SOUTH AFRICA’S SECURITY RELATIONS WITH THE MERCOSUR COUNTRIES

by

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SUMMARY

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The cementing of ties between South Africa and the Mercosur countries occurred at the time when the Cold War had just ended. Characteristic of the post-Cold War environment is the ascendance of socio-economic issues and the receding importance of military issues. Thus, South Africa’s security relations with Mercosur are rooted in the socio-economic sphere with limited military interaction which is designed to facilitate trade links and deal with potential trans-oceanic criminal activities such as drug-trafficking, arms-smuggling, poaching and sea piracy.

This is in stark contrast with the pre-1994 relations between South Africa and the South American states. Given the fact that South Africa was regarded by the international community as a pariah state owing to her unacceptable political system, it was only prudent for South Africa to look for like-minded allies across the South Atlantic Ocean. From the mid-sixties to the early eighties, most South American states were under military rule, thus providing an ideal opportunity for possible allies for South Africa. At that stage, South Africa’s motive for cementing ties with South American states, especially those that eventually formed Mercosur, was not based on a genuine need for mutual protection and complementarity of defence capabilities, but a quest for some semblance of acceptability by the international community.

Despite the decreasing importance of military matters in international relations, South Africa still maintains a significant exchange programme with the Mercosur military establishments. While most of the exchanges are for diplomatic purposes, military establishments on both sides of the South Atlantic Ocean conduct regular military exercises on both shores, in cooperation with extra-regional powers such as the US and the UK. These exercises serve the purpose of ensuring interoperability of military equipment (such as operational communication systems) and harmonising national policies and procedures, especially for search-and-rescue operations, but also for ensuring the smooth operation of maritime traffic on the South Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, there is always a perennial fear that, despite the demise of the Cold War, the South Atlantic region may become a theatre of war in future. This is particularly based on the analysis of possible resource-endowment in Antarctica, which will fuel competition and intensify territorial claims. South Africa and some of the Mercosur countries also have significant interests in Antarctica.
Key words: Antarctica; Mercosur/Mercosul; military exercises; security relations; security theory; South Atlantic states; zone of peace.
SAMEVATTING

VEILIGHEIDSVERHOUDINGS TUSSEN SUID-AFRIKA EN DIE MERCOSUR STATE

deur

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‘n Verdere ontwikkeling van bande tussen Suid-Afrika en Mercosur lidstate het aan die einde van die Koue Oorlog ontstaan. Die kenmerke van die post-Koue Oorlog omgewing is die toenemende belangrikheid van sosio-ekonomiese kwessies en die afname van militêre kwessies. Suid-Afrika se veiligheidsverhoudings met Mercosur is dus gevestig in die sosio-ekonomiese sfeer met beperkte militêre interaksie, wat ontwerp is om handelsbande te vestig en potensiële trans-oseaniëse kriminele aktiwiteite soos die smokkel van verdowingsmiddels en wapens, visstropery en seerowery, te bekamp.

Dit is in sterk kontras met die bande tussen Suid-Amerikaanse state en Suid-Afrika gedurende die tydperk voor 1994. Gegewe die feit dat Suid-Afrika deur die internasionale gemeenskap as ‘n verstote ("pariah") staat beskou is as gevolg van ‘n onaanvaarbare politieke bestel, was dit belangrik vir Suid-Afrika om soortgelyk-denkende bondgenote oor die Suid-Atlantiese Oseaan te soek. Sedert die middel sestigerjare tot en met die vroeë tagtigerjare, was die meeste Suid-Amerikaanse state onder militêre regeringen en het daardeur die ideale geleenthed geskep vir Suid-Afrika om moontlike bondgenootskappe oor die Suid-Atlantiese Oseaan te soek. Sedert die middel sestigerjare tot en met die vroeë tagtigerjare, was die meeste Suid-Amerikaanse state onder militêre regeringen en het daardeur die ideale geleenthed geskep vir Suid-Afrika om moontlike bondgenootskappe oor die Suid-Atlantiese Oseaan te soek. Op daardie stadium, was die motief om bondgenootskappe te smee met Suid-Amerikaanse state, veral dié wat eventueel deel gevorm het van Mercosur, nie gebaseer op die werklike behoefte vir onderlinge beskerming en aanvullende verdedigingsvermoëns nie, maar was dit ‘n poging om ‘n beeld van aanvaarbaarheid in die internasionale gemeenskap te skep.

Ondanks die afname van militêre kwessies in internasionale verhoudings, handhaaf Suid-Afrika tog ‘n aansienlike wisselwerking met die militêre gemeenskap van Mercosur lande. Alhoewel meeste van die wisselwerking vir diplomatieke doeleindes is, word militêre oefeninge gereeld aan beide kante van die Suid-Atlantiese Oseaan, in samewerking met buiteregionale magte soos die Verenigde State van Amerika en die Verenigde Koninkryk, gehou. Hierdie oefeninge het die doel om te verseker dat militêre uitrusting met mekaar versoenbaar is (aspekte soos kommunikasie stelsels) en die versoenbaarheid van beleid en procedures,
veral in die geval van soek-en-redding operasies, maar ook om te verseker dat die beheer van maritieme verkeer glad verloop in die Suid-Atlantiese Oseaan. Verder, is daar ook kommer dat, ten spyte van die beëindiging van die Koue Oorlog, die Suid-Atlantiese streek ‘n oorlogteater in die toekoms kan word. Dit is veral gebaseer op ‘n ontleiding van die moontlike hulpbronryke Antartika wat wedywering kan aanblaas en aansprake op territoriale gebied in dié poolstreek kan verhoog. Suid-Afrika en sommige van die Mercosur lidlande het ook aansienlike belange in dié gebied.

**Sleutelwoorde:**

Antarktika; Mercosur/Mercosul; militêre oefeninge; Suid-Atlantiese lande; veiligheidsteorie; veiligheidsverhoudings; vredesone.
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INTRODUCTION

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Prior to 1990 – the year in which a new and inclusive political dispensation was introduced in the country – South Africa’s security considerations were largely determined by both the manoeuvrings of the Cold War superpowers (the United States of America and the former Soviet Union) and the threats posed by the neighbouring countries. Because of its unacceptable racial and political policies, South Africa acquired a *pariah* status, thus resulting in limited membership of international organisations, and bilateral agreements proved difficult to conclude.

Even though South Africa’s foreign policy with regard to Southern Africa was characterised by destabilisation during the period prior to 1990, the country did everything possible to win the support and co-operation of especially the North American and West European countries. Minimal, if ever any, attention was paid to the strategic value of trans-Atlantic relations with countries in Latin America, especially those countries which constitute the Mercosur/Mercosul (Southern Cone Common Market), namely, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, with Bolivia and Chile as associate members. Like South Africa, these countries have experienced long periods of disproportionately high influence by the military, as well as the unbridled role of the military in politics. Despite these similarities, South Africa’s security considerations do not seem to have seriously brought these countries into its strategic equation.

This study does not intend dealing with these countries in their institutional capacity as member states of the Mercosur group, but rather as individual entities that happen to constitute Mercosur. However, since the Mercosur group has an important regional parallel in the form of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it will also be discussed as an institution, especially in the sections dealing with economic relations and regional security.
2. PROBLEM POSTULATION

This study identifies the following factors which contribute towards the propositions listed below:

- South Africa had a significant strategic value to the countries that now constitute Mercosur during the period starting in 1980. This date (1980) is selected, mainly because it was only after this period that new regional security challenges (such as during the Falklands War of 1982), especially in the military sphere, occurred, which could have had direct security implications for South Africa.

- The end of military dictatorships in the Mercosur countries and apartheid in South Africa, which paved the way for the ushering in of democracy on both shores of the Atlantic Ocean, signalled commonalities that could be exploited for mutual benefit. This is particularly important in the security arena.

The study is based on the following propositions:

- South Africa’s security considerations are increasingly becoming inseparably entangled with those of its south-west Atlantic neighbours, notably Brazil and Argentina.

- Security in the broader sense, which also includes social and economic dimensions, requires a holistic approach and South Africa’s security relations with Mercosur could offer numerous benefits for the general good of its citizens.

- The effects of the global crisis in markets, which affected both developed and emergent markets at the end of the 1990s, showed that South Africa’s virtual or benign neglect of Latin America can no longer be sustained if it is serious about being a global competitor of note.
South Africa’s global ambitions, including permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, can only materialise with considerable support from the Latin American countries.

A study of this nature is not only necessitated by a sheer lack of similar studies in South Africa, but by the ever-increasing need to have readily available information on Latin American countries, especially the Mercosur. The Mercosur group has been hailed as a success story of the 1990s, which could provide significant lessons for the ailing SADC.

3. METHODOLOGY

In analysing South Africa’s security relations with the Mercosur countries, an eclectic approach, including description and analysis will be applied. A comprehensive literature survey, which will include material originating from these countries, forms a major part of the sources for the study. Challenges associated with linguistic limitations were envisaged, but alternative mechanisms to deal with them were found. These mechanisms included the use of translation facilities, especially at universities, and also attempting to secure the co-operation of embassies to translate some of the material, which might be in the language of their country.

Because of the diverse nature of aspects that are explored in this study, both institutional and issue-based approaches were used at different stages of the study. While an institutional approach was used in analysing the role of the countries under investigation in the context of, for example, the Zone of Peace and Co-operation in the South Atlantic (ZPCS A), specific issues, such as defence industries, were addressed either separately or in combination with the institutional framework.

4. DEMARCATION

The study is divided into the following chapters:

CHAPTER 1: SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
With the broadening of the concept of security, new dimensions have evolved, thus introducing new challenges to international relations. This chapter seeks to identify and deal with the various aspects of security as they pertain to bilateral and multilateral security arrangements. Factors that constitute and contribute to threat perception and vulnerability are also discussed.

While security is primarily discussed from the point of view of securing national interests through the conclusion of international agreements and/or treaties, internal aspects of security also receive attention. This outward-looking approach to security helps shed some light on the justification or lack thereof, for South Africa to cement ties with the Latin American countries, especially on security issues.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF MERCOSUR

The formation of Mercosur was the culmination of a process that was initiated almost two decades after the Second World War (WW II). The process had been prompted by many factors, which ranged from the proliferation of regional organisations to globalisation. This chapter provides a perspective on the historical evolution of the Mercosur group and also identifies the organs and functions of the group.

A good understanding of the structure and functioning of the Mercosur group would enable South Africa (or any other extra-regional country) to identify specific areas of possible cooperation and the relevant mechanisms for doing so. It concludes by analysing the performance of Mercosur.

CHAPTER 3: SOUTH AFRICA, SADC AND MERCOSUR: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND SECURITY

Issues of social security and development are often inter-linked. The main focus of the Mercosur group is currently on economic development and trade. All the efforts to ensure regional security, especially through the use of the armed forces, are often aimed at securing commercial and trade routes. This chapter looks into the nature of economic activity in the South Atlantic, which involves South Africa and the Mercosur countries. Particular attention
is also paid to the benefits for the Southern African sub-region through South Africa’s participation in trans-Atlantic arrangements.

It is undeniably true that the demise of the Cold War propelled economic issues to the forefront in international relations. Security issues have taken a backstage role and, when these are addressed, it is normally because they are seen as potential impediments to prosperous economic and social development. Trans-national and trans-continental crime syndicates, such as those linked to drug trafficking, money-laundering, piracy on the high seas and, in some cases, small-arms proliferation, are all security issues which have a negative impact on the economic well-being of nations. This chapter seeks to address these aspects with regard to South Africa and the countries constituting the Mercosur group.

CHAPTER 4: BILATERAL MILITARY CO-OPERATION BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE MERCOSUR COUNTRIES

South Africa’s historical relations with the individual countries of the Mercosur grouping are discussed. An attempt was made to trace military relations that South Africa had with the Mercosur countries prior to and after the 1994 political dispensation.

The existing formal and informal Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between South Africa and the member states of the Mercosur group provide a suitable point of departure. Through these MoUs, South Africa undertakes joint projects which not only help with the transfer of skills and expertise, but also reduce costs on capital that is required to conduct such projects. Included in this regard are search-and-rescue operations in the South Atlantic Ocean, and also joint military exercises.

CHAPTER 5: MULTILATERAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

This chapter looks into the regional groupings/arrangements covering the South Atlantic region in which security is the main focus. Multilateral arrangements in the form of agreements, conventions, treaties and MoUs to which South Africa and the Mercosur members are parties, are broadly analysed.
While the historical development of the ZPCS A in relation to the role of the member states of Mercosur and that of South Africa (when it joined it in 1994) is addressed, more attention is paid to the future role of this regional security arrangement in the 21st century. The active involvement of some of the Southern African states (such as Namibia and Angola) in the ZPCS A implies that South Africa’s security arrangements with her Atlantic neighbours should adopt an approach that benefits the whole sub-region.

CHAPTER 6: EVALUATION

This chapter summarises the whole study and briefly discusses the findings per chapter. The original assumptions are validated and propositions tested. The chapter concludes by giving an indication of the areas of study that still require to be supplemented with additional research.