary to the RCD's expectation of an easy victory, the conflict stalled. On the one hand, President Kabila received the backing of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as Chad and Sudan, and was able to stop the progress of the rebels. On the other hand, the rebellion itself was further fragmented. While the RCD continued receiving support from Rwanda, Uganda created a second proxy, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), in 1998. In 1999, the Rally for Congolese Democracy/Kisangani-Movement for Liberation (RCD/K-ML) defected from the RCD and was supported by Uganda (Sweet, 2021), adding to the complexity of the conflict. Eight countries were involved: Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan, and the DRC, on the one side, and Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda on the other side. In addition, a range of local defense groups emerged, such as the Mayi-Mayi (Hesselbein, 2007; Vépierre, 2016; Sweet, 2021). At the peak of the war, the DRC was broadly divided between three areas of influence: its government, Rwanda, and Uganda, respectively.

After many unsuccessful attempts to end the conflict, parties to the conflict agreed to hold an "Inter-Congolese Dialogue" and signed the Sun City Agreement in April 2002. The Agreement served as the framework for a multi-party government, set a timeline for elections, and reduced violence. However, since some disagreements remained, neither the formation of a government nor the drafting of a new constitution took place (Hesselbein, 2007; Zachariassen, 2017).

Once peace agreements were sealed between Rwanda and the DRC, and Uganda and the DRC, respectively, the DRC Government, rebel groups, political opposition, and civil society signed the "Global and All-Inclusive Agreement" on December 17, 2002. The agreement called for a ceasefire and peaceful solution to the crisis, the creation of "a restructured, integrated national army," the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and "the disarming of the armed groups and militia and to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC" (Inter-Congolese Dialogue, 2002, 2-3).

The "Global and All-Inclusive Agreement" also established a power-sharing mechanism which included one president, Joseph Kabila, and four vice presidents, representing the government, the RCD, the MLC, and the political opposition, often referred to as "1+4" (Hesselbein, 2007; Zachariassen, 2017). The transitional government's objectives included the country's reunification and reconstruction, the restoration of territorial integrity and state authority, national reconciliation, the creation of a national army, and the organization of free and transparent elections (Inter-Congolese Dialogue, 2002).

The signing of the Final Act on April 2, 2003 officially ended the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and the Second Congo War (Zachariassen, 2017), and led to the withdrawal of foreign troops (Schoeman, 2003). It is estimated that more than three million people died between 1998 and 2008 (BBC News Afrique, 2010).

## 5. South Africa and Conflict Resolution in the DRC

South Africa participated in various stages of conflict resolution in the DRC. Its participation can be divided into two periods: from 1998 to 2006 and from 2006 to 2019. The first period covers the beginning of the war up to the first multi-party elections that ended the transition period, and the second period starting from 2006 includes state-building efforts until the first peaceful power transition in January 2019.

### 5.1. The First Period (1998-2006)

Three SADC countries, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe were militarily involved in the DRC conflict since 1999. In contrast, South Africa, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, preferred a

politically negotiated solution that could involve fighting groups as well as neighboring countries (le Pere, 2006). This position did not change when Mbeki became president in 1999. Pretoria pushed for a political solution and supported SADC-led peace talks hosted by Zambian President Chiluba (OCHA, 1999). The peace talks under the Zambian leader led to the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999 by six states (Angola, DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe), three international organizations (SADC, Organization of African Unity, and the UN), and two rebel groups (the RCD and MLC) (Sweet, 2021).

The parties agreed to an immediate ceasefire to be enforced by a UN mission and a joint military commission to facilitate the integration of armed groups into a national army at the end of the war. However, fighting continued, and after multiple calls for a ceasefire, the UNSC finally adopted Resolution 1279, establishing the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (referred by its French initials, MONUC).[1]

While things stalled, President Kabila was assassinated in 2001. His son, Joseph Kabila, succeeded him and agreed to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. Meanwhile, South Africa, a backstage leader, strengthened its role as the mediator under Mbeki. For many months, Mbeki hosted more than three hundred representatives from rebel groups, political parties, civil society groups, and the government for consultations. The Pretoria Agreement was signed under his leadership in 2002 (Besharati and Rawhani, 2016).

Aside from leading peace negotiations, South Africa extended its efforts toward peacebuilding by first deploying its troops under the MONUC (Adetiba, 2017), and provided financial and logistical support for the 2006 elections (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.). South Africa further provided training for the national electoral commission personnel, technical assistance, monitoring, and communications equipment, and supported the printing and delivery of ballots throughout the country (Besharati and Rawhani, 2016). The elections were held in 2006 despite several impediments, such as failed security sector reforms, the existence of parallel administrations within the security forces, and the persistent influence of wartime networks during the transition period (Hesselbein, 2007; Sweet, 2021). Nonetheless, restoring state authority in the country remained one of the biggest challenges.

### 5.2. The Second Period (2006-2019)

On February 14, 2004, South Africa and the DRC signed a General Cooperation Agreement, which serves as the foundation for bilateral cooperation between the two states and the basis for political, economic, and technical cooperation. The agreement established a Bi-National Commission (BNC), which meets yearly as a strategic mechanism at the level of Heads of State

[1] UNSC resolution 1279. Adopted by the Security Council at its 4076th meeting on 30 November 1999, S/RES/1279.

(Republic of South Africa, 2020). It was under this agreement that South Africa assisted the DRC before and after the 2006 elections. As international efforts focused on restoring state control over the country, Pretoria assisted the DRC in developing managerial capacity through a Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) program (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.). Its strategy consisted of training programs and the provision of technical assistance.

For instance, South Africa actively participated in reforming the security forces in the DRC, as the South African Defense Forces (SADF) trained three battalions, including the Rapid Reaction Force Battalions 42 and 43, to fight against armed groups. Likewise, the South African Police Services trained the National Police of Congo (PNC) in several fields, including human resource management, crowd management, and VIP protection, and provided technical assistance as well (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.).

Furthermore, South Africa conducted capacity-building programs through its government departments. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) trained more than 700 DRC diplomats. The Department of Public Service and Administration helped the DRC develop its anti-corruption strategy and assisted in establishing effective control of public service. Under the program, Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy and a National School for Public Administration (ENA) to train public officials were created. Likewise, the Department of Home Affairs assisted the country in population and immigration matters and provided appropriate equipment and technology for the standardization of procedures regarding immigration and population matters (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.).

In the economic sphere, South African investment rose significantly, from mining to banking, telecommunications sector, agriculture and retail, logistics, and other services (Besharati and Mthembu-Salter, 2016). As for trade, South Africa represents 21.6% of the DRC's total imports, being the country's top supplier of foreign goods and services (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.).

Finally, South Africa has also been active in the DRC through multilateral organizations such as the MONUC and its successor, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Initially, the task of MONUC included the establishment of contacts with the signatories to the Ceasefire Agreement, liaison with and provision of technical assistance to the joint military commission, provision of information on the local security conditions to the UN, the observation planning of the ceasefire and disengagement of forces, and the maintenance of liaison with all parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the protection of human rights (UNSC resolution 1279).

The mission was first expanded in 2000 with new responsibilities such as monitoring the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement and the release of prisoners of war and military captives.[2]

[2] UNSC resolution 1291. Adopted by the Security Council at its 4104th meeting, on 24 February 2000, S/RES/1291.

The UNSC added election support, security sector reform, and the enforcement of the arms embargo as part of the mission's task in 2004.[3] Furthermore, with the persistence of armed groups in the Eastern part of the country, the mission's mandate was expanded to include duties such as supporting the government in dealing with armed groups. Stressing the stabilization aspect of the mission, MONUC became the MONUSCO in 2010.[4]

The UN mission was expanded due to the rise of a new rebellion, the Mouvement du 23 Mars (March 23 Movement, or M23). As the M23 seized towns and cities, MONUSCO was severely criticized for its inability to protect civilians. With the growing pressure and calls to strengthen the mission, the UNSC finally allowed the creation of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) under the MONUSCO in 2013.[5] As an offensive unit, the FIB successfully fought against the M23 together with the government troops. Since then, the FIB has been fighting against other armed groups.

South Africa participated actively in the creation of the brigade and sent troops together with other SADC countries. With a contingent of 1345 soldiers (SA Defence Web, 2014), South Africa, along with Tanzania and Malawi, were the primary troop-contributing countries of the 3069-strong FIB (Roux, n.d.).

As this overview described, South Africa was a key player in the efforts to end the conflict in the DRC and the subsequent post-conflict reconstruction. Its strategies included two main aspects: multilateral and bilateral initiatives. First, South Africa led conflict resolution by acting as a mediator and supporting multilateral initiatives under the UN mission and regional bodies. Second, based on the General Cooperation Agreement signed by the two countries on February 14, 2004, Pretoria developed a PCRD program through which its government agencies assisted Kinshasa in capacity building. Finally, South Africa's approach underwent a major shift under the Mbeki government: from non-intervention under Mandela, to intervention, either under the MONUSCO's FIB or by assisting government troops. The factors behind these shifts will be discussed in the following section.

## 6. Drivers of South African intervention in the DRC conflict

South African foreign policy underwent a significant shift as it moved from a principled approach under Mandela to a more strategic one that mixed principles and pragmatism under Mbeki (Landsberg, 2012). More ambitious than his predecessor, Mbeki believed that to make South

[3] UNSC resolution 1565. Adopted by the Security Council at its 5048th meeting, on 1 October 2004, S/RES/1565.
[4] UNSC resolution 1925. Adopted by the Security Council at its 6324th meeting, on 28 May 2010, S/RES/1925.
[5] UNSC resolution 2098. Adopted by the Security Council at its 6943rd meeting, on 28 March 2013, S/RES/2098.

Africa a major actor in the continent and a reliable global player, there was a need for developing a more predictable foreign policy which provides a progressive agenda (Landsberg, 2012). As described in the *2005-2008 Strategic Document* of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) (2005), Mbeki's agenda was centered around two factors: national interests and the primacy of Africa. The *Document* declared that "our foreign policy is guided by the same goals that we pursue at home" (DFA, 2005, 9).

As for the centrality of Africa, the *Document* stated that "in the first instance, our greatest challenge is to consolidate the African agenda and, in this way, to contribute to the victory of the African Renaissance" (DFA, 2005, 10). The high priority that Mbeki gave to Africa is even more apparent in the *Fifteen Year Review*, which affirms that "the regeneration of Africa is the main pillar of South Africa's foreign-policy objectives. It is central to ensuring a better life for all in South Africa and on the continent" (South African Government, 2008, 58). A similar claim about Africa's centrality in South Africa's participation in peace missions was visible in the *1999 White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions* (*1999 White Paper*) (South African Government, 1999).

The *2005-2008 Strategic Plan* summarized the foundation which guided Mbeki in his approach toward Africa. The *Document* defined three pillars upon which South Africa's engagement with Africa rests. They include (1) "strengthening Africa's institutions continentally and regionally;" (2) "supporting the implementation of Africa's socio-economic development program, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD);" and (3) "strengthening bilateral political and socio-economic relations by way of effective structures for dialogue and co-operation" (DFA, 2005, 9).

Thus, through the banner of the "African Renaissance," Mbeki advocated strategic partnerships such as the NEPAD (Landsberg, 2012; Alden and Schoeman, 2013), a vision and framework for developing Africa. As Alden and le Pere (2004) commented, the "African Renaissance" discourse served as a call for the African responsibility to transform the continent. They argued that Mbeki was an advocate of norms and standards for good governance and sound economic management. In addition, the continental revival and development required the creation of new institutions and the reform of existing ones. It is from this perspective that South Africa notably contributed to the creation of the African Union (AU) and its Peace and Security Council, as well as the Organ for Politics, Defense, and Security of the SADC.

Another aspect that Mbeki believed to be crucial was conflict resolution and peace missions. The importance of conflict resolution in Mbeki's foreign policy was equally highlighted by *the 2005-2008 Strategic Plan* of the DFA. The *Document* insisted that "the Department's goals for the Continent are therefore the resolution of conflict and the building of a framework within which socio-economic development can take place" (DFA, 2005, 19). Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister

of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, equally stressed the link between prosperity and stability in a speech at the University of Pretoria. She declared that "the ultimate goal of African development and the prosperity of its people are premised on a stable political environment. Therefore, the challenge relating to peace and security on the continent remains of paramount concern" (DIRCO, 2011).

From the perspective of liberal theory, it can be argued that the South African commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Second Congo War was part of Pretoria's Africa-centered foreign policy and its desire for the development of the continent. As Minister Nkoana-Mashabane argued, South Africa shares the belief that building stable democratic systems "will make a positive contribution to the challenge of peace, democracy, development and stability" in Africa (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2012, 6). Therefore, like in the DRC, South African leaders use mediation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction and development as their strategies to actively participate in finding solutions to the issues that the continent faces (DIRCO, 2011). As leaders who were particularly committed to the African cause, both Mandela and Mbeki were personally involved in the process, and Mbeki accompanied the DRC transitional government.

Ideational considerations also informed the strategy of Pretoria. The *1999 White Paper* defines the South African conception of peace missions and declares that participation in these missions "is increasingly a requisite for international respectability and for an authoritative voice in the debate on the future on international conflict management and the reforms of intergovernmental organizations" (South African Government, 1999, 20). As Alden and Schoeman (2013) pointed out, these ideational considerations were notably evident in Mbeki's first term, when South Africa strived to be the bridge-builder between the developed and developing worlds while being an anti-imperialist voice.

Similarly, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane, under President Zuma, stressed the role of South Africa as "a critical player in shaping the development of agenda of Africa." Speaking for South Africa, before the country chaired the presidency of the UNSC, the minister had declared in these terms: "We have defined ourselves as a progressive agent for positive change. In practice, we have assumed the role of peacemaker and negotiator in Africa and a champion of Africa's interests abroad" (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2012, 6).

Based on this role conception and the evaluation of performance, Alden and Schoeman (2013) argued that decision-makers such as Mbeki tried to develop their foreign policies according to their self-prescribed roles to strengthen the international leadership of the country. In other words, leaders such as Mbeki were also guided by their perception of South Africa's role in the continent and the world. According to Gqiza and Ogunnubi (2019), leaders had to show their commitment to peaceful resolution and to work through multilateral venues such as the MONUSCO or SADC to increase the status of South Africa as the creator of premier norms and values, negotiator and

peacemaker.

It should be noted, however, that although liberal and normative considerations explain why South Africa called for a peaceful solution and continued to participate in UN peacekeeping throughout and after the conflict, they cannot explain the shift from non-intervention to intervention in 2013 or the bilateral cooperation on many areas such as security and defense.

Aside from liberal and ideational factors, it is argued that realist features such as political, security, and economic calculations influenced the South African intervention in the Congolese conflict (le Pere, 2006; Adetiba, 2017). The *1999 White Paper* stressed the importance of participation in peace missions. The document asserted:

> the level and size of South African contribution to any peace mission will depend on how closely the mission relates to national interests and the type of demand that exists for the type of contribution outlined about. Indeed, where core national interests are clearly at stake, the level and the size of the South African contribution may well exceed that of the envisaged potential contribution. (South African Government, 1999, 25)

As of December 2020, South Africa was the top troop-contributing African country to the MONUSCO, with 1003 troops (United Nation Peacekeeping, 2020), and is the biggest contributor of the FIB's troops. Furthermore, in 2019, 1,190 troops were involved in UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC, Sudan, and South Sudan. Considering the number of troops deployed as of 2020, South African peacekeepers are most present in the DRC.

Pretoria's policies toward the continent were influenced by its belief in the link between the peace and development of Africa and the national security of the country. This ideal was apparent in a speech given to journalists in 2014 in Cape Town by the then Minister of Defense, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula:

> …our commitment to the renewal of the African continent, and to the promotion of peace and stability which will lead to sustainable development in Africa is based on the understanding that our national interest is inextricably linked to what happens in our sub-region, SADC, and the continent of Africa in general. (Allison, 2014)

The above statement supports the claim that national interest considerations play an essential role for rising powers to define their approaches toward conflict resolution (Dal, 2018). As for the DRC case, it can be argued that economic factors significantly influenced South Africa's approach. A comparison with Lesotho supports this argument. While at the beginning of the conflict, leaders in South Africa continued calling for a negotiated political solution, the same country intervened

militarily in Lesotho in September 1998. Commenting on South Africa's motivations in Lesotho, Likoti (2007) argued that the intervention was motivated by resource concerns, notably the control of the Katse Dam, which was vital to South Africa. In comparison, the DRC was of little strategic interest to leaders in Pretoria at that time.

However, South African interests in the DRC changed since 1999. The country has been massively investing in many sectors of the Congolese economy. South African mobile telecommunications giants Vodacom and MTN, mining companies, Standard Bank, and state-owned electricity provider Eskom are active in the country (Adetiba, 2017). Besharati and Mthembu-Salter (2016), in a study of the two countries' trade relations, underlined the substantial imbalance in bilateral trade. In 2012, for example, South Africa exported goods and services to the DRC worth USD 88 million, while Congolese exports to South Africa barely reached USD 4.5 million. As of 2018, South Africa was the DRC's biggest supplier of foreign goods and services, providing 21.6% of its total imports (South African Embassy Kinshasa, n.d.).

Many in South Africa regard the DRC as a strategic partner and a country with diverse opportunities. Speaking at a business seminar in Kinshasa in 2015, Deputy Minister of Energy, Thembisile Majola, stated:

> South Africa regards the DRC as a strategic market and partner due to the enormous potential that exists between the two countries driven by the mining, reconstruction of roads and energy infrastructure, as well as the impact of the agricultural campaign launched in 2012. Notwithstanding the global challenges, the DRC's economy has remained strong with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 8.6% in 2014. (South African News Agency, 2015)

Finally, South Africa has been eyeing the DRC's energy potential to compensate for its energy shortage. Since 2011, a joint RSA-DRC development of the Grand Inga hydroelectric has been under consideration. With a proposed capacity of 40,000-MW in its final phase, the Grand Inga hydroelectric project on the DRC's Congo River is of vital interest to South Africa (DIRCO, 2020). Hence, if one agrees with the remarks made by Mapisa-Nqakula and Deputy Minister Majola, it can be argued that economic factors and security concerns such as spillover effects (e.g., the flow of refugees) played a role in Pretoria's decisions to participate in MONUSCO's FIB heavily. Pretoria has invested economically and politically in the country so much that stabilization of the DRC had critical importance. It was a tendency that realist scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (2006) highlighted a long time ago.

This analysis of South Africa's involvement in the Second Congo War under the framework consisting of material, normative and ideational considerations led us to two findings. First, Pretoria has moved from a non-intervention approach to a combination of soft and hard measures.

While Mandela called for a political solution and supported regional efforts, Mbeki turned South Africa into a major peace negotiator and peacemaker in the conflict. A combination of factors such as efforts toward African revival, conformity to self-conceived roles, and other economic and material concerns explain the shift mostly undertaken under President Mbeki. Second, the South African strategy under Mbeki has consisted of a combination of multilateral and bilateral initiatives. While it has supported UN-led and regional efforts, South Africa has individually been assisting the DRC in capacity building.

## 7. Conclusion

The contribution of South Africa to the Congolese crisis has been significant. This paper analyzed the country as a middle power for its mid-range economic and military capability and aspiration to be a regional leader. While the country has shown extraordinary leadership in the DRC conflict, many other challenges remain in the continent and the world. Strengthening the AU's major organs, economic and political integration, poverty eradication, lack of infrastructures, and human development are but some of the challenges that require sound regional leadership and cooperation.

South Africa made a significant contribution in solving the crisis that affected much of the Great Lakes Region. Although armed groups still control some areas of the DRC, state control has relatively been restored, elections regularly organized, and power transfer took place in 2019. Consequently, South Africa is generally well accepted as a leader and mediator in the DRC by the government and the opposition. At a business meeting in Kinshasa in 2016, the Minister of Economy in the DRC, Modeste Bahati, has requested South African businesspeople to exploit existing opportunities in the DRC and to invest in other provinces of the country (South African New Agency, 2015). Similarly, opposition leaders often hold consultations and discussions in South Africa (BBB News Afrique, 2018). Many articles in the press welcome with enthusiasm South African investments in the country (Mediacongo.net, 2014; Diasso, 2015)

The attitudes of many leaders and the public in the DRC concerning South Africa's intervention are in contrast with suspicions and criticism toward Pretoria within the continent. In the SADC, the role of South Africa as a leader is sometimes contested. For instance, Angola and Zimbabwe criticized Pretoria's refusal to join them in fighting rebels upon the request of President Laurent-Desire Kabila in 1998 (Likoti, 2007). Likewise, at the continental level, there are cases of resistance to Pretoria's agenda. The rejection of Mbeki's mediation in Cote d'Ivoire by West African states and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's bid against Jean Ping for the AU Commission significantly damaged the image of South Africa in the continent (Alden and Schoeman, 2013). Finally, recurrent

xenophobic attacks against migrants from other African countries challenge Pretoria's self-image as a "champion of Africa's interests" (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2012, 6).

These suspicions and feelings may affect South African ability to deal with future conflicts and limits its ability to transform its economic and military capability into tools for influence (Crouzel, 2002). As Kefale, Alden, and Schoeman (2017) adamantly argued, South Africa needs to listen to Africa's views about its role on the continent.

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