

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION

An analysis of the security relations between South Africa and the Mercosur countries is complicated by a number of factors. Firstly, Mercosur is a recent creation and South Africa a new democracy. However, the interaction between the individual member states of Mercosur and South Africa has existed for many years. The status of current relations is largely influenced by their previous interaction at bilateral level.

Secondly, and flowing from the previous point, the current relations are based on the post-Cold War global environment, which is characterised by reduced inter-state war or, at least, asymmetrical warfare (i.e. powerful states vs. weak states, or state vs. non-state actors); adoption of the principle of democratic governance; and subordination of military security to human security through socio-economic development. In such an environment, the rationale and motive for forming alliances are totally different from those of the Cold War era.

1. SUMMARY

There is general consensus that states continually seek to strengthen their power through alliances and partnerships in the social, economic, military, technological or political spheres. However, with the expansion of the concept of security, the nature and scope of such alliances and partnerships have become elastic and differences between the various forms of security blurred. The emergence of concepts such as co-operative security, collective security, collective defence (also known as mutual defence), common security and human security, has added to the confusion for both analysts who have to interpret the concepts and the policy-makers who have to provide policy guidelines in respect of various forms of security.

1.1 SECURITY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

a. The eternal quest by states to pursue strategies that help maximise their power and security has a direct influence on the way in which state-building and alliance-formation processes are viewed. The traditionalist and, to a more limited extent, modern view of the

state-building process, portrays states as predatory political entities which normally thrive on the weaknesses of their neighbours. However, that perception is increasingly receding owing to a host of factors, which include the emergence of a new understanding of security. For instance, the economic strength of a country is linked to the economic strength, or lack thereof, of its neighbour. Poor neighbours are a main source of instability through refugee problems, trans-border criminal activities and support for rebel or insurgent groups. Thus, the modern view of security is predicated on co-operative security, which implies a multilateral approach to security.

b. There has also been a gradual expansion of the concept of security. The modern notion of security, with its multitude of new threats, presupposes that the state has limitless resources. As resource requirements normally far outstrip available resources, such an analysis implies that the quest for total security is a futile exercise as it is unachievable. Thus, instead of rejecting the expanded notion of security on the grounds that it makes security efforts unattainable, a sense of realism has to be injected in the debate. This can be done by acknowledging that real security threats are those that are urgent, critical and have the potential of causing cataclysmic damage to the state and/or citizens, if they are not attended to. Hence, it is these types of threats that warrant urgent use of the available national resources.

c. Unlike in the previous two centuries where co-operative relationships between states were more informal and short-term, there has since the latter half of the twentieth century been a significant change in the international system where inter-state interaction is based on some form of formal and long-term strategic arrangement in such spheres as trade, politics, military or technology. The central idea is the sense of mutual interest in survival under all conditions, including during war, natural disasters and economic hardships. Consequently, numerous variations or concepts of inter-state co-operative mechanisms and structures have emanated from this situation. These include collective security, collective defence, the concert security notion, human security, common security, and comprehensive security. These variations are described on national, regional, international and global scales. For each, or for combinations of these variations, there are numerous structures or bodies that are supposed to deal with the specific form of security at a particular geographic scale, that is, nationally, regionally or globally. With the globalisation phenomenon, it is increasingly becoming almost impossible to maintain mutually-exclusive agreements because membership

of these structures tend to overlap. There is therefore a potential danger of an unfettered proliferation of security-related national and international structures, dealing with issues that are so closely related that they should not be separated. This is particularly true in the area of nuclear non-proliferation issues.

d. Given the complexity of especially depicting the inter-relationships of security variations and the dichotomy in the international system of the rich Global North and the poor Global South, it can be surmised that the ‘Security Pyramid’ succeeds partially in providing a broad picture of these inter-relationships. The point of departure is that there are different perceptions of security prioritisation between the developed and developing countries. There is an incremental graduation in terms of ambitions and geographical scope of involvement in security co-operation. This incremental approach is based on the level of economic development and maturity of the national political system. Put differently, as states develop economically and become mature politically, their security priorities shift to the higher level. For instance, most developed states have concerns about global security while most developing states are still grappling with internal issues such as ethnic/racial or religious fractions, separatism, unstable political systems, lack of national consensus and extreme poverty.

1.2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF MERCOSUR

a. The formation of Mercosur and the subsequent attempts by South Africa to cement ties with individual member states of the group, bears testimony to the states’ eternal quest for security, primarily in the socio-economic sphere. When Mercosur was formed, it coincided with a few significant epoch-making events in the international political system. Firstly, the Cold War era was coming to an end; secondly, in Southern Africa, the sub-regional organisation known as the SADCC was being transformed into the SADC, and lastly, South Africa was in the process of democratising. This had a tremendous influence on the nature of engagement between the post-1994 South Africa and the latter’s strategic partners, which included members of Mercosur. Since security was no longer defined strictly in military terms, economic interaction and high-profile business visits took place, culminating in mutual visits by heads of states across the Atlantic Ocean.

b. The South American countries, including those that later formed Mercosur, were plagued by military intervention in politics to the extent that they believed that no civilian

government could rule the country without a significant military involvement. One of the instruments they used was the so-called 'military developmentalism', which is a doctrine that the military should stay in power for as long as it requires to place the economy on the right footing. During the reign of the military in countries like Argentina and Brazil, the economy was performing even better than when the civilian authority was in power. Even though this was done at the expense of human rights and other civil liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and demonstration, and the right to strike, the good performance of the economy gave credence to the perception that the military were better rulers. And given the recurrence of military *coups d'tat* in the Southern Cone countries, it is possible that this popular perception became inculcated into the minds of the junior military officers and it therefore became one of their long-term goals to become military politicians. Furthermore, this demonstrated without doubt that when it amounts to 'bread and butter' issues, the enjoyment of popular civil liberties could become a political luxury which ordinary people are prepared to forfeit or relegate to lower priority.

c. The formation of Mercosur was actually a culmination of a long process of alliance formation on a regional basis. The post-WW II period was characterised by the extension or extrapolation of alliances that had existed during the war. This resulted in the mushrooming of regional organisations, some of which had incompatible goals and therefore later disbanded or re-aligned. Given the bipolarity of the international system at the time of the Cold War, it is not clear if these organisations would have been formed at all or if they were not part of the grand strategy of the superpowers to carve the world into distinct regional groupings, which would be easier to influence or deal with. The predecessors of Mercosur were established on the basis of an all-inclusive approach which seemed to disregard some of the dynamics brought about by such factors as contiguity or geographic proximity, compatibility of political systems, and level of economic development. Unlike its predecessors, Mercosur was limited to four countries but a 'window' for possible future expansion was left open. Thus, judging by the increase in volume of trade within members of Mercosur and comparing it with such sub-regional organisations such as the Andean Community and SADC, it can be concluded that Mercosur is the best performing sub-regional economic organisation in the Southern Hemisphere. Therefore, any interaction (in the political, economic or military spheres) between South Africa or SADC and Mercosur is bound to generate benefits for the Southern African sub-region generally and South Africa in particular.

d. The dominant economic policies of the immediate post-WW II era in South America were autarkic and based on self-sufficiency. Imbued with the spirit of nationalism, as most military governments seem to over-emphasise nationalist symbols and ideals, the regional organisations that were created became weak due to nationalist fissures that became too prominent to ignore. Thus, with the formation of Mercosur, the member states decided on an 'open regionalist' formula that was still at an embryonic stage in the Far East. The Mercosur countries took a calculated risk in opening up their economies, despite the potential danger of being overwhelmed by East Asian and European products. Furthermore, the traditional rivalries among the member states that had existed for many years had not yet been totally obliterated. However, despite the glaring risks, the Mercosur countries were already at a fairly advanced level of development. In addition, they also had a significant regional partner, Brazil, whose sheer weight (in military, economic and political terms) in the international system was significant enough to partially shield them. It is highly unlikely that extremely poor regions like Africa would have been able to pursue the concept of 'open regionalism' without any negative impact on a massive scale. However, the question could be asked as to how open is Mercosur's so-called open regionalist approach really? This question stems from the realisation that while Mercosur is open in respect of external trade, it also has limited membership and a common tariff structure, similar to the EU, which is regarded as a typical 'closed regional economy'.

e. Mercosur as a regional economic organisation has achieved remarkable success in its attempts to integrate its regional economies. Some of the contributory factors to this success include the following:

- Small size as a result of limited membership. Its predecessors failed because membership was automatic and based on geographic proximity. Like the EU, membership of Mercosur is not automatic and certain criteria have to be complied with before such membership can be granted. Hence, Bolivia and Chile still remain associate members, pending full compliance with the criteria.
- Gradual and incremental approach. Mercosur resolved to remain small in size without precluding the possibility of future expansion. This has enabled it to establish a sound foundation and to define not only 'household' rules and internal

controls, but also the mechanisms to engage external role-players and potential members from the regional neighbourhood. It is also notable that even in the area of common external tariffs, a gradual approach has been adopted, thus allowing countries like Chile to adjust their tariff structure in accordance with Mercosur's schedules.

- Sensitivity to unequal levels of economic development. Given the unequal levels of development among member states, Mercosur designed a graded mechanism that accommodates other states on the basis of their economic strength. For instance, the use of a chequered tariff system and the strict application of rules of origin in trade, are a case in point.
- Democratic imperative. With all the Mercosur members having experienced numerous military *coups d'état*, it was only evident that the requirement that member states should demonstrate adherence to liberal democratic principles, would become a pre-requisite for membership.

e. The cessation of hostilities between the regional rivals, Argentina and Brazil, was actually the determining factor in ensuring the success of the integration process of Mercosur. Even though Brazil has tremendous influence within Mercosur due to her economic, political and military dominance in the sub-region, there are sensitivities related to possible reversion to political tensions with Argentina and that alone substantially helps keep the whole organisation in check. Each member state, especially Argentina and Brazil, is very cautious in taking courses of action that would militate against the founding treaty among members, or even compromise the working relationship between Argentina and Brazil.

1.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND SECURITY

a. South Africa's interaction with the Mercosur countries has always been based largely on socio-economic co-operation. During the period prior to 1994, South Africa used such co-operation with the aim of gaining some semblance of acceptability by the international community despite the unacceptable internal political system. The urgency of cementing ties with Latin American states, especially those that later formed Mercosur, was prompted by an intensified campaign by the liberation movements (particularly the ANC and the PAC); the

anti-apartheid movement around the world; and the imposition of an arms embargo by the United Nations on South Africa. Seeking allies in South America was logical and politically prudent as very few states in Europe, North America and the Far East were prepared to deal with South Africa, even surreptitiously. This was also prudent because most states in South America were under military rule. However some of these countries attempted to shun South Africa despite being in a similar situation of being ostracised by the international community.

b. The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 opened the doors of opportunity for the South African people and government. Furthermore, it enabled littoral states on both sides of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans to design a complete security architecture that included South Africa and the newly-independent Namibia. On a global level, it enabled South Africa not only to play a significant role in international affairs, but also to advance the notion of South-South co-operation in all spheres of human endeavour. In this respect, Mercosur countries were among the very first to be visited by the first democratically elected president of South Africa – Nelson Mandela. His successor, Thabo Mbeki, also followed suit. Brazil and Argentina have always played relatively prominent roles within the NAM. When South Africa assumed the chair of NAM, her ties with the two countries were cemented quite significantly.

c. The democratisation of countries on both sides of the South Atlantic Ocean almost coincided with the demise of the Cold War, and the end of a bipolar world. Thus when South Africa became democratic, the nature of issues that dominated the post-Cold War environment were such that there was a fundamental shift away from military interaction to socio-economic development. The only issues of security concern between South Africa and the Mercosur countries related to trans-oceanic criminal activities such as drug-trafficking, arms smuggling and sea piracy. However, the common thread in the diplomatic exchanges between South Africa and the Mercosur countries concerns solidifying trade links and mutual investment. This is done not only to promote the concept of South-South relations, but also for South Africa to take advantage of her geo-strategic position as straddling two of the most important oceans in the world – the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

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

a. Some South American states, especially those that later formed Mercosur, had strong bilateral cultural, political and military ties with South Africa that predate WW I. These ties continued even after WW II and through the Cold War era – the period that coincided with vehement international condemnation of South Africa's political system. While some of the South American states defiantly maintained such ties at the risk of being ostracised by the international community for interacting with a *pariah* state, it is notable that South Africa provided incentives to sustain these relations. These incentives ranged from providing free military training in South African operational training schools, to bursaries at universities and encouraging South African investors to conduct subsidised business operations in selected countries. There is no documentary evidence that these countries also had to reciprocate such favours in kind, other than to ignore international condemnation of South Africa's political system or to provide support, directly or indirectly, at international fora such as the UN General Assembly.

b. South Africa's ability to 'penetrate' South America and to make an impact especially on those countries that later constituted Mercosur, was based largely on the insecurity of those states at the time. It is highly unlikely that South Africa would have made any progress if governments of such states were also not faced with strong internal and external challenges. This is evidenced by the fact that once these countries democratised during the mid-eighties, political and military ties with South Africa were severed immediately. However, it is also noteworthy that some of these ties were severed at a time when there were already indications that a political settlement between the South African government and the liberation movements was imminent.

c. The military relations that were re-established between South Africa and the Mercosur states after 1994 were not as intense as they were in the late seventies and early eighties. While most Mercosur states were enthusiastic in establishing military representation in South Africa, the latter was selective and cautious in its approach. The initial enthusiasm was due to a number of factors including the desire to show solidarity with the new South African government as most of them also had oppressive regimes in the past. It was possibly also to take advantage of the potential arms market (especially from Brazil's perspective) both in South Africa and the rest of the continent. The latter aspect is particularly important as most

foreign military representatives in South Africa are also accredited to other countries in the region, thus taking advantage of advanced communication facilities available in South Africa.

d. While it is true that some of the initial enthusiasm for military representation in South Africa and backed by exchange of high-profile visits by political and military dignitaries was aimed at obtaining a foothold in military issues in the country, it is not clear if that actually materialised. This observation is based on the fact that both South Africa and Brazil are significant arms-producing states from the developing world, and that both have strong anti-military lobby groups in the civil society, thus negatively affecting their budgetary allocation for defence. Furthermore, despite the fact that South Africa could be used as a launching pad to penetrate the African arms market, there is the challenge of limited buying power of African states and that most of the weapons used in African conflicts are low-tech and are largely obtained from the former Soviet Union republics.

1.5 MULTILATERAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

a. One of the perplexing hurdles regarding the prospects for regional security co-operation in the South Atlantic pertains to the geographic demarcation of the region. Furthermore, there is still no clarity about the manner in which extra-regional powers that have interests in the region (such as the UK) can be incorporated into the strategic interaction of littoral states without compromising on certain fundamental principles that render the trans-oceanic neighbours compatible. These extra-regional powers happen to be known nuclear states which may either provide military protection to the littoral states in times of need, or could equally pose a threat to the environment when they intend to transport nuclear material or nuclear weapons in the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, the littoral states of South Atlantic do not have the military capacity to prevent or threaten any of the nuclear states if the latter wanted to undermine the authority of the South Atlantic states, especially if the nuclear powers insist on using the high seas or international waters for transporting nuclear material, conducting military exercises or conducting scientific experiments that have a clear military applicability. Thus, it is imperative that a strong consensus and mutual understanding should exist between the South Atlantic littoral states and these extra-regional powers. However, there is no guarantee that the nuclear states will always abide by such a consensual

relationship with the South Atlantic states, particularly during times of war or when their national interests are threatened.

b. As much as the traditional hegemonic rivalry that existed between Argentina and Brazil has receded, there is still a perennial fear that political tensions may re-emerge as the latter seeks to entrench her influence in the region, while the former seeks to challenge it, *albeit* in less militaristic form.

c. There has always been a need to foster security co-operation on the hemispheric level. This was initiated during the Cold War era but the various models were not implemented. The main reason was that they included the incorporation of South Africa, which, at that stage, was still a *pariah* state. The hemispheric alliance for the Americas was successfully forged due to the US's overwhelming influence both in terms of finances and geopolitical clout it wielded on the bipolar world. However, the US's commitment to the Rio Treaty is now arguably less intense than was the case during the height of the Cold War. This is understandable because, with the demise of the former Soviet Union, there has been a significant reduction in military threats and a corresponding adjustment of budgets. However, it could be envisaged that the Rio Treaty would concentrate on the so-called 'new-generation' threats such as drug-trafficking, illicit transfer of nuclear and radioactive materials, and international terrorism. The latter will probably dominate the strategic thinking of the US, especially following the events of 11 September 2001.

d. The idea of a South Hemispheric military alliance – to be called SATO – modelled along the lines of NATO was never discredited. The main reason for its failure was largely due to the possibility of including South Africa. However, despite the fact that South Africa now has a democratic dispensation, it is highly unlikely that SATO will ever be formed, especially after the end of the Cold War. Thus, rather than pursuing the SATO idea, it may be recommended that the South Atlantic littoral states should concentrate on converting the ZPCSA into an organisation, such as the South Atlantic Rim Association (SARA). Since most South Atlantic littoral are already involved, in a significant way, in activities such as joint military exercises, it can be assumed that the formation of SARA would only be the formal institutionalisation of processes already underway.

2. ASSESSMENT

a. The elasticity of the concept of security, in its various forms, is susceptible to being exploited or abused by insecure and/or oppressive regimes for reasons of political expediency. The so-called ‘new-generation threats’ are normally not mutually exclusive, thus leading to possible over-securitisation of threats and the prescription of harsh measures even when dealing with relatively minor threats to stability such as riots and public disorder.

b. While it may be argued that one of the significant reasons for the formation of Mercosur was largely due to the realisation that Brazil was an unrivalled regional power, the main impetus for Mercosur was provided by the democratisation processes within member states. The traditional rivalries between Argentina and Brazil did not necessarily disappear with the formation of Mercosur but rather became a managed process. This is almost similar to the way the Russian Federation dealt with the Western Countries in the post-Cold War era where Russia conceded to the superiority of the latter without losing credibility.

c. The cementing of economic ties between South Africa and the Mercosur countries in the post-1994 period fell squarely in the emerging paradigm of the post-Cold War era where there was a dramatic ascendance of socio-economic issues. These ties had always existed but were limited by various UN Resolutions which proscribed interaction with South Africa. However, the success of South Africa’s trade relations with Mercosur depended on the former’s ability to act as the voice of the Southern African sub-region, with Brazil playing a similar role within Mercosur.

d. The bilateral and multilateral arrangements in the military sphere are an extension of the relations in the political and economic spheres. Other than regular, largely symbolic military exercises involving states such as the US and Britain, it is evident that the primary driving force behind such exercises are not military imperatives but political and economic factors. In the political sphere, there is clear collusion among states of the Global South to support one another in fora such as the UN. Economic factors are self-evident in their concerted effort in reviewing the rules of the WTO, NAFTA and the EU in order to allow products from the Global South to access the huge and rich markets of the Global North.

e. The ability of the South Atlantic littoral states to conduct combined military exercises and to commit themselves to ensuring that the whole South Atlantic Ocean remains nuclear-free, demonstrates the potential for an organisation that binds both sides of the ocean. There is also common purpose in dealing with transoceanic criminal activity. However, the main impediment to the realisation of such an organisation may be inadequate political will or preparedness of the littoral states to provide sufficient resources so that the organisation is not entirely dependent on handouts from the North. Even though the ZPCSA meets regularly, it does not seem to have reached the necessary maturity level where it could be converted into a fully-fledged organisation. Furthermore, the formation of such an organisation would require that Mercosur and the various sub-regional organisations from Africa be prepared to amend their founding constitutions in order to accommodate overlapping membership, which, in Africa, would include ECOWAS, CEEAC and SADC.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND TESTING OF PROPOSITIONS

When this study was initiated, it was to be based on certain propositions and assumptions.

a. *First proposition:* “South Africa’s security considerations are increasingly becoming inseparably entangled with those of her south-west Atlantic neighbours, notably Brazil and Argentina.”

Findings: South Africa has taken up the challenge of security threats on the western shores quite seriously. This is demonstrated by the fact that South Africa is currently in the process of purchasing corvettes, which are much faster, more versatile in terms of armaments, and provide limited blue-sea capability. In addition, there are more scheduled and *ad hoc* joint military exercises in the South Atlantic Ocean than is the case in the Indian Ocean. This could be attributed to the fact that there is a change in focus in terms of the nature and scope of security threats. In addition to scheduled multilateral military exercises involving South Africa and the Mercosur countries, the former also has specific bilateral arrangements with Argentina and Brazil.

b. *Second Proposition:* “Security, in the broader sense which also includes social and economic dimensions, requires a holistic approach and South Africa’s security

relations with the Mercosur grouping could offer numerous benefits for the general good of her citizens.”

Findings: The emerging approach to security as confirmed in the various policy documents of the South African government such as the Constitution, 1996; White Paper on Defence, 1996 and the White Paper on Intelligence, 1994 seems to indicate that a broader understanding of the concept of security is being adopted. Furthermore, the current spending patterns which emphasise social development (for instance, education, health, electricity, safety and security, and provision for small and medium enterprises), also seem to attest to this observation. Despite the imperative of social development, the government has committed itself to long-term strategic defence packages to re-equip the SANDF. This demonstrates beyond doubt a balanced approach towards security.

- c. *Third Proposition:* “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 she is serious about being a global competitor of note.”

Findings: While South Africa is acutely aware of the necessity for increased investment from, and trade relations with the Latin American countries, particularly those constituting Mercosur, there appears to be limited success in this respect. The so-called ‘butterfly’ approach adopted by the South African government in respect of trade links confirms the focus on North America and the EU, while residual trade takes place on the wings of the butterfly, that is in East Asia and Latin America. With Brazil and South Africa being regional powers in their respective sub-regions, there is limited complementarity in their markets and they are also competing for the same market of the Global North.

- d. *Fourth Proposition:* “South Africa’s global ambitions, including membership of the United Nations Security Council, can only materialise with considerable support from the Latin American countries.”

Findings: South Africa has mobilised every possible international constituency in order to gain recognition as a credible international role-player. Some of the strategies used have been active involvement in conflict-resolution and management on the African continent, and also championing the cause of Africa's renewal programme through NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). In addition to these, South Africa assumed chairs of significant international bodies including the SADC, the NAM, the Commonwealth of Nations and some UN specialised bodies. In all these achievements, it is not clear what the role or influence of the Mercosur countries has been, but it appears negligible. Despite the perceived failures or blunders such as the handling of the anti-Aids drug programme and the 'silent diplomatic' approach during the apparent breakdown of law and order in Zimbabwe, South Africa is perceived by the international community as a credible ambassador for Africa. It can therefore be surmised that South Africa has successfully carved a niche in the international arena and does not necessarily need the Latin American countries to maintain that position.

4. **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This study has concentrated mainly on the security interactions among the littoral states of the South Atlantic region. It has highlighted the security concerns and strategic perceptions of these states and extra-regional powers in that region. However, it has not explored the security inter-linkages between the South Atlantic region and Antarctica. It is an open secret that while there are numerous conventions prohibiting military activity in Antarctica, various states are currently claiming ownership of certain portions of Antarctica. Some of these claims are not only disputed because they are new, but because they coincide or overlap with those that are being claimed by other countries. Given the volatility of the situation, it is evident that the apparently self-imposed restraint may not last long enough to settle all the claims. The moratorium on making new claims, which was imposed by the Antarctic Treaty when it was initially opened for signature, expired in the early nineties, and therefore states can now revive their territorial claims on Antarctica.

Being one of the original signatories, a claimant and active role-player in Antarctica, South Africa is bound to be entangled in the controversies over Antarctica. It is therefore important that a further study be conducted to determine the way in which South Africa's interests in

Antarctica can be affected and how to protect them. Such a study can identify threats and potential allies that could help secure South Africa's interests.