

***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 co-operation 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**

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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-oseaniese 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 regerings en het daardeur die ideale geleentheid geskep vir Suid-Afrika om moontlike bondgenootskappe te smee. 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 buite-regionale 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 prosedures,

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 ontleding van die moontlike hulpbronryke Antartika wat wedywing 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.

Stutelwoorde:

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	
1. Objectives of the Study	1
2. Problem Postulation	2
3. Methodology	3
4. Demarcation	3
CHAPTER ONE	
SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
1. Introduction	7
2. International Co-operation	8
2.1 Imperatives and Motivations for Co-operation	8
2.2 Forms of Co-operation	10
2.2.1 Setting Standards	11
2.2.2 Obligations	11
2.2.3 Allocations	12
2.2.4 Prohibitions	12
3. Conceptual Analysis of Security	13
3.1 <i>Security: A Common Understanding</i>	13
3.2 Changing Nature and Focus of Security	16
4. National Security	17
4.1 National Security: A Common Understanding	18
4.1.1 Classical View of National Security	18
4.1.2 Modern View of National Security	20
4.2 Focus of National Security: Internal and External Dimensions	23
4.3 Human Security	26
4.4 Threats to National Security	28
4.4.1 Military Threats	29
4.4.2 Political Threats	30
4.4.3 Environmental Threats	30
4.4.4 Economic Threats	31
4.4.4.1 Economic Facets of National Security	32

4.4.4.2	Use of Economic Resources for Military Security	34
4.4.4.3	Use of Military Resources for Economic Security	36
5.	International and Regional Security	37
5.1	Collective Security	38
5.2	Collective Defence	41
5.3	Concert Security	47
5.4	Common Security	48
5.5	Comprehensive and Co-operative Security	49
6.	Global Security	51
7.	The Security Pyramid	53
8.	Conclusion	57
	References and Notes	60
CHAPTER TWO		
THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF MERCOSUR		
1.	Introduction	66
2.	Factors Necessitating the Establishment of Mercosur	67
2.1	Military Developmentalism Doctrine	67
2.2	Proliferation of Regional Organisations	68
2.3	Conflict Potential	70
2.4	Democratisation Process	71
2.5	Globalisation	74
3.	The Establishment of Mercosur	75
4.	‘Open Regionalism’ Concept	77
5.	Defining the Mercosur Group	78
6.	Mercosur’s Institutional Framework and Functions	80
7.	The Performance of the Mercosur Group	86
8.	Conclusion	88
	References and Notes	91

CHAPTER THREE

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

1.	Introduction	94
2.	South-South Relations	95
3.	South Africa's Socio-Economic Relations with the Mercosur Countries and Security Implications	96
3.1	South Africa's Official Views on Co-operation with South American Countries Prior to 1994	97
3.2	The End of South Africa's <i>Pariah</i> Status and the Beginning of a New Era	102
3.3	Relations with Individual Countries	105
3.3.1	Argentina	105
3.3.2	Brazil	109
3.3.2.1	Historical Development of Relations	109
3.3.2.2	Current Relations	112
3.3.3	Paraguay	115
3.3.4	Uruguay	115
3.3.5	Bolivia and Chile	116
4.	Inter-Regional Co-operation: Mercosur and SADC	118
4.1	The Debate on South Africa's Strategic Orientation	118
4.2	Mercosur and SADC: A Comparative Perspective	119
4.3	Challenges and Prospects for Inter-Regional Co-operation	121
5.	Drug-trafficking Across the South Atlantic Ocean	124
6.	Some Broad Security Implications	127
7.	Conclusion	130
	References	133

CHAPTER FOUR

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

1.	Introduction	138
2.	Historical Military Relations	138

2.1	Argentina	139
2.1.1	Pre-1994 Argentine-South Africa Military Relations	139
2.1.2	Post-1994 Argentine-South Africa Military Relations	142
2.1.2.1	Military Representation	143
2.1.2.2	Military Visits	144
2.1.2.3	Military Training	145
2.2	Brazil	146
2.2.1	Pre-1994 Brazil-South Africa Military Relations	146
2.2.2	Post-1994 Brazil-South Africa Military Relations	148
2.2.2.1	Military Representation	148
2.2.2.2	Military Visits	150
2.2.2.3	Military Training	151
2.2.2.4	Military Agreements	152
2.2.2.5	Co-operation Between the Defence-related Industries	153
2.3	Paraguay	154
2.3.1	Pre-1994 Paraguay-South Africa Military Relations	155
2.3.2	Post-1994 Paraguay-South Africa Military Relations	158
2.4	Uruguay	159
2.4.1	Pre-1994 Uruguay-South Africa Military Relations	159
2.4.2	Post-1994 Uruguay-South Africa Military Relations	164
2.5	Bolivia	165
2.6	Chile	169
2.6.1	Pre-1994 Chile-South Africa Military Relations	169
2.6.2	Post-1994 Chile-South Africa Military Relations	173
2.6.2.1	Military Representation	173
2.6.2.2	Military Visits	175
2.6.2.3	Military Training	176
2.6.2.4	Mutual Agreements and Defence Industry Co-operation	177
3.	The Nature of Military Capabilities of South Africa and the Mercosur Countries	178
4.	Conclusion	181
	References	185

CHAPTER FIVE

MULTILATERAL MILITARY CO-OPERATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

1.	Introduction	189
2.	Defining the South Atlantic Region	190
3.	Inter-American Security System	192
4.	Southern Cross Alliance	195
5.	The South Atlantic Treaty Organisation	197
6.	Zone of Peace and Co-operation in the South Atlantic (ZPCSA)	200
6.1	The ZPCSA as a New Alternative	201
6.2	Denuclearisation	204
6.3	South Africa and the ZPCSA	208
6.4	The Naval Military Potential of the ZPCSA	210
6.5	A South Atlantic Rim Association	216
6.6	Joint Military Exercises	217
6.6.1	Exercise ATLASUR	217
6.6.2	Exercise UNITAS	218
6.6.3	Exercise TRANSOCEANIC	218
6.7	<i>Prospects and Challenges of the ZPCSA</i>	220
7.	Conclusion	222
	References and Notes	224

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION

1.	Summary	229
1.1	Security: A Conceptual Framework	229
1.2	Historical Development and Structure of Mercosur	231
1.3	Socio-Economic Co-operation and Security	234
1.4	Bilateral Military Co-operation Between South Africa and the Mercosur Countries	236
1.5	Multilateral Security Co-operation in the South Atlantic Region	237
2.	Assessment	239

3. Research Findings and Testing of Propositions	240
4. Recommendations for Further Study	242
Abbreviations	244
Bibliography	249
Summary	
Opsomming	

List of Tables

Table 1:	Mercosur Organs and Their Functions	82
Table 2:	Profile of the Mercosur Countries, 2000	85
Table 3:	Trade Relations With and Within Mercosur	87
Table 4:	Intra-Regional Trade Within Mercosur, 1987 – 1994	87
Table 5:	Comparison of Brazil's Imports from the Current Member States in 1980 With Specific Months in 1997	87
Table 6:	South Africa's Trade Ties With the Mercosur Countries	103
Table 7:	Foreign Investment Between South Africa and Mercosur, 1996	104
Table 8:	Comparison Between Mercosur and SADC	120
Table 9:	SAPS Projects on Organised Crime, March 1997.	125
Table 10:	Argentina's Military Students Trained in South Africa, (as in December 1983)	142
Table 11:	SADF and, after 1994, SANDF Attachés in Argentina	143
Table 12:	Argentinean Military Attachés in South Africa	144
Table 13:	South Africa's Military Attachés in Brazil Since 1994	149
Table 14:	Brazilian Military Attachés in South Africa Since 1994	149
Table 15:	SANDF Training Presented to the Brazilian Armed Forces Since 1994	152
Table 16:	Brazilian Military Training Presented to the SANDF Since 1994	151
Table 17:	Chilean Military Training Presented to South African Students in Chile, (as in December 1983)	171
Table 18:	South Africa's Military Attachés in Chile	174
Table 19:	Chilean Military Attachés in South Africa	174
Table 20:	SANDF Training Presented to Chilean Armed Forces after 1994	176
Table 21:	Chilean Military Training Presented to the SANDF Personnel after 1994	177
Table 22:	Military Expenditure of Mercosur Countries and South Africa, 1995-2000	179
Table 23:	Uniformed Military Personnel in South Africa and Mercosur Countries, 2000/2001	181
Table 24:	Signature and Ratification of Rio Treaty by Selected Countries	193
Table 25:	South Africa's Trade With The ZPCSA Members, 1999	209
Table 26:	ZPCSA Countries' GDP, Defence Budgets and Populations	211
Table 27:	Naval Patrol Capabilities (2000) and Mercantile Marine (1997/8) of the ZPCSA Member States	213
Table 28:	Ratio of Budget Allocation for the Navy, Air Force and Army, 1998	214
Table 29:	South African National Defence Force's Arms Acquisition Programme, 1998	216
Table 30:	ATLASUR Exercises Involving the South African Navy After 1994	218
Table 31:	TRANSOCEANIC Exercises Involving the South African Navy After 1994	219

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Wæver's 'Hourglass' Model of Security	24
Figure 2:	The United Nations and Regional Organisations With Security Dimensions	45
Figure 3:	The Security Pyramid	54
Figure 4:	The Organisation of the 2 nd Department (Military Intelligence) of the Paraguayan Armed Forces as in August 1984	157

List of Maps

Map 1:	The Four Mercosul Countries	81
Map 2:	The Geographic and Geopolitical Demarcation of the South Atlantic Ocean	191

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 (ZPCSA), 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 co-operation 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 ZPCSA 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 ZPCSA 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.