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South Africa's Global, Continental and Regional Strategic Importance: Key issues

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Introduction

This work contributes towards a concrete understanding of key issues characterising South Africa's global, continental and regional strategic importance. While these issues are opportunities enjoyed by South Africa globally, continentally and regionally, they are dialectically also challenges it faces internally and externally.

South Africa's position within international power relations

South Africa is a country of strategic importance globally in the world, continentally in Africa and regionally in Southern Africa. Its global, continental and regional status is characterized by its position within a hierarchy of political, economic, financial, trade, human resources development, technological and military international power relations that extend from the United States of America at the center of

capitalism to the African continent and its Southern African region at its periphery. It is African continental power and a Southern African regional power with requisite resources to consolidate its continental and regional status and strive to be an important international power, a major force within the Group of 20 countries and a global organization consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and an important actor within the United Nations (UN). It has made it impossible for any global organization established by members of the UN committed to end the Western world domination concerned with African affairs in theory and practice and striving to have mutual sustainable closer working relations with Africa to exclude it as a member. Its membership to Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICS) was inevitable.

It made this strategic theoretical and political contribution through its articulation of key issues, processes and developments in international affairs affecting Africa and the world and its call upon the global progressive forces to solve international socio-political and economic problems. The view of BRICS as a political, not economic and trade formation, primarily in terms of political factors not economic, trade and population factors is such that South Africa is more important than how its membership in the organization is viewed by its

critics. Its expectation continentally and globally to contribute towards the struggle to end racism is more than of some of its BRICS partners.

South Africa is of strategic importance for the advancement of the strategic interests of the Western powers and those of global capitalism in Africa. They attached great importance to the negotiated settlement of its apartheid conflict. Central to this attachment was the fundamental and structural need to stabilize Southern Africa, the region of strategic importance for their continued control of Africa's resources, to maintain access to and control over its strategic resources and to ensure that their strategic interests in the country survive the end of its apartheid rule. The Western powers achieved this strategic objective for the survival and expansion of their interests not only in South Africa, but also regionally, continentally and globally. South Africa is in the Southern African region occupying a strategic position in the plans of the Western powers for their continued control of Africa's resources. It occupies a leading position within this process. It is a target not in its own right by the Western powers in their program of action on the national, regional, continental and global fronts. It is more integrated into the West and global capitalism than any other African country. It is this strategic importance which structurally renders it as the country facing more challenges

than any other African country in the struggle for social justice.

South Africa has enormous natural resources of vital importance to the external powers.

South Africa was invited to be a member of BRICS because of its global geopolitical strategic importance. Its geopolitical strategic importance to BRICS is characterized by the fact that its strategic port locations would serve its members to better compete with the countries constituting the center of capitalism in global affairs. South Africa has enormous natural resources of vital importance to the external powers located strategically on the three essential shipping routes from West to East. This includes key Asian countries such as China, India and Japan and Russia's far eastern regions.

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Russia, a country upon which Europe depends for its energy critical for the operations of its economy and security, is a transcontinental country spanning Eastern Europe and

Northern Asia and the world's largest country by area. The other routes are through the Suez Canal and around Cape Agulhas which is of vital importance to the BRICS countries. Cape Agulhas is the geographic southern tip of Africa and the beginning of the dividing line between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. South Africa's added importance to BRICS members is its maritime position. If it manages to invest in its military and expand its military and air capabilities, it will increase not only its importance to BRICS members but also to its global, continental and regional importance.

South Africa's contribution towards a new African and global diplomacy

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, as the national president, put human rights, democracy, development and political governance of African societies conducive for their advancement at the center of his administration's Africa policy. For the first time in the history of its role in African and global affairs, through Mandela called for a new renaissance in the conduct of African and global diplomacy based on human rights, democracy, development and progressive political governance. Central to them were the interests and needs of the people of Africa and the world, not of their heads of state and government. He viewed sovereignty and

national interest on this basis. This is in essence the core of his call for a new renaissance in the view of sovereignty and national interest in the conduct of diplomacy in African and global affairs.

Mandela's administration was a leap forward of African diplomacy in service of the African people.

Mandela's call for a new renaissance in the conduct of African diplomacy was for theory to serve practice as African people confront socio-political and economic problems for their resolution. He made it clear without fear and favor that he was representing the African people, not his fellow African heads of state and government. He demonstrated this by criticizing them in their presence particularly for being against human rights, democracy, development and progressive political governance. Mandela's administration was a qualitative leap forward in the conduct of African diplomacy in the service of the material conditions and rights of the African people. Central to his administration's diplomatic approach towards African conflicts was to ensure that Africans solve their problems so as to prevent external actors and powers from interfering in their internal affairs. In this context, South Africa's security as indissolubly linked to that of other

African countries, its active participation in the resolution of African continental problems is a solid investment in its sustainable development. South Africa's continental and global strategic importance helps to explain a higher level of demands and expectations placed upon its shoulders continentally and globally for it to play increasingly a progressive role in African affairs and in the relations between the continent and the world.

Its position within a hierarchy of international power relations, it being Africa's qualitatively largest and most diversified economy, its capital accumulation process, its relative international and considerable African continental and Southern African regional strength are some of factors characterizing its global, continental and regional status. It constitutes a potentially powerful center of independent development on the African continent. These factors give it enormous advantages to play an increasing leadership role in African affairs and in the relations between Africa and the world.

The view of South Africa from the late 1990 to the early 2000s

In the late 1990s to the early 2000s, it was popularly maintained that South Africa was having political conditions conducive for

the advancement of development, material conditions and rights of the majority of its people. Some of these conditions were regarded, firstly, as its mass-based, well-organized, disciplined party. Secondly, it was regarded as having highly developed state-owned enterprises like the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and ESKOM to be used for developmental project. Its Department of Trade and Industry through DBSA and IDC was regarded as a driving force using its financial resources and capabilities in its efforts to achieve its development objectives. Thirdly, on the human capital front, it was said to have enough capable people. These political conditions are conducive for it to have the developmental state.

South Africa has energy and mineral companies with well-entrenched international links and capabilities.

South Africa's political conditions were regarded as its proud national assets in solving its problems. They were viewed as its weapons in confronting its weaknesses on its negative side. These weaknesses were and are still the fact that, firstly, it has no control over the banking sector. The private financial sector in the country is dominated by five banks. They

are the Absa Group Limited, Capitec Bank, the First National Bank, the Nedbank Group Limited and the Standard Bank of South Africa. The domination of its financial sector by these banks is a serious problem particularly given the fact that the finance industry is very powerful with global linkages. Secondly, South Africa has energy and mineral companies with well-entrenched international links and capabilities with the result that it is facing profound challenges to solve.

South Africa currently does no longer have these political conditions. The consequence is that, firstly, it has not been able, on the human capital and organizational fronts, to solve two problems it is facing on its negative side. Secondly, it has continued not being able to best and most effectively advance research and development crucial for its sustainable development and to have the developmental state. Thirdly, it continues not having the development bank under the state ownership and leadership. The profound consequence is that it has not yet substantially done justice to its status as the number one African country of global, continental and regional strategic importance.

ANC's internal problems and their impact on South Africa

Another problem South Africa is facing relates to its governing political party. The African National Congress (ANC) was once popularly viewed as the proud national product produced by South Africans in their struggle to end their socio-historical injustice and in the process, a producer of activities aimed at earning and sustaining respect, trust and loyalty of the South African people so as to organize best, most effectively and progressively for socio-political and economic change. It produced leadership of unassailable quality and general membership who through risks, courageous acts and principled lives enabled it in moving theory and analysis to practice through mobilization and concrete action that led to its victory over the forces of the apartheid rule in 1994.

South Africa has been negatively affected by profound unprecedented challenges faced by the ANC in its history as its governing political party. With Jacob Zuma's accession to the national presidency and an assailable quality of his administration and their consequences, the ANC's problems became more profound and unprecedented. Its members increasingly recognized and admitted this reality. Some of its members maintain it has lost its historical direction. These problems have continued increasing. They are currently worse. The ANC has not proved being capable of solving them.

The ANC should serve as a clear and unambiguous forward movement towards the resolution of persistent poverty.

The reality that the ANC is facing profound unprecedented problems in its history as a governing party is recognized and admitted by individuals of different and antagonistic political, economic and ideological positions, including its members and its alliance organizational partners, the South African Communist Party and the South African Congress of Trade Unions. The ANC should serve as a clear and unambiguous forward movement towards the resolution of persistent poverty and lack of socio-economic security faced by the majority of the South African people. Without this, it will leave more South Africans with no other alternative but to join opposition political parties in increasing its loss of support and further visualizing the country being not under its leadership. It lost key metros such as Pretoria and Johannesburg. It has so far not demonstrated in theory and practice that it is addressed by the socio-economic problems faced by the majority of South Africans by using its exercise of state political power to act as their collective intellectual in their efforts to create their own better life.

Directly related to this lack of demonstration of commitment to think and act in the interest of those who used to regard it as their organizational servant, it continues not ensuring that South Africans who live in relative comfort and security contribute towards the resolution of socio-economic problems their fellow South Africans face. Central to its problems is the fact that it has not been able to transform itself from being a broad church of members with different and antagonistic political, economic and ideological positions on issues, processes and developments into a cohesive organization with solid direction guided by political, economic and ideological imperatives in performing its first function of best and most effectively protecting the South African people as a governing party.

A country more developed than any other African country is facing unprecedented socio-political and economic problems.

South Africa, a country more developed than any other African country is facing profound unprecedented socio-political and economic problems. It is characterized by a higher level of inequalities. They are the misfortunes of capitalism and racism faced by the decisive majority of its population and the benefits of capitalism and racism enjoyed by its decisive

minority. One of the key reasons behind this is that since 1994 it has continued viewing its transformation as the task of widening the boundaries of privileges and not of solving socio-political and economic problems. It has also continued viewing development as the gift to the South African people by the state. Central to this view is its continued task of superseding the people as the social agents of their development and that of their country. This has resulted into what is referred to as the state capture, central of which is the capture of the state by capital for its interests against those of the country and its people.

Conclusion

South Africa as a target not in its own right by the Western powers in their program of action in ensuring that it should not serve as the structural obstacle towards their continued control of Africa's resources, has no alternative to the investment in their defeat nationally and internationally. It should strategically and tactically use any opportunity available to increase the forces of progressive change nationally and internationally. The consistent pursuit of this program of action will contribute towards the creation of the global environment for the victory over the forces of regional, continental and global status quo.

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