



# SOUTH AFRICA'S SECOND UN SECURITY COUNCIL TENURE

## The Emerging Powers Dimension

Proceedings of an IGD roundtable, 26 August 2011



Compiled by Francis Kornegay, Fritz Nganje & Uyo Salifu



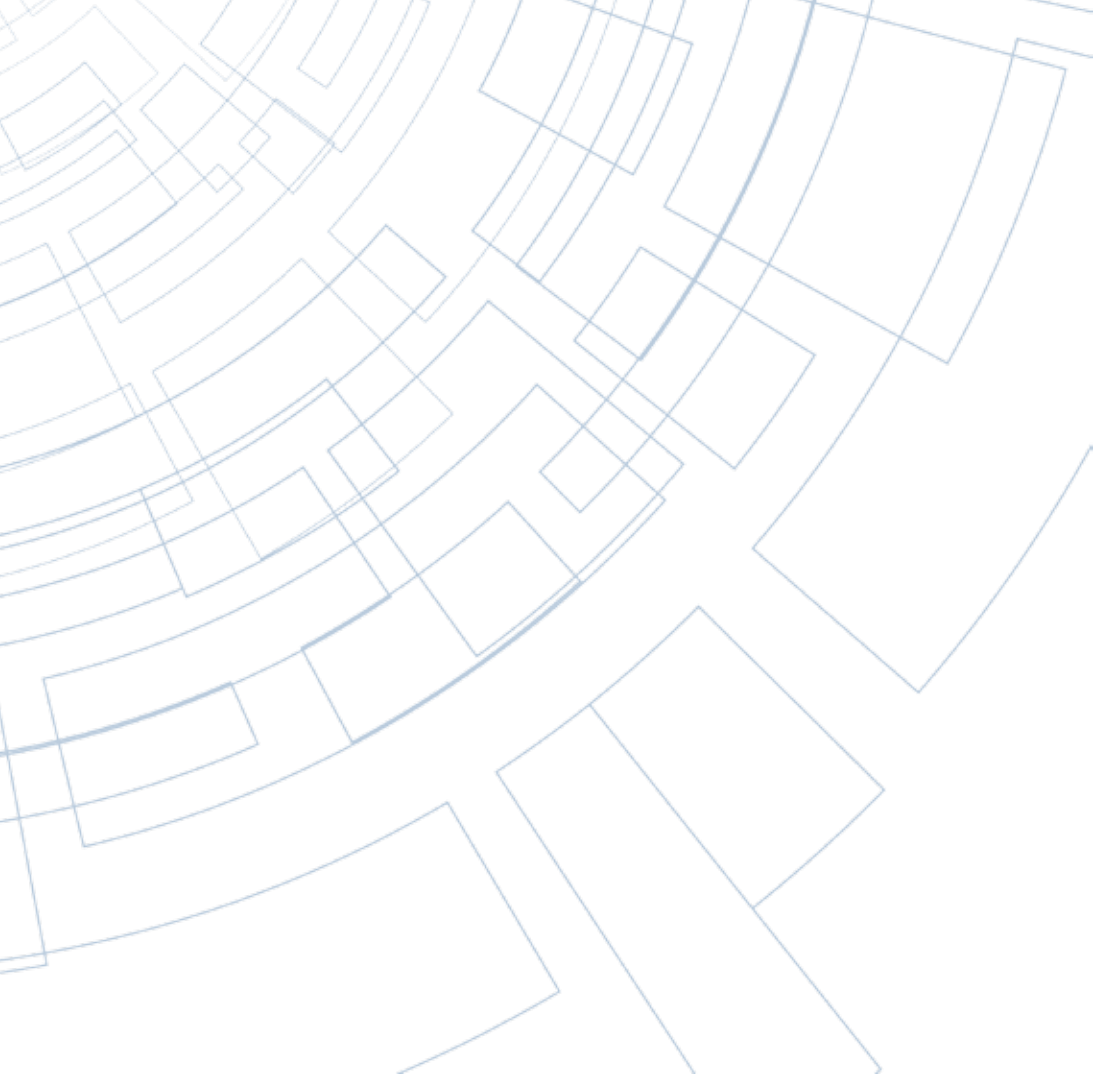
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# CONTENT

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|                                                                            |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION                                                               | 1  |
| Opening remarks and speakers                                               | 1  |
| Reflections on the emerging powers dimension of South Africa's UNSC tenure | 2  |
| <i>Sanusha Naidu</i>                                                       | 2  |
| Responses from the discussants                                             | 3  |
| <i>Aubrey Matshiqi</i>                                                     | 3  |
| <i>Lesley Masters</i>                                                      | 5  |
| <i>Fadl Nacerodien</i>                                                     | 7  |
| Interactive discussion: Perspectives from the floor                        | 8  |
| Conclusion                                                                 | 9  |
| APPENDICES:                                                                |    |
| I. Roundtable Programme                                                    | 11 |
| II. List of Participants                                                   | 13 |
| III. About the IGD                                                         | 15 |



# INTRODUCTION

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The half-day roundtable was part of a research and dialogue initiative jointly undertaken by the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA). The project seeks to understand and stimulate dialogue around South Africa's dilemma in balancing multiple relationships and agendas during its second term on the UN Security Council (UNSC). The project is designed to focus on South Africa's relationship with different blocs represented in the UNSC, as well as its determination to advance the African agenda.

*South Africa's Second UN Security Council Tenure: The Emerging Powers Dimension* was the first of two seminars dedicated to reflecting on this challenge. Whereas the second roundtable will examine South Africa's effort to advance the African agenda in the context of the UNSC, the meeting held on 26 August 2011 at UNISA's Kwame Nkrumah Hall put the spotlight on the emerging powers dimension of Pretoria's 2011-2012 temporary residence on the UNSC. This report provides an overview of the salient points arising from the day's discussion.

## Opening remarks and speakers

In the opening remarks, Francis Kornegay of the IGD underscored the topicality of the issue, given developments that were unfolding within the structure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). He pointed out that the emerging powers structure of the Security Council in 2011, with India, Brazil and South Africa represented as non-permanent members along with Russia and China, made this a compelling focus for this first roundtable. Kornegay also used the opportunity to draw attention to a related international workshop convened by

the IGD on 5 November 2010, which examined South Africa's emerging power alliances on the eve of its admission into the BRICS club of emerging economies. The proceedings and outcomes of this forum are available in the IGD publication, *From BRIC to BRICS*.

The roundtable discussion was led by a presentation by **Sanusha Naidu** of the Human Sciences Research Council (now with OSF-SA) followed by discussant responses from **Aubrey Matshiqi** of the Helen Suzman Foundation and *Business Day* columnist, IGD senior researcher **Lesley Masters**, and **Fadl Nacerodien**, Chief Director of the Policy, Research & Analysis Unit (PRAU) of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

## Reflections on the emerging powers dimension of South Africa's UNSC tenure

### *Sanusha Naidu*

The roundtable got underway with the observation that South Africa's role among emerging powers tended to always be examined from an economic perspective. The geo-political dimension also needs to be examined. The UN Security Council was seen as conveniently providing this context with both the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) trilateral forum as well as BRICS reflected in the 2011 UNSC line-up.

There needed to be an interrogation of how critics and scholars were reviewing South Africa's role during its second tenure on the Council. Is there continuity or is there a departure? Previous reviews of South Africa's first stint on the Council focused on whether it had abandoned its human rights agenda. Such issues as came before the UNSC as the repression in Myanmar and pressure to place the issue of Zimbabwe on its agenda were highlighted.

The current tenure of South Africa serving on the Council was seen as different. This had to do with the line-up in the UNSC, begging the question of how Pretoria navigates its relations with its partners among emerging powers while still pursuing an African agenda. Consideration also had to be given to the role that aspirations towards UNSC reform played in the calculus of South Africa and others.

The presence of other African non-permanent members, Gabon and Nigeria, and the fact that they would not be there in 2012 while newer representatives from Africa and the global South will join the Council, also had to be factored into the current assessment. Nigeria's presence was especially important, as it had already registered on African agenda issues such as Côte d'Ivoire and Libya.

Hence the questions that emerged surrounding UN Resolution 1973: what informed South Africa's position? How did Gabon and Nigeria factor into the



position taken, as both countries also voted for Resolution 1973, while BRICS countries either abstained or failed, in the case of China and Russia, to exercise their veto? What were their geo-political calculations informed by national interest? Were they true to their foreign policy principles or were their bilateral relations given more prominence? Indeed, debate was generated in both India and Brazil by their abstentions.

The BRICS and IBSA configurations within the UNSC context had to be assessed in terms of whether or not they are mutually exclusive or interdependent. What role do they respectively play in the debate about global governance reform? BRICS is seen to be focused more on global economic governance. IBSA is seen to be more politically oriented in terms of the greater degree of convergence between Indian, Brazilian and South African democratic systems, norms and values. It was felt that BRICS and IBSA might need to align their agendas (though this raises issues about the orientations of Russia and China).

Apart from BRICS and IBSA, there still was the question of where other emerging powers such as Turkey fit into this discourse. This brings into play the heterogeneity of emerging powers and the global South and how this plays out in the UNSC. Further complicating such assessments were relations between emerging powers and Western countries and what influence this dimension has in how agendas are configured in the UNSC, with the example of India and the US cited in this regard.

## Responses from the discussants

### *Aubrey Matshiqi*

In response to these observations, reference was made to the riots in London, and a cartoon suggesting that the looters were not the first but that bankers and MPs had beaten them to it. The point was to convey the selectivity in how people analyse events.

South Africa's moral foundation of its foreign policy has been criticised, ignoring the reality of the absence of morality in international politics. As such, the truth about the Libyan resolution, 1973, is much more complex than many admit. That said, as the Libyan situation within the UNSC unfolds, is there anything like an African agenda? On the other hand, the term 'emerging powers', in reference to those on the Council, seems misleading.

Rather, they might better be referred to as 'emerging economic powers,' as the label 'emerging powers' is based on the shift in economic power from West to East and North to South. The question is, will their emerging economic power result in a reconfiguration of the global political and ethical/moral order? That would be a legitimate expectation.

South Africa was depicted as being very idealistic prior to 1994 because of the nature of the liberation struggle. The moral and ethical dimension of apartheid influenced South Africa's outlook of what the world should be. Today, the country was being judged on the basis of those expectations although, inevitably, morality has to be accommodated in the amoral universe of international politics. Ironically, some of the voices on the UNSC criticising South Africa's lack of moral commitment are no better themselves on this score.

Beyond the question of morality, the point was made that it is very difficult as an observer to determine what informs South Africa's positions on certain foreign policy issues. Expectations of consistency are a pipe dream (which, in fact, is a universal shortcoming of the foreign policies of all states).

The absence of communication and public diplomacy cannot solely account for perceived inconsistencies and controversies that may arise from them. Here, it was ventured that there is a problem with South Africa's foreign policy architecture. There is often an impression that foreign policy-makers are caught off guard by events. This raised questions about the internal communication system. Is it efficient? In this regard, discontinuities were seen as minimal from Mbeki to Zuma.

Thus, was there an alternative approach for South Africa in voting for Resolution 1973? Did or why didn't Pretoria use South Africa's BRICS membership to convince China and Russia to push for an alternative resolution, one that would



Roundtable panel. From left to right: Aubrey Matshiqi, Lesley Masters, Fadl Nacerodien, Sanusha Naidu and Francis Kornegay

have exposed the ulterior motives of the West, yet protect the lives of Libyan civilians?

The problem is that governments all over the world are less accountable when it comes to foreign policy because of minimal public interest in this area. As a result, any expectations that South Africa's behaviour will always be in line with its moral leanings display little knowledge of the contradictory interests that influence foreign policy. Civil society should inform some of the contents of foreign policy and the country must reflect on its requisite architecture as foreign policy behaviour often reflects what the country can do on the domestic front.

### *Lesley Masters*

A follow-up observation was made concerning how the role of emerging powers is always about expectations. In the case of UN climate change talks, this was seen as stemming from the role the BASIC countries played in COP15; BASIC comprising Brazil, South Africa, India and China (IBSA + China). Specifically, regarding South Africa, there are expectations that a second tenure on the Council might be used to dismiss criticism levelled at the government's performance during the first term (2007-2008) while recasting the country's global image, including an opportunity to shape the global agenda.

Expectations, however, tend to be dampened somewhat by the realities of the short-term occupancy of non-permanent membership. Already we are halfway through with little to show in terms of progress on reform. This is a situation that confronts numerous challenges: an essentially rigged multilateral framework in terms of agenda-setting and geopolitical realities, the resort to unilateralism by larger powers, an historically dated framework reflecting a bygone era, and a limited timeframe enabling the P3 (and for that matter the entire P5) to wait out the non-permanent members' tenure.

'Soft issues' like climate change which have major security implications, human and otherwise, are firmly off the agenda of the UNSC. Furthermore, as emerging powers are not permanent, there is not the same sort of institutional memory of engagement. South Africa, in particular, had to face this during its first term following international reactions to votes on Myanmar and Zimbabwe, thus needing an understanding of a very established and already running system.

In terms of the Security Council context, while the emerging powers are present (especially as IBSA since Russia and China are permanent members), the presence of other countries like Germany and Nigeria also adds an important dynamic (with Brazil and India along with Germany being part of a so-called 'P4' UNSC reform group that also includes Japan). The problem, however, is that the experience of the P5 and P3 (US-UK-France) is a constraint on the actions of emerging powers to bring about meaningful change. Moreover, many states have a propensity for taking unilateral action.

A telling observation on the inadequacy of the Council in how it treats international security concerns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the fact that human security issues do not make it onto the agenda of the UNSC. This omission is reinforced by the temporary nature of the tenure of some emerging powers due to their non-permanent status. This works against their ability to use the UNSC to advance certain agendas, amplifying constraints imposed by the P5.

This raises questions about the Council's relevance in the face of bloc diplomacy. But another constraining factor on what emerging powers can achieve is that their individual national interests may also come in the way of their collective efforts (as IBSA, BRICS, or BASIC).

Nevertheless, in reflecting on the UN system, it remains the only truly representative global body, providing a table for everybody. States still value the UN (i.e. there is still a role for it) in spite of the lack of progress on reform. It remains effective for human security issues although these do not make it onto the UNSC agenda. Yet the UN itself, overall, is underfunded and under-capacitated in a number of areas impinging on human security, peacekeeping included. This tends to raise questions about the UN's relevance and pressures for finding solutions outside of its framework.

In terms of providing a platform for international engagement on an equal basis, the UNSC falls short. The result has been the creation of other forums outside of the UN system: G20, IBSA, BRICS, and major economies/emitters, etc. But none of these can claim full representivity.



Roundtable participants

In terms of South Africa's approach, support for the UN remains central to the country's foreign policy. This is in line with how the government sets out to use South Africa's transformation and experiences in prioritising diplomacy, broad consultation, transparency and reconciliation in promoting a culture of 'collective responsibility' and collective responses. Within the political cut-and-thrust of the UNSC, however, an open-ended question was posed: is South Africa a reliable partner in the UNSC and should reliability be about sticking to our partners or doing the right thing?

### *Fadl Nacerodien*

This question fed into follow-up remarks, which began by drawing attention to the perception in the media that when South Africa does not vote with the West, its behaviour is wrong, a betrayal of its history and the moral tenets of its foreign policy. This leads to talk of foreign policy inconsistency. This was seen as a wrong benchmark and very simplistic.

From an official perspective, Pretoria's explanations of South Africa's voting behaviour tended to emphasise technical processes as influencing outcomes. Furthermore, South Africa was wary of the UNSC succumbing to the problem of mission creep given the terms of reference of other organs like the Human Rights Council when it comes to issues falling more in that domain than those with more clearly defined regional and international peace and security implications.

Apart from human rights, it was pointed out that the 'war on terror' had forced the UNSC to establish sub-committees to cut off funding from terrorists. This led to a resolution that has impacted on banking practices in member states. The ability of the UNSC to legislate and its impact on the lives of people across the world places responsibility on South Africa to be vigilant about what kind of decisions are made there.

Moreover, there were intricacies in the negotiation process that led to decisions in the UNSC that are also a challenge for South African diplomats. It should not be left only to DIRCO to educate the public on these intricacies. Academics and the media should also have a part to play. This involves a challenge in reconciling principles and morals with South Africa's interests domestically and in the region and in Africa as a whole.

As South Africa has tended to assume a leading role in different African multilateral bodies like the African Union and SADC, this naturally informs its positions on the UNSC. In other words, South Africa's positions change as it consults with relevant groupings such as the AU and SADC. The same goes for how it approaches issues in other parts of the world, such as in south-east Asia where ASEAN, China and India may have vested interests such as in the case of Myanmar.

Groupings like BRICS and IBSA are not recognised blocs in the UN system. Currently it is not necessary (though it may be advisable) for these states to consult each other before voting at the UNSC. Emerging powers may, in the future, be influential in global political decisions as in the UNSC. At present, however, the status quo powers are the ones who make all the decisions. South Africa gets into trouble at times because it recognises the value of the UN but also pushes hard for its transformation.

However, belonging to a 'club' (like IBSA or BRICS) does not mean members must agree on everything. There will be case by case consultations. But total 'eye-to-eye' consensus should not be taken for granted. Such considerations impinge on a country's national interests. For example, regarding COP17, South Africa needs to make compromises between its own interests and serving as the president of the climate change negotiation process.

## Interactive discussion: Perspectives from the floor

Leading into the discussion was a question about multilateral negotiations. This evoked a response about their complexity. Such negotiations defy theorising and prediction. Foreign policy is essentially an extension of domestic policy. It is difficult, from an African continental perspective, to accommodate different domestic interests in common positions, say within the AU. There is also the influence of external considerations on common positions. For example, this may apply to countries relying on AGOA (the US African Growth and Opportunity Act) which impacts on their propensity to stick to common positions against the US.

Another challenge is the inadequacy of capacity in terms of staff and skills. These constraints, in terms of human resources, make it difficult for Africa and its states to make a mark in the UN system. Also affected is the ability of African states to succeed in negotiations at the UN. Capacity should be a criterion for countries representing Africa on the UNSC.

It was also observed that pressure on South Africa to adopt moral positions is sometimes done dishonestly as a kind of blackmail to exploit its stated ethical leanings in pursuit of devious agendas. Besides, South Africa, it was argued, should not be seen to be out to purposefully frustrate the position of the US on issues that come before the Security Council. This is evident in the fact that South Africa has voted alongside the US on most UNSC resolutions.

These observations led to several follow-up questions. Among them:

### 1. Is reform of the UNSC really possible?

The nature of the reform anticipated would determine its feasibility. It was explained that it is difficult to dislodge hegemonic tendencies amongst

incumbent great powers on the Security Council. This makes it difficult to envisage reform of the UN, and the Security Council in particular.

## 2. Have things changed from Mbeki to Zuma?

While the personalities of different presidents play a role in foreign policy, the principles which were established by the ANC have remained the same, with very minor changes.

## 3. Is there an example of a middle power that navigated these different alliances from which South Africa can learn?

The problem is that the post-Cold War period appears to be unique in a way that makes it difficult to borrow lessons from the past, given the multitude of identities and alliances that were not known in the past.

## 4. What is the strategic calculus on which South Africa bases its decisions generally and does a balance of power analysis continuously inform our strategic decisions? As such, why did South Africa vote for 1973 and then change its mind later?

South Africa essentially had two choices, to abstain or vote for the resolution. It could not abstain given the calamity on the ground as well as taking into account the positions of Nigeria and Gabon. Furthermore, South Africa has always supported negotiations and thus saw fit for action from the UN to make this effective. South Africa did not change its mind in this regard.

## 5. Why did South Africa agree to the release of the embargoed funds to the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC)?

South Africa's main consideration was to avoid contradicting the AU. It had, therefore, to insist on the elimination of the reference to the NTC. On this basis, it arrived at its decision to release the funds. South Africa does not shy away from taking controversial positions as it aims to create an impact on the UN system.

## Conclusion

In sum, the foreign policy dialogue brought to the fore a number of critical considerations that should inform any assessment of South Africa's current Security Council tenure. In addition to underscoring the structural and technical constraints that temporary members like South Africa are faced with in the Council, the roundtable was very successful in highlighting the limitations on



the ability and willingness of emerging powers to act as a collective in the interest of reforming the global system of governance. Even as the forum raised concerns about the way in which the South African government arrives at decisions on the UN Security Council, it also questioned the moral basis of criticisms levelled against the country's foreign policy behaviour by permanent members of the Council. Overall, however, the discussion raised more questions than definitive answers as South Africa's role on the UN Security Council is ongoing and dynamic throughout its tenure. As such, the presentations aired at this roundtable focusing on the role of emerging powers set the stage for a follow-up roundtable, which will reflect on how South Africa has navigated the African agenda – its own and that of the AU – in the course of 2011.





## APPENDIX I: Roundtable Programme

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- 10:00    Introductory remarks  
          *Francis Kornegay, IGD*
- 10:15    Presentation:  
          ‘The Emerging Powers Dimension of South Africa’s role on the  
          UNSC’  
          *Sanusha Naidu, HSRC*
- 10:35    Discussants:  
          *Aubrey Matshiqi, HSF*  
          *Lesley Masters, IGD*  
          *Fadl Nacerodien, DIRCO*
- 11:05    Open discussion
- 12:05    Vote of thanks



## APPENDIX II:

### List of Participants

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|                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Siphamandla Zondi        | IGD                       |
| Lesley Masters           | IGD                       |
| Francis Kornegay         | IGD                       |
| Sanusha Naidu            | HSRC                      |
| Fadl Nacerodien          | DIRCO                     |
| Aubrey Matshiqi          | Helen Suzman Foundation   |
| Nomfundo Ngwenya         | SAIIA                     |
| Mohd Yani Daud           | Malaysian High Commission |
| Javier Fernandes         | Embassy of Argentina      |
| Quraysha Ismail Sooliman | UP                        |
| Sam Bhembe               | Nedbank Africa            |
| Olivier Serrao           | FES                       |
| S. F. Moloi              | DIRCO                     |
| Faith Mabera             | UP                        |
| Olivier Richards         | French Embassy            |
| Cecile Vigneau           | French Embassy            |
| Dale Lawton              | US Embassy                |
| Johannes Oljelund        | Embassy of Sweden         |
| Brad Dubbelman           | Engineering News          |
| Nicholas Boyd            | Engineering News          |
| Lyndsey Duff             | IGD                       |
| Fritz Nganje             | IGD                       |
| Uyo Salifu               | IGD                       |

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Xoli Masala     | IGD                |
| Scott Firsing   | Monash University  |
| Louise de Bruin | UP                 |
| Kaamilah Joseph | FES                |
| Lisa Otto       | ISS                |
| Arther Chatora  | ISS                |
| Richard Moses   | SANDF              |
| John Tesha      | Africa Forum       |
| Emilia Haworth  | Africa Forum       |
| G. Chepik       | Russian Embassy    |
| A. Litvinov     | Russian Embassy    |
| Kennedy Mabasa  | CEASEFIRE          |
| Lora Pollecutt  | CEASEFIRE          |
| Li Bingxin      | Chinese Embassy    |
| Chen Huixin     | Chinese Embassy    |
| Tim Walker      | ISS                |
| Jason Wells     | US Embassy         |
| Janne Posti     | Embassy of Finland |
| Patrick Baleka  | ANC                |

## APPENDIX III: About the IGD

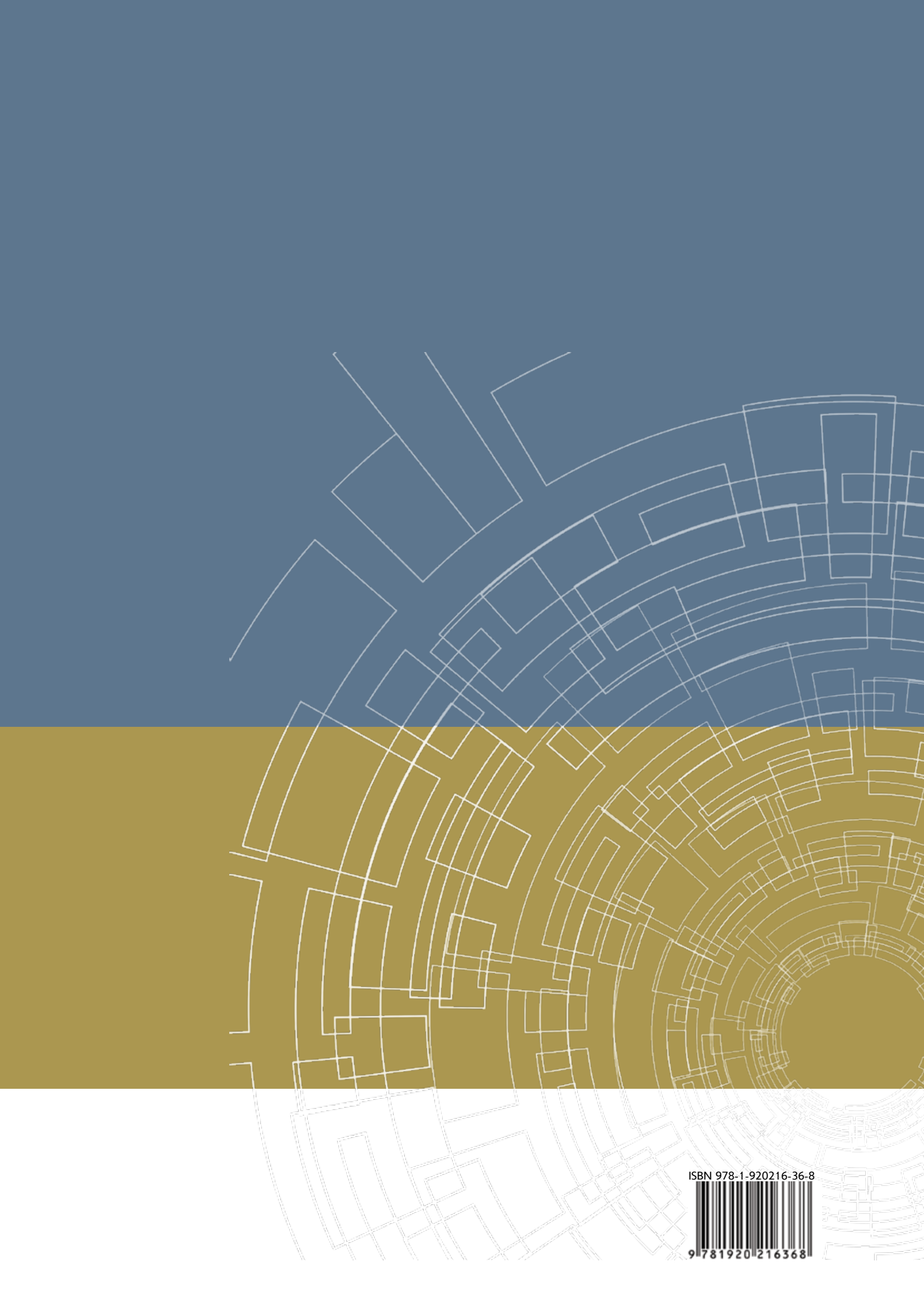
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The IGD is an independent foreign policy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment, and the role of Africa and South Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

The IGD was initially established in 1995 as the Foundation for Global Dialogue after several years of effort led by the former South African president, Nelson Mandela, in his capacity as the president of the African National Congress. He and his team of leaders saw a need for a research organisation that would facilitate the new South Africa's engagement with the changing global order after 1994. This was a period in which three vectors of change coincided: the tectonic shift in global power politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the wave of democratisation that hit Africa and South America; and the near miraculous transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa. The initial funding came from the German government and went towards establishing the Foundation's competitive edge, a combination of policy-oriented research, catalytic dialogue, tailor-made publications and grant-making for NGOs interested in international relations.

The IGD's research agenda has three broad programmatic focus areas: Foreign policy analysis with special reference to the making and management of foreign policy and diplomatic tools like economic, developmental, and public diplomacy; African studies focusing on the role of regional and continental integration in African politics and development as well as the study of peace diplomacy; and International diplomacy, analysing dynamics in international diplomacy that have a bearing on African peace and prosperity.

**Mission:** The IGD strives for a prosperous and peaceful Africa in a progressive global order through cutting edge policy research and analysis, catalytic dialogue and stakeholder interface on global dynamics that have an impact on South Africa and Africa.



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