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Michal Onderco

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A battle of principles: South Africa's relations with Iran

Michal Onderco*

Department of Public Administration & Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

This paper provides a detailed case study and theoretical explanation for one of the least appreciated bilateral relationships of democratic South Africa. It analyses South Africa's post-apartheid relations with Iran as a case study to illustrate and discuss the contradictory principles that appear to guide South Africa's foreign policy. South Africa's tempered reaction to Iran's nuclear programme is in contradiction with its non-proliferation stance, but can be understood by looking into the ideology of the ruling African National Congress.

Keywords: South Africa; Iran; nuclear program; MTN; foreign policy

Introduction

South Africa's relations with Iran are very little studied. This is surprising, given that the relationship has so much of interest in it, and essentially captures many of the dilemmas of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy. If we start dissecting the relationship, we quickly discover old friendships, oil, nuclear energy, big business, not to mention spying games and diamond cuf-links. This bilateral relationship in the post-apartheid era provides an outstanding example with which to study the puzzles of democratic South Africa's foreign policy. Iran appears in so many areas of South Africa's foreign policy that the absence of interest in the relationship between the two regional powers lies somewhere between surprising and disconcerting.

There were close connections between the African National Congress (ANC) and Iran's revolutionary regime in the days of the anti-apartheid struggle; the ANC has been keen to refer to them frequently. But in the post-apartheid era, Iran has been more likely to be a source of trouble for South Africa's leaders; South Africa has been torn over Iran. In the early years of

*Email: michal.onderco@eui.eu

post-apartheid's South Africa's foreign policy, the country tried to position itself as a traditional middle-power, with the appropriate focus on human rights and being a good global citizen (see Mandela's 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article). The early post-apartheid experiences of South Africa led to internal discussions about how much of a good global citizen South Africa should be and where its allegiances should lie (Geldenhuys, 2013; Lipton, 2009). The conflict within the South Africa's foreign policy became obvious in relations with Iran.

As the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme became the defining feature of Iran's international image in the twenty-first century, it became difficult for South Africa to position itself. It could not side with the West, as its non-proliferation credentials would lead one to expect, because this would be seen as a betrayal of a fellow non-aligned country, and economic ties and interests called for the advancement of working relations with Iran. But nor could it side with Iran, because it had no interest in belonging to an odd medley of anti-imperialist powers occupying that corner, and because South Africa's non-proliferation credentials were too precious to be discarded so quickly. Relations with Iran, hence, pitted ties with the West against ties with the non-aligned world.

The relationship between the two is also of interest to international relations scholars, and not only those interested in South Africa's foreign relations. It demonstrates a rising power's attitude towards an issue of global importance, outside of its region, where it has a vested (normative) interest. There are not many bilateral relationships of BRICS countries to rival this. In the paper, I provide an analysis of South Africa's relations with Iran since the end of apartheid. I argue that while walking a tightrope between the West and Iran, South Africa has lent more frequently than not towards Iran.

I argue that this balancing act is related to the formative experience of the ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle; it is here that the dominant world view of the ANC was shaped. Given the prominence of the ANC and the party's role in shaping post-apartheid South Africa's foreign policy, the world view the ANC leaders espoused had a defining role in determining the course of South Africa's foreign policy. Given that these views have been predominantly anti-imperialist, the direction of South Africa's foreign policy is less puzzling than it appears on the surface.

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first, I outline the argument surrounding party ideology and foreign policy. I then discuss briefly the historical background of the relationship between Iran and South Africa. While this paper focuses on post-apartheid links, the historical background is crucial to understanding some elements of the relationship. I then proceed to outline South Africa's reaction to Iran's nuclear dossier, given that it has so strongly marked relations between the two countries. I follow this with a brief comment on economic relations between the two countries, before drawing

conclusions about South Africa's foreign relations and sketching briefly the outlook for the future.

The ANC's intellectual stewardship

Scholarship on political parties and foreign policy tends to underline arguments about the left–right divide and how it translates into different attitudes towards the use of force, development aid, or migration (Mello, 2014; Rathbun, 2004; Thérien & Noel, 2000; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015). This argument follows the logic of the increasing politicisation of foreign policy: that politics does not end at 'the water's edge', but instead parties contest what foreign policy should look like (Zürn, 2014). While this argument could be applied to South Africa (as any observer can point to differences between the ANC on the one hand, and the Democratic Alliance or the African Christian Democratic Party on the other), it will not be taken up in this paper. For the simple fact of the sheer numerical superiority of the ANC, alternative parties have never had the opportunity to translate their views into foreign policy. Instead, I argue that to understand South Africa's foreign policy, we need to understand the ideas that shape the ruling party's view of the world.

Such an argument is liberal (in the spirit of Moravcsik, 1997), because it takes the preferences of individual actors seriously.¹ I argue in this article that South Africa's foreign policy towards Iran is heavily affected by the ANC's intellectual stewardship of the country, steering towards an anti-imperialism.

The ANC has been 'the custodian and steward of South Africa's foreign policy' in the post-apartheid era.² The party's views on foreign affairs were often governed by its leaders, and therefore party leaders tended to be those who also drove the country's foreign policy (Alden & Le Pere, 2003; Nathan, 2011). This imprint comes from the party's experience in exile and during the anti-apartheid years. The ANC's foreign policy mixes third-world Marxism with the anti-imperialism of the fight against the apartheid regime, seen as being both the epitome of imperialism, and as being supported by the imperialist powers (Lipton, 2009; Sidiropoulos, 2008).³ Some commentators argue that this intellectual heritage is associated with an altruistic attitude towards less powerful countries and their advancement (Bischoff, 2003), or with a desire to emerge as an alternative norm entrepreneur (Neethling, 2012). However, these discussions are not very relevant to the present paper, as it focuses on the intellectual origins of South Africa's foreign policy, and how this translates into relations with Iran.

What is certain, however, is that this world view sees the world as a place of fundamental struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. In the ANC's world view, the oppressor today is the West (or the North), which oppresses

weaker, smaller states within a fundamentally unjust system. We only need to look at the documents released ahead of the ANC's conference in October 2015 to understand how the ANC sees the world. At the beginning of the section dealing with international relations it is stated that 'the ANC is a revolutionary national liberation movement which is an integral part of the international revolutionary movement to liberate humanity from the bondage of imperialism and neo colonialism' (African National Congress, 2015, p. 161). This statement is followed by a quotation from Lenin: 'revolutionary scientific theory is the weapon to make us judge and define the methods of struggle correctly' (African National Congress, 2015, p. 162). The document then continues to rail against Western imperialism ('The sudden collapse of socialism in the world altered completely the balance of forces in favour of imperialism', p. 162). Even these brief quotations signal already that a Marxist and anti-imperialist framework still heavily influence the ANC's current ideology.

Such a perception of the world leads to a foreign policy that advocates a radical overhaul of the existing global order. This includes, for example, proposals calling for more voting power for itself and other countries of the Global South in the Bretton Woods institutions, or the Security Council (Woodward, 2007). The White Paper on Foreign Policy states that 'South Africa will actively participate in the BRICS, whose members are reshaping the global economic and political order' (Building a Better World, 2011, p. 26). This resonates with the Ten Year Review, published in 2003, which called on South Africa to work towards 'reform and strengthen[ing of] the multilateral rules-bound political, economic, security and environmental organisations in order to advance the interests of developing countries' (Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services of The Presidency, 2003, p. 58). Such initiatives have the goal to bring more power to developing countries, a traditional goal in Marxist and anti-imperialist thought (Habib, 2009).

In the particular case of Iran, the international community's punitive response towards it also plays into another piece of the ANC's intellectual baggage: the view that the only suitable strategy to resolve problems is negotiation. The ANC's successful experience of negotiation with the apartheid regime has led the party to the conviction that negotiation can always and everywhere be successful (Nathan, 2011). This led South Africa to advocate for negotiation to solve conflicts in, for example, Zimbabwe (International Crisis Group, 2008), Libya (Boyd-Judson, 2005; Wonacott, 2011) and Sudan (Nathan, 2011). While numerous scholars have argued that the penchant for negotiation is the trademark of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy (Alden & Le Pere, 2003), in this particular case, it provided South Africa with a welcome opportunity to demonstrate its own historical experience and use it as a tool against the Western approach of sanctions and isolation.

In the case of relations between Iran and South Africa, anti-imperialist ideology provides the unique (and possibly the only) basis for comprehending South Africa's reaction to Iran's nuclear programme, and to understand better relations between the two countries, as outlined in the following sections. The traditional predilection towards negotiations provided a suitable language and platform to advance such an ideology.

Back to the future

South Africa enjoyed good relations with Iran under the Shah, both economically and politically. The situation changed after the Islamic Revolution. The new regime cut ties with the apartheid regime after 1979 and supported the anti-apartheid movement. The official story, however, omits that the Islamic regime in Tehran owned a stake in the Natref refinery, 'inherited' from the Shah's era. This meant that Iran was legally obliged to sell oil to South Africa for the refinery. Given that apartheid South Africa excelled in the production of advanced military technology, and the Islamic regime needed weapons during the Iran–Iraq war, in 1985 the two agreed to exchange weapons (South Africa to Iran) for oil (Iran to South Africa) in a \$750 million deal (De Quaastienet & Aarts, 1995). Iran was also active on the spot market, where the apartheid regime purchased most of its oil. By the time of apartheid's collapse, South Africa imported between 65 and 90 per cent of its oil from Iran (Cohen, 1996; Streek, 1996). Yet, the official anti-Western and anti-imperialist discourse, emanating from Tehran, was akin to the discourse emanating from the ANC in exile, which saw the USA and the UK as the props of the apartheid regime. The ANC and the regime in Tehran developed good ties, and after the fall of apartheid, the ANC leaders called Iran 'a friendly country' (The Citizen, 1994). This view persisted till today: the 12th meeting of the South Africa–Iran joint commission in Tehran in 2015, the South African Minister for International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, reiterated this position: 'The Islamic Republic stood by us during our darkest days, cutting ties with the apartheid regime. Your revolution was our revolution. You showed us that emancipation was possible, whatever the odds' (SAnews, 2015a).

Bilateral relations between the two countries were officially re-established in 1994, following a 15-year break (during this period Iran was officially represented by the Iranian interests section of the Swiss embassy), after the UN General Assembly called on states to restore economic relations with South Africa (United Nations, 1993). One year later, a joint binational commission was established, originally at the deputy minister level, dealing at the outset mostly with trade issues (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2006). The Commission was one of the most active in the

post-apartheid era; many such binational commissions were established, but few met more than a handful of times, whereas the one involving Iran initially met annually. After the tenth meeting in 2010, the meetings have been less frequent – the eleventh took place in 2013, and the twelfth in 2015. Despite Iran's pleas to upgrade the status of the Commission to ministerial level, South Africa rejected such proposals until recently. Over time, issues of regional policy and the Middle East peace process were included. Iran also showed an interest in South Africa's nuclear expertise, but South Africa's leaders always rejected any cooperation with Iran on its nuclear programme (Agence France Presse, 2005; Sunday Tribune, 1995; The Argus, 1995). On the official level, however, Iran's nuclear dossier soon overshadowed other issues. However, an official Communiqué from the 2015 meeting, lists 103 action points, though most of them are rather generic (such as point 82, which stipulates that '[b]oth sides have agreed to enhance relations between financial institutions of the two countries'; see Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2015).

Iran's nuclear programme

Iran's nuclear programme put South Africa in a difficult position. A significant contribution to the building of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy has been the narrative of the non-proliferation poster child. In its last years the apartheid government gave up nuclear weapons (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005; van Wyk, 2009), and the new post-apartheid government led the consensus towards the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Van Der Merwe, 2003). Attempt to position itself as a middle-power, bridge-builder between the West and the non-aligned countries meant that South Africa could establish itself as a prominent actor with legitimacy and stature (Flemes, 2009; Taylor, 2006). Today, South Africa is a member of all the non-proliferation clubs and institutions – one of the few countries in the Global South to hold this status (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005).

At the same time, the ANC's leadership, as outlined above, has been turning towards the developing countries and the Global South, and away from the West. This created a challenge for South Africa's reaction to Iran's nuclear programme. On the one hand, South Africa's non-proliferation credentials required the country to be concerned about Iran's behaviour, given that Iran has been found in violation of its commitments under international law (International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA], 2003a, 2003b, 2005). On the other, the feeling of solidarity between two developing countries would nudge South Africa towards a conciliatory position vis-à-vis Iran. The result was a policy in which South Africa scrambled to balance its interests, leading to *The Economist* in 2010 calling South Africa 'one of Iran's doughtiest supporters at the UN'.

Ever since 2002, when Iran's nuclear programme became a significant topic in international politics, South Africa refused to support the use of coercive tools against Iran. The country has pushed consistently to give more time to Iran, preferring to deal with Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Board of Governors, and accusing the West of ulterior motives in its dealings with Iran.

Initially, Iran's nuclear programme was discussed in the IAEA Board of Governors, where South Africa enjoys a permanent seat. Here, South Africa consistently rejected reporting the situation to the UN Security Council (UNSC). South African diplomats argued that the international community's reaction should be 'talk, talk, talk not isolation' (WikiLeaks, 2006), and that referral to the UNSC would 'split' the Board (WikiLeaks, 2004).

When the Board finally voted on finding Iran in non-compliance with its obligations in September 2005, criticising Iran's 'failures and breaches of its obligations to comply with its IAEA Safeguards Agreement' (IAEA, 2005), South Africa abstained from the vote (Kerr, 2005). Two months later, when the IAEA Director-General Muhammad El-Baradei submitted a report stating that Iran's compliance with the requirements of the September resolution was only partial, South Africa commended Iran on its compliance and pleaded for more time so that the IAEA could 'clarify certain issues pertaining to the Islamic Republic of Iran's peaceful nuclear programme' ('Statement by South Africa's Governor', 2005). South Africa also proposed that Iran should be allowed to continue enriching uranium, a view rejected by Western diplomats (Hibbs, 2005).

But in February 2006, the IAEA Board of Governors adopted a resolution referring Iran to the UNSC. One month later, South Africa's Governor and Ambassador to the IAEA, Abdul Minty, in his talk with the Parliamentary Committee on International Relations criticised the move again and said that the government 'was opposed to moves by the UNSC to stop Iran's civilian nuclear programme' (Africa News, 2006). The same points were reiterated by President Mbeki, and Foreign Minister Dlamini-Zuma in her meeting with Iran's foreign minister.

There are two explanations that South Africa offers for this insistence on the authority of the IAEA, *versus* the UNSC. Firstly, as emerged during author's interviews with South Africa's diplomats, the IAEA was thought to possess technical expertise that makes it ideal for dealing with nuclear matters; secondly, the referral to the UNSC was understood as a 'mission creep', the expansion of the Council's activity to new areas. This is a counterintuitive position. One could expect that a newly elected Security Council member at the time, aiming to acquire a permanent seat on the Council (Alden & Vieira, 2005), would be more interested in bolstering the importance of the Security Council.

South Africa became a UNSC non-permanent member in 2007, after the Council adopted the first round of sanctions against Iran in December 2006

(United Nations, 2006). By March of 2007, the UNSC was discussing further sanctions, after Iran failed to comply with the requirements of the previous resolution. However, South Africa proposed trimming the list of sanctioned entities and the introduction of a freeze on UN sanctions in return for a freeze on Iran's nuclear activities. The five permanent members rejected the proposal. South Africa, holding a monthly rotating Presidency of the UNSC, reproached the permanent members 'as if [the resolution] is written by God or has the wisdom of God in it' (UPI, 2007). Yet, after two days of heated discussions, South Africa voted in favour of the resolution, arguing that this was the only possible option to avoid war, and did not address the concerns about the discrepancy.

However, South African officials were still unhappy with the vote and in May, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Director-General Ntsaluba argued that South Africa ought not to think that 'if there is any undermining of international law and existing agreements on Iran it will not happen to us' (SABC News, 2006), airing similar statements made by Iran in the context of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Only three months later, Foreign Minister Dlamini-Zuma of South Africa, in her budget speech, called on all parties 'to enter into dialogue and negotiations in order to seek a comprehensive and sustainable solution' ('Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs' 2007). In March 2008, while still a non-permanent member of the UNSC, South Africa again argued strongly against the adoption of further sanctions against Iran. South African diplomats argued in favour of extending the time limits for IAEA-Iran cooperation, and the Director-General of the DIRCO, George Nene, claimed that 'nobody expects a terrible atomic catastrophe to take place in a month' (IRNA, 2008). Two weeks later, Abdul Minty joined the chorus, arguing that all the issues had been clarified ('Notes following media briefing by ambassador', 2008). Yet, despite these claims, South Africa again voted in favour of sanctions against Iran, contrary to expectations.

The Iranian reaction to the vote was one of disappointment. Iran's former Ambassador to South Africa wrote an opinion piece, in which he said South Africa's actions were 'no way to treat a friend' (Ghorbanoghli, 2007); and Iran's deputy foreign minister, Sayed Abas Araghchi, during a visit to Pretoria, stated that Iran was 'a little bit disappointed' (Kaninda, 2007). In interviews with the author, South African diplomats confided that Iran's officials were privately unhappy with the vote, but never publicly reproached South Africa. South African officials, for their part, never addressed the discrepancy between their words and deeds when voting on the sanctions. In interviews, some diplomats admit that they were disappointed by the lack of new evidence, which Iran had repeatedly promised. While South African diplomats may have started having doubts about Iran's sincerity, the party line was established by

Abdul Minty, and no officials (including top-level DIRCO officials) wanted to cross him (WikiLeaks, 2007).

South Africa's involvement, and in particular Abdul Minty's strong personal involvement, were likely also the main reasons why Minty failed in his candidacy to lead the IAEA. When he ran for election in 2009, he was not elected in the elections he contested with the Japanese counter-candidate Yukiya Amano (during the campaign, Minty made 63 flights which cost the South African government over 750,000 Rand, as revealed in the government's response to a question from a parliamentarian; see Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2010).

In 2010, the Speaker of South Africa's parliament, Max Vuyisile Sisulu, travelled to Tehran to meet his Iranian counterpart, and praised the 'good and growing' relations between the two countries, touting Iran as a friend of African countries, and admonishing the 'arrogant' policy of the USA towards the country (Iran Daily, 2010). Despite occasional meetings between the two countries' diplomats and parliamentarians, however, South Africa remained relatively disengaged from Iran, having been forced to abandon trade ties in 2012 due to sanctions on Iran.

And while in 2013 the Joint Commission met again, South Africa's statements on Iran's nuclear programme have been less pronounced, except for praising Iran for on-going negotiations with the West, and calls for lifting the sanctions (SABC News, 2013). In July 2015, after the deal between Iran and the P5+1 was announced, South Africa (unsurprisingly) welcomed the agreement. 'This historic agreement is testament to the success of a negotiated and diplomatic solution, to which South Africa had steadfastly and continuously lent its full support', said South Africa's foreign minister, while lauding the lifting of 'unilaterally imposed sanctions' and hailing Iran's 'inalienable right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes' (SAnews, 2015b).

Economy

The lively and positive political relations between the two countries were also translated into a business relationship. As stated above, oil has connected the two countries for a long time. However, there is more to the economic relations between South Africa and Iran than oil; there is a particularly sizeable South African investment in Iran.

South Africa has been historically dependent on Iran's oil, and though it has decreased that dependence, in 2012 Iran was still the most important single supplier of Iran's oil, accounting for approximately 27 per cent of South African imports (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015). Yet, in 2012, the pressing sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran, imposed by the USA and the EU, forced South Africa to find an alternative source of oil, and cease

Iranian imports (IOL News, 2012). South Africa switched to Saudi Arabia for supplies and continued the search for alternative suppliers in Africa. In 2013, 60 per cent of its oil was imported from Saudi Arabia and Iran, and 40 per cent from African sources, as reported in a reply by South Africa's Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa to a question in Parliament (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2015). Immediately following the announcement of the agreement between Iran and the P5+1 South Africa announced the expansion of its oil trade with Iran, and plans for a visit to Iran by South Africa's deputy president, Ramaphosa, were announced. As of the time of writing (September 2015), no agreement has yet been signed.

In addition to oil, other South African businesses entered Iran's market. In 2011, 31 per cent of South Africa's credit insurance exposure was in Iran, though the percentage decreased to 8 per cent by 2015 (Export Credit Insurance Corporation, 2012, 2015). Sasol, South Africa's energy and chemical giant, held a 50 per cent stake in Arya Sasol, a joint venture with Iran's National Petrochemical Company, located in the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (in the province of Bushehr), reportedly worth approximately US\$900 million in 2012 (Faucon & Maylie, 2012). However, as a New York Stock Exchange-listed company, over time the asset became a nuisance and in 2013, after taking over US\$300 million in write-downs, SASOL sold its share (Crowley, 2013).

Another important South African investor in Iran is MTN, a telecommunications conglomerate. MTN, under the leadership of the current Deputy President Ramaphosa, successfully won a tender for 49 per cent of Irancell. Today, 24.4 per cent of the total income of the MTN Group is generated in Iran, with 44.4 million subscribers, and high profit margins (42.8 per cent; EBIDTA). The Iranian market is the third largest for MTN, which controls more than 45 per cent of the market (MTN Group, 2014, 2015). Yet, the investment in Iran has also been a major source of difficulties for MTN. The company has been unable, over a long period of time, to extract profit from Iran. Approximately one billion US dollars was trapped in Iran because of the international banking sanctions, which prevented the group from accessing dividends and loan repayments (Reuters Africa, 2015). MTN fired the group's chief financial officer after he attempted to circumvent the banking sanctions (Fin24, 2015), while the conditions of the award of the licence to MTN continue to be murky. MTN's main competitor, Turkish Turkcell, alleged that MTN used bribery to gain the licence.⁴ Reports surfaced that Iranian officials, led by then-chief negotiator and current president, Rouhani, attempted at the time of the award of the contract to exchange the award of the licence for favourable votes in international institutions, and defence deals (with questionable success, it needs to be added; see Naidoo, McKune, & Brümmer, 2012) A former ambassador of South Africa to Iran was suspended because of allegations of bribery (Maylie, 2012). Official reports, however, cleared MTN of

any wrongdoing. At the same time, MTN was accused of cooperating with Iran's government in cracking down on the so-called Green Movement following the 2009 presidential elections in Iran and shared its data willingly with the country's intelligence apparatus (McKune & Naidoo, 2012).

The economic relations between the two countries provided an opportunity to 'grease' the political relationship, but it turned out to be problematic for South African companies; curiously mirroring the political relationship. While some of the problems were externally induced (especially the sanctions placed on Iran), the situation left South African businesses vulnerable to influences they (and their government) had no control over, whether directly or in terms of damage-control.

Conclusion

South Africa's relations with Iran since the end of apartheid illuminate the puzzles of democratic South Africa's foreign policy. Driven by the revolutionary anti-imperialist zeal of its elites, and its (somewhat contradictory) strong business bent seeking expansion, the country's foreign policy is at odds with what expectations would be, based on the early normative commitments expressed by post-apartheid South Africa's political leaders, particularly when it comes to human rights and nuclear nonproliferation. In the particular case of relations with Iran, this meant that solidarity with a fellow developing country trumped the concerns about norm violation or non-proliferation. Despite strong economic interests, these seem to play a secondary role (if any role at all); South Africa's foreign policy was instead predominantly shaped by the ANC's ideology. South Africa's reaction to Iran's nuclear programme was distinguished by its distrust of the West's motives, a preference for large forums, and the presumption of the credibility in Iran's claims. South Africa also rejected sanctions – not only because they harmed the country's own businesses (which never appeared as an argument), but primarily because South African leaders questioned their usefulness. The ANC's special position in crafting democratic South Africa's foreign policy, and the ideological leanings of the party's leadership, help explain the pattern.

So what will the future bring? With the economic opening up of Iran, one can reasonably expect an improved supply of oil from Iran to South Africa, as well as increased ease for South Africa's companies to conduct business in Iran. As Iran's nuclear industry advances, scientific and industrial cooperation may take place. Iran will probably continue to be interested in the products of South Africa's defence industry. But the focus on developing, non-aligned, 'oppressed' countries makes Iran and South Africa a rather suitable two to tango in the future. Iran and South Africa may forge coalitions of convenience in international forums, to block Western countries or to help steer the agenda.

Such cooperation would surely bring more conflicts with the normative standards of South Africa's foreign policy, and will ensure bewilderment among South Africa's Western partners.

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Notes

1. I have elsewhere argued that the goals of South Africa's foreign policy are fundamentally realist (Onderco, 2012). There is no inconsistency in arguing that South Africa's foreign policy follows realist goals, and looking within the state to explain the origins of such goals.
2. Garth Le Pere, interviewed by the author, February 2012.
3. It is an interesting question whether the internal–external struggle distinction matters in this case. The internal struggle – the United Democratic Front – created what Raymond Suttner called 'prefigurative democracy' (Suttner, 2005, p. 63), with emphasis on 'people's power'. But Suttner (2005) also reminds us that ideological influences upon UDF were similar as those upon ANC, and therefore we probably should not read too much into this distinction for the present purposes, if only because it is the ANC that was the 'victor' in the end.
4. Turkcell's claims continue to be dismissed by various courts for lack of jurisdiction. See IT News Africa (2014).

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