

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD PALESTINE

South Africa's foreign policy advancement toward Palestine unfolded through a gradual but profound transformation shaped by its historical experiences. In the apartheid era (1948–1994), South Africa built a close strategic relationship with Israel, grounded in shared international isolation, military cooperation, and pragmatic interests. However, this alignment began to change dramatically after the collapse of apartheid in 1994, when the African National Congress, under Nelson Mandela's leadership, introduced a new foreign policy rooted in human rights, anti-colonial solidarity, and African nationalism. The post-apartheid government placed Africa at the center of its diplomacy, embraced multilateralism, and championed global justice, marking a sharp departure from the apartheid regime's militarized and isolated international stance. As South Africa redefined its identity on the global stage, its relationship with Israel steadily declined. By the early 2000s, South Africa had begun openly criticizing Israeli policies in Palestine, and by 2018, it recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv and downgraded its embassy. This timeline reflects a clear evolution: from strategic cooperation with Israel during apartheid, to the adoption of principled post-apartheid foreign policy frameworks, and finally to the visible deterioration of relations with Israel as solidarity with Palestine became a central expression of South Africa's new identity.

2.1. Foreign Policy Under Apartheid: Strategic Alignment with Israel (1948–1994)

Between 1948 and 1994, South Africa's foreign relations were largely shaped by its apartheid policy, which formalized and intensified pre-existing racial segregation. Initially, the apartheid regime pursued an assertive foreign policy aimed at asserting its dominance over Southern Africa, but by the late 1970s, these efforts had largely failed. South Africa's racial policies, its occupation of Namibia, and military interventions in Angola increasingly isolated the country on the global stage (Schenoni, 2017).

In the post-World War II era, global attitudes toward racial supremacy began to shift, particularly in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust (Borstelmann, 1999). Although many Western nations still maintained discriminatory practices in their colonies or, as in the U.S., through segregationist laws, the international community gradually began distancing itself from explicit racial policies. South Africa, however, had long institutionalized racial segregation since its unification in 1910. The apartheid system, established in 1948, codified this discrimination into a rigid and systematic legal framework. Despite the oppressive nature of these laws, early international reactions were muted, in part because of Western hypocrisy and geopolitical interests. The Cold War made South Africa a valuable anti-communist partner for Western powers. Still, apartheid's brutality gained attention, as seen in the international outrage following the 1951 death of Milton King in South African police custody, which prompted widespread protests and eventually led to Jamaica's 1959 economic boycott of South African goods.

South Africa's early diplomatic ties with Israel were rooted in shared strategic and ideological interests. Formal relations began in 1948 when South Africa, under the leadership of Field Marshal Jan Smuts, quickly recognized the newly declared State of Israel (Lowenberg, 1950). This move was not surprising given Smuts' pro-Zionist views and South Africa's significant Jewish population, which had long supported Zionist efforts financially. Even after the National Party, known for its antisemitic roots and staunch support of apartheid, rose to power in 1948, ties with Israel continued. Despite its prior prejudice, the party appeared to shift its stance, and by 1949 South Africa had officially recognized Israel, allowing diplomatic exchanges to deepen (Stevens, 1971).

Throughout the 1950s, the cooperation grew stronger. South Africa relaxed currency controls to facilitate the export of goods to Israel, supported Zionist fundraising efforts, and even permitted Jewish volunteers to serve in the Israeli military. Key visits—such as Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett's trip to South Africa in 1951 and Prime Minister Malan's visit to Israel in 1953—solidified their bilateral ties. By the end of the decade, prominent figures such as Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd maintained this alliance, and Jewish financial support for Israel from South Africa had become substantial, estimated at \$19.6 million between 1951 and 1961 (Bishku, 2010).

However, after Israel's 1967 victory in the Six-Day War and its subsequent occupation of Arab territories, it faced growing criticism from the global South, including many newly independent African nations, who began to see Israel as an extension of colonialism. In contrast, white South Africans, particularly in

leadership circles, increasingly admired Israel's military success. Prime Minister John Vorster's government allowed South African volunteers to join Israeli paramilitary efforts and supported the expansion of Zionist organizations within the country. Bilateral trade and cooperation surged, supported by organizations like the Israeli–South African Friendship League and the Israel–South Africa Trade Association (Haron, 1997).

By the early 1970s, this partnership had matured into a robust economic and military alliance. Both nations saw themselves engaged in existential struggles—South Africa against the African National Congress (ANC) and Israel against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Polakow, 2017). Intelligence services from both countries shared classified information and military strategies. South African and Israeli generals worked closely together, even exchanging access to military operations. Israel played a key role in arming South Africa, becoming its top foreign arms supplier during the 1970s and 1980s (Nadelmann, 1981). Additionally, the two countries reportedly collaborated on nuclear weapons development, with the controversial 1979 Vela incident widely speculated to have been a joint nuclear test conducted in the Indian Ocean (Hersh, 1991). Despite attempts by the U.S. to downplay the event, many experts—including Seymour Hersh and Richard Rhodes—conclude that it was an Israeli-South African nuclear experiment (Rhodes, 2011).

2.2. Foundational Foreign Policy Principles in the Post-Apartheid Era

To understand the principles of the newly adopted foreign policy of post-apartheid South Africa, we must look at the apartheid-era ruling government. During 1948-1994, when the Nationalist Party ruled, South Africa was considered a pariah state by the international society because of its white minority rule and institutionalized racial segregation that obviously violated international norms and human rights principles. The principles and policies adopted in this era were primarily defensive, reactionary, and combative strategies to mitigate the effects of isolation and punitive actions. On the report of a practitioner and scholar, the policy formulation during the apartheid era was restricted to a handful of elite individuals; therefore, the parliament effectively had no role in foreign policy, while the cabinet's role was mostly confined to the policy's approval (Sole, 1994).

Former South Africa's prime minister, who ruled from 1978 to 1984 and later on became the first executive state president during 1984 to 1989, Pieter Willem Botha, established renowned institutions, one of it being the State Security Council as an independent component of the Foreign Ministry to combat the perceived 'total onslaught' against the nation (Alden, 1996). This foreign policy that is perceived as 'militarized' signified the comprehensive utilization of South Africa's military capabilities across the region to counter a perceived communist threat and to eliminate the ANC guerrilla bases and training facilities. With that in mind, the ANC party tried to execute a strategy of intensifying South Africa's isolation by propagating the UN declaration that 'apartheid constituted a crime against humanity'.

For the ANC, the fight for an apartheid-free South Africa was a struggle to achieve essential human rights. Consequently, it was no surprise that upon assuming power, the ANC prioritized human rights as a significant principle in its foreign policy. Furthermore, the newly enthroned government's strategy was primarily driven by an aspiration to establish Africa —particularly Southern Africa—as the central arena of South African activism, which is aimed at fostering regional development and engaging constructively in global organizations. A comprehensive concept of 'universality' was then embraced, reflecting the new government's aim to engage in diplomatic activity characterized by active internationalism. The new strategy adopted by the ANC was constrained by specific ideological biases and preferences derived from its guerilla history. The government consequently found itself in the undesirable position of sustaining connections with former allies and ANC supporters who are considered to have questionable human rights records (Pfister, 2000).

On the eve of the 1994 elections, Nelson Mandela declared that "human rights will be the light that guides our foreign policy". This obvious statement established the framework and conduct of South African diplomacy post-apartheid (Mandela, 1994). The unexpected complexities that accompanied the transformation of South Africa's foreign affairs bureaucracy further complicated these objectives. Hence, the ANC leader aimed to embody the experiences of the anti-apartheid struggle into South African foreign policy to foster an emphasis on civil freedoms and democratization in IR. Furthermore, in alignment with the historical solidarity politics that unite the liberation forces all across East Timor,

even to Western Sahara, the new South African government has shown receptiveness to the issues raised by non-state actors and demonstrated readiness to engage with them.

Another principle and characteristic of post-apartheid foreign policy was ‘active internationalism’, which was primarily implemented through multilateral institutions. The government endeavored to revitalize these institutions by referencing South Africa’s own distinctive political transition and the resulting moral authority that resulted from unprecedented measures, such as the unilateral dismantling of its nuclear program. Active internationalism itself, within the scope of foreign policy, is a proactive strategy that prioritizes engagement and collaboration with other states and international organizations to tackle global challenges and advance mutual interests (Svensson, 1997). To be precise, African-based institutions, like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and organizations with a “South” orientation, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), were perceived as the appropriate platforms for advancing a reformist agenda that aligned with South Africa’s interests in democratic governance and development.

The post-apartheid South African government encountered considerable obstacles in reforming the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), which had formerly prioritized countering international sanctions and sustaining relationships with Europe and the US, alongside engaging in sanctions evasion and military interventions (Geldenhuys, 1984). Relations with the majority of African governments were considered antagonistic, and the TBVC states maintained their own unacknowledged diplomatic missions. Subsequent to 1994, discord emerged

within the DFA around racial and gender representation, with staffing disparities enduring into the 2000s. The department was ideologically polarized between “neo-mercantilists” from the former government who promoted trade, self-interest, and “internationalists”—many of whom returned from exile—who underscored solidarity with poor nations. The divides, coupled with ineffective leadership, impeded significant policy changes and organizational reform, intensifying the cultural rift between seasoned, politically compromised bureaucrats and idealistic, yet experienced, new officials (Hill, 2003).

It is important to note that the ANC government, by prioritizing the advancement of human rights in South Africa’s foreign policy, adopted a broader interpretation of the idea beyond its limited liberal definition. In this framework, human rights encompassed not just political rights but also economic, social, and environmental rights (ANC, 1997). The interplay of domestic socioeconomic limitations and intricacies of its African surroundings, which became the focal point of its human rights and democracy initiative, positions South Africa’s international human rights role within the Global South’s quest for socioeconomic justice, thereby prompting inquiries into the dedication of successive South African governments to a principled and ethical foreign policy. Besides that, there are other principles that were meant to guide post-apartheid South Africa’s foreign policy, one of them being a strong faith in international law, justice, cooperation, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In the pursuit of these and other principles, South Africa aimed to establish a new international identity and foreign policy direction, one that would transcend the ‘pariah’ status imposed during apartheid.

The newly developed foreign policy perspective comprised three interconnected dimensions. Initially, South Africa pledged to support its African neighbors and engage in the continent's revitalization, asserting that its fate as an African nation was interconnected with that of the entire continent. By prioritizing Africa in its foreign policy, the South African government was not only rejecting the colonial-apartheid view of the nation as a Western enclave on the continent but also confirming its African identity. Significantly, it recognized that the nation's stability and prosperity were not assured amidst an unstable and impoverished continent (Mandela, 1993). This insight proved prescient in the decades following apartheid's conclusion, as political instability and socioeconomic mismanagement in nations such as Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) precipitated a surge of unsustainable migration to South Africa in pursuit of asylum and improved livelihoods (Nganje & Ayodele, 2021).

Another principle, while preserving its traditional affiliations with Western nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States, Pretoria chose to align itself with the Global South collective, cognizant of the persistent disparities in the international political economy. This dedication to promoting South to South solidarity and cooperation, not only as a counterbalance to the ongoing predominance of the West in global affairs but also as an alternative route to socioeconomic advancement, would complicate Pretoria's foreign policy further. Although South Africa has endeavored to position itself as a mediator between developed and developing nations, its identification with the South has frequently resulted in strained relations with Northern partners and perceptions of

inconsistencies in its foreign policy. A third, equally contentious aspect of post-apartheid South Africa's foreign policy articulates its commitment to multilateralism, both as a principle and as a strategy to achieve other foreign policy goals. As a regional power, South Africa acknowledged early that it could not fulfill a substantial international role or attain its foreign policy goals without a rules-based multilateral framework to counterbalance the influences of power politics, particularly in light of its own material limitations.

In this framework, Pretoria would adopt an activist stance in multilateral forums and embrace the role of a norm entrepreneur both internationally and regionally, aiming to reform and improve institutions of multilateral governance (Geldenhuys, 2010). South Africa's inclination towards multilateral diplomacy has faced criticism. Some contend that South Africa's reformist stance in multilateral organizations is misguided in a context of *realpolitik* and amid urgent domestic socioeconomic demands (Qobo & Dube, 2015). Conversely, several analysts contend that an unwavering commitment to multilateralism, especially at the regional scale, impedes Pretoria's diplomatic efforts (Khadiagala & Nganje, 2016).

Furthermore, South Africa is also known for its Non-Aligned Movement, meaning that they won't interfere, give a significant stance, or even participate formally in or against any major power bloc. One of the distressing actions of this NAM behavior is about the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the South African government has consistently emphasized its non-alignment and dedication to a diplomatic resolution. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) first denounced

the invasion and called for a Russian withdrawal; however, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa promptly altered this stance and sought to reassure Moscow related to South Africa's ongoing partnership. All the following remarks from Ramaphosa, cabinet ministers, and DIRCO have meticulously refrained from criticizing Russia. Hence, South Africa has rejected economic sanctions on Russia and has refrained from employing terms like 'invasion', 'aggression', or 'occupation', opting instead for more neutral phrases like 'the conflict in Ukraine'.

The administration asserts that its abstention at the United Nations General Assembly on all resolutions condemning Russia is rooted in its dedication to fostering discussion and dispute resolution instead of exacerbating polarization. This has resulted in the belief among numerous Western capitals that South Africa, among Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Turkey, constitutes a cohort of 'fence-sitting' or 'hedging' states that are hesitant to take sides and engage in the fight. Pretoria itself has asserted its preference for rigorous neutrality and the maintenance of flexible alternatives while navigating a growing and intricate multipolar world order (IISS, 2023). Nevertheless, South Africa's non-aligned foreign policy remains inconsistent, proven by its marvelous stance on the Palestine-Israel conflict.

2.3. The Decline of South Africa–Israel Relations

Even though there are no completely severed ties between South Africa and Israel, the relations are slowly but surely strained on behalf of South Africa's doing. Long before that, with the white supremacist ideology that flourished under the apartheid regime, the political behaviors adopted during this dark period also

reflected the British Empire's position in the South African government, which can be seen in its international relations with Israel. The two countries ostracized by the international community eventually found their way to develop a relationship built on pragmatic considerations and mutual interdependence. The era witnessed extensive cooperation between the two countries, which included military exchanges, technology transfer, and diplomatic support (McGreal, 2010). South Africa's support of the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, which favored the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, solidified the two nations' alliance (Bishku, 2010).

The post-apartheid government of South Africa was partly to blame for the decline in ties with Israel. In the Israeli-Palestinian dispute that entered the International Court of Justice, South Africa, represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad, declared its support for Palestine prior to the end of 2004 (Rapanyane et al., 2022). The two nations' foreign policies have not been restricted or banned, despite South Africa's criticism of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Prior to 2018, economic relations between the two countries were excellent, reaching \$1.03 billion in 2010, with Israel ranking as South Africa's 24th largest export destination and its 40th largest source of imports (Bishku, 2010).

Diplomatic conflicts were exacerbated in the 2010s by South Africa's criticism of Israel (Gruzd et al., 2018). South Africa boosted its support for UN resolutions criticizing Israel regarding the Gaza flotilla raid that happened in 2010, removing its own ambassador from Israel and requesting reprimands from the Israeli embassy (Migdalovitz, 2010). On May 14, 2018, South Africa recalled its

ambassador, a sign of strained relations between the two countries in the wake of the 2018 riots along the Gaza border (Powell, 2018). In order to voice its displeasure with Israel's policies and behavior, in 2018, South Africa downsized its Tel Aviv embassy to a liaison office (Benjamin & Gruzd, 2018). A statement highlighting the dangerous state of circumstances was made by the Department of International Relations in South Africa in 2022. It claimed that diplomatic and political contacts between South Africa and Israel had been hampered by Israel's animosity toward the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and disdain for international law pertaining to Palestinian rights, particularly those on the Palestinian lands (Belder & Coolegem, 2016). Furthermore, the relations keep getting strained time by time due to Israel's long atrocities towards Palestine.

Since South Africa unilaterally downgraded its diplomatic ties with Israel, relations between the two nations have remained tense. In 2021, South Africa's Department of Sports, Arts and Culture withdrew its endorsement of the Miss South Africa competition after the pageant declined to pull out of the Miss Universe contest held in Eilat, Israel (Mitchley, 2021). That same year and again in late 2022, South Africa, along with Algeria, led an unsuccessful initiative aimed at revoking Israel's observer status within the African Union (Fabricius, 2022). However, the situation escalated significantly during the war in Gaza. South Africa called on the international community to take action against what Foreign Minister Pandor referred to as "a real crime against humanity." Soon after, the African National Congress adopted a resolution urging the government to shut down its embassy in Tel Aviv (Al Jazeera, 2023). The South African cabinet also called on the

International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. At the same time, South Africa withdrew its ambassador and all diplomatic personnel from Israel. Minister in the Presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, added that the Israeli ambassador to South Africa had made derogatory comments about those criticizing Israel's actions, which she characterized as opposing atrocities and genocide.

On November 21, 2023, South Africa's Parliament voted 248 to 91 in favor of a motion introduced by the Economic Freedom Fighters, which called for the closure of the Israeli embassy and the suspension of all diplomatic relations until Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza. In response, Israel recalled its ambassador from South Africa for consultations. The following day, President Ramaphosa welcomed a temporary four-day ceasefire and expressed optimism that it might pave the way for a more permanent end to the hostilities. By March 2024, Minister Pandor made it clear that any South African nationals who had traveled to Gaza to fight on Israel's behalf would face arrest upon their return (Al Jazeera, 2024).

2.4. South Africa's Evolving Engagement with Palestine

2.4.1. Limited Engagement During the Apartheid Era

During apartheid, South Africa's white minority government maintained a close alliance with Israel, which influenced its stance—or lack thereof—on the Palestinian issue. This relationship was primarily pragmatic, rooted in shared geopolitical isolation and mutual interests. Both regimes faced international condemnation—South Africa for its racial segregation policies and Israel for its

occupation of Palestinian territories—and found common ground in military and economic cooperation. Israel supplied arms and military advisors to South Africa, while the apartheid government reciprocated with diplomatic support. This collaboration extended to nuclear technology, with reports revealing secret deals between the two governments in the 1970s (New Arab, 2024). As a result, the apartheid regime refrained from addressing or criticizing Israel's policies toward Palestinians, prioritizing its strategic partnership over any engagement with the Palestinian cause.

The ideological alignment between apartheid South Africa and Israel further reinforced Pretoria's silence on Palestinian oppression. Both governments implemented policies of segregation—Bantustans in South Africa and settlements in occupied Palestinian territories—which some scholars likened to apartheid systems. However, South Africa's white minority leadership avoided drawing such parallels publicly, likely to preserve its relationship with Israel (Newlines Magazine, 2024). Despite this alignment, Afrikaner leaders initially viewed Israel with suspicion during the 1950s and 1960s due to concerns about communism but later embraced cooperation after 1967. Ultimately, the white minority government's stance on Palestine was shaped by realpolitik rather than moral considerations, as it prioritized its survival amid global isolation over taking a position on Palestinian rights.

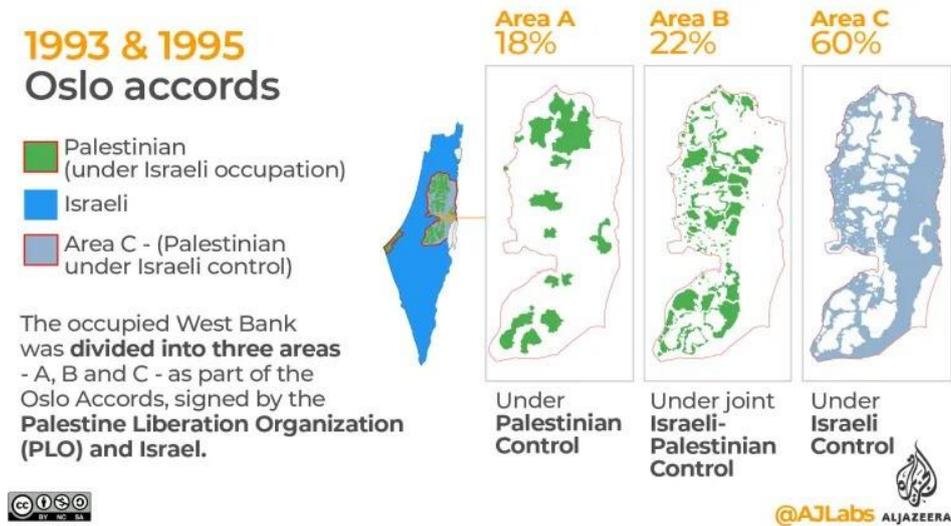
However, South Africa's Black resistance movement developed strong solidarity with Palestine during the anti-apartheid struggle. The African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation groups identified closely with the Palestinian

Liberation Organization (PLO), seeing parallels between their struggles against colonialism and racial oppression. Nelson Mandela famously expressed support for Palestine, emphasizing that South Africans could not enjoy freedom while Palestinians remained oppressed (Arab News, 2025). This solidarity extended beyond rhetoric; both movements exchanged strategies and resources during their respective struggles. After apartheid ended, South Africa's post-apartheid government continued this legacy by adopting a pro-Palestinian foreign policy, downgrading diplomatic ties with Israel and supporting campaigns like Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli policies (AA News, 2024; Arab News, 2025). For Black South Africans, the Palestinian cause remains deeply intertwined with their own history of resistance against systemic injustice.

2.4.2. Early Symbolic Support in the Post-1994 Democratic Transition

The period from 1994 to the early 2000s was very crucial for Palestinian diplomatic ties, which was indicated by notable advancements subsequent to the Oslo Accords. The Oslo I Accord, executed in 1993, established a framework for Palestinian self-governance and mutual recognition between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. This specific agreement resulted in the formation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, conferring limited self-governance in certain areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The later Oslo II Accord in 1995 further defined the partition of these lands into Areas A, B, and C, detailing differing levels of administrative and security authority (Hassan, 2011).

Figure 1. 3 Oslo Accords Divided Areas



Source: (Al Jazeera, 2023)

Based on the figure, Area A was governed entirely by Palestinian civil and security authority, Area B was subject to Palestinian civil governance with collaborative Israeli-Palestinian security supervision, while Area C remained under complete Israeli jurisdiction. The arrangements were conceived as temporary solutions, intended to pave the way for final status negotiations that would tackle outstanding matters including borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023). Even though there is an area that is completely under Israeli control, the Oslo Accords enabled Palestine to interact with the international community, resulting in the formation of diplomatic relations with various nations.

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa experienced a significant shift in its foreign policy, prioritizing solidarity with countries facing similar challenges. The formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the State of Palestine was concluded on February 15, 1995, and stands as a notable example

of this approach. This was deeply rooted in the ANC and PLO's historical alliance, both of which have fought for self-determination and freedom from oppressive regimes. The reciprocal support throughout their individual liberation struggles established a strong basis for the diplomatic interactions that followed the end of apartheid. The establishment of these connections transcended mere symbolism, embodying a genuine dedication to cooperative endeavors aimed at tackling global challenges and championing the rights of marginalized communities across the globe (DIRCO, 2015).

The establishment of diplomatic relations was later characterized by profound exchanges that highlighted the substantial commitment shared between the two nations. In April 1995, South Africa conferred accreditation upon the inaugural Palestinian ambassador, signifying its commitment to advocating for the Palestinian cause within the global arena. This action was mirrored in August 1995 when South Africa designated its first representative to the Palestinian National Authority, thereby reinforcing the ties between the two entities. These appointments transcended mere formalities, embodying a profound alliance intended to cultivate collaboration across diverse sectors, such as diplomacy, education, and health. The appointment of ambassadors established direct lines of communication, allowing both countries to align their stances on global platforms with greater efficacy. This era witnessed the inauguration of the Palestinian Embassy in Pretoria alongside the establishment of the South African Representative Office in Gaza, emblematic of a profound dedication to fostering and maintaining diplomatic relations (Embassy of Palestine, 2020).

High-level visits and meetings showed even more evidence of the two countries' relationship development. Alfred B. Nzo, South Africa's Minister of Foreign Affairs, paid an official visit to Palestine in September 1995. An agreement was then made during this visit to create a Joint Commission of Cooperation that was meant to enable cross-domain cooperation (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2012). Reflecting both countries' commitment to mutual development and assistance, this commission set the foundation for organized and continuous bilateral activities. The creation of the Joint Commission gave a formal way to find and carry out cooperative initiatives, so guaranteeing that the partnership resulted in real advantages for both people. This project highlighted the proactive attitude both nations took in converting their historical unity into pragmatic cooperation meant to solve modern issues.

Later on, diplomatic contacts that strengthened this bilateral relationship and partnership persisted into the late 1990s. Previously, when Nelson Mandela was released from the prison, two weeks after that, he met Yasser Arafat, who at that time held the position of PLO chairman, in Lusaka, Zambia (Bishku, 2010). During this visit, Mandela and Arafat seem to have close ties, and Mandela stated, "There are many similarities between our struggle and that of the PLO." (Mandela, 1990). Long after that, Yasser Arafat visited South Africa in August 1998 on a state visit, which attested to the lasting unity between the two countries. President Nelson Mandela then gave Arafat the Order of Good Hope, South Africa's greatest award for foreign people, during his visit, which reflects great mutual respect between two nations (Reuters Archive Licensing, 1998).

Arafat's later working trips in April 1999 and August 2000 underlined even more dedication to continuous discussion and collaboration. Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian issue, these trips helped coordinate both countries' stances on global platforms. The regular high-level meetings highlighted the importance of the relationship between South Africa and Palestine, as well as their common vision for global justice. These meetings also gave chances to share opinions on the peace process, regional stability, and plans to rally worldwide support for Palestinian self-determination.

South Africa's consistent support for Palestine went beyond diplomatic niceties to real help. Working with the Gift of Givers Foundation, the South African government in 2002 organized an R5-million aid package for Palestinian refugees in Ramallah (Gift of the Givers Foundation, 2002). Comprising state-of-the-art medical equipment for an operating theater and an intensive care unit, a C-arm image intensifier used in orthopedic surgical procedures, an ultrasound machine, intravenous fluids, sutures, disposable gloves, antibiotics, analgesics, water purification tablets, bottled water, rice, cooking oil, sugar, cake flour, biscuits, salt, candles, and soap, this assistance emphasized South Africa's dedication to the welfare and development of the Palestinian people. The successful distribution of this aid, following agreements with the Israeli government, underlined South Africa's proactive attitude in converting solidarity into practical help, hence indicating a partnership that went beyond political discourse. This project not only offered instant assistance but also represented the depth of compassion and shared

experiences between the two countries, hence supporting the moral need motivating South Africa's foreign policy towards Palestine.

2.4.3. Policy Deepening and Assertive Advocacy in President Cyril Ramaphosa's Regime

Under President Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa has taken a notably assertive stance in championing Palestinian rights, both domestically and on the international stage. The Ramaphosa administration has consistently condemned Israeli policies, particularly those related to settlement expansion and military operations in Gaza. In 2019, South Africa downgraded its embassy in Tel Aviv to a liaison office, a move that signaled a significant recalibration of diplomatic relations and a direct protest against Israeli actions. This assertive approach escalated during the 2023 Israel-Gaza conflict, when South Africa recalled its ambassador from Israel and initiated legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of genocide. These actions underscore President Ramaphosa's commitment to holding Israel accountable and advocating for Palestinian self-determination on the global stage (WAFA, 2025).

President Ramaphosa has repeatedly reaffirmed South Africa's unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people, emphasizing this commitment in key national and international addresses. In his 2025 parliamentary address, he highlighted South Africa's actions under the Genocide Convention and reiterated the country's dedication to the principles of the United Nations, particularly the peaceful resolution of international disputes. He has also called for the immediate

implementation of the ICJ's provisional orders to halt Israeli military operations in Gaza and to facilitate humanitarian relief, stressing that only a just and lasting solution—protecting the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis—can bring stability to the region (Isilow, 2024).

The Ramaphosa administration's pro-Palestinian policy has been reinforced by strong domestic support. The South African Parliament has passed motions backing Palestine, with parties such as the EFF openly supporting Palestinian resistance movements. Civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in mobilizing public support through protests and advocacy campaigns, particularly promoting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. These combined efforts have solidified South Africa's reputation as a leading advocate for Palestinian rights and strengthened its solidarity with other nations sharing similar perspectives (Cakirtekin, 2025).

Additionally, President Ramaphosa has welcomed international mediation efforts, such as the humanitarian pause brokered by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, viewing them as steps toward a durable political resolution to the conflict. He has consistently urged the international community to intensify efforts for a two-state solution and has called for reforms within the United Nations, advocating for a more inclusive and effective Security Council capable of ensuring global peace and security. Through these actions, the Ramaphosa administration has positioned South Africa as a prominent and principled actor in the ongoing pursuit of justice and peace for Palestine (South African Government, 2023).

2.5. Influence of Domestic Political Ideologies on Foreign Policy

South Africa's current political landscape after the 2024 elections and the formation of the Government of National Unity shows that there are some major political ideologies held by each political party. With a multi-party system in place, these ideologies have a lot of influence on the course of the country's political status, both in domestic and international contexts.

Figure 2. 1 South Africa's Dominating Political Party

Name	Abbr.	Leader	Est.	Main Ideologies	Political position	National Assembly	NCOP	Provincial legislatures	Municipal council seats
African National Congress	ANC	Cyril Ramaphosa	1912	African nationalism Social democracy	Centre-left	159 / 400	43 / 90	224 / 487	4,549 / 8,794
Democratic Alliance	DA	John Steenhuisen	2000	Liberalism Federalism	Centre	87 / 400	21 / 90	97 / 487	1,494 / 8,794
uMkhonto weSizwe English: Spear of the Nation	MK	Jacob Zuma	2023	Zulu nationalism Socialism Social conservatism	Left-wing	58 / 400	9 / 90	58 / 487	0 / 8,794
Economic Freedom Fighters	EFF	Julius Malema	2013	Communism Pan-Africanism	Far-left	39 / 400	10 / 90	54 / 487	982 / 8,794
Inkatha Freedom Party	IFP	Velenkosini Hlabisa	1975	Conservatism Constitutional monarchism	Right-wing	17 / 400	2 / 90	16 / 487	544 / 8,794
Patriotic Alliance	PA	Gayton McKenzie	2013	Right-wing populism	Right-wing to far-right	9 / 400	2 / 90	10 / 487	85 / 8,794
Freedom Front Plus	VF+	Corné Mulder	1994	Conservatism Afrikaner interests	Right-wing	6 / 400	2 / 90	9 / 487	221 / 8,794
ActionSA	ACTIONSA	Herman Mashaba	2020	Classical liberalism Libertarianism	Centre-right	6 / 400	1 / 90	5 / 487	90 / 8,974

Source: (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024)

Based on Table 2.1., the African National Congress (ANC), while still the largest party and representing African nationalism and social democracy, lost its majority. The Democratic Alliance (DA), advocating for liberalism, maintained a strong position. The uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party, a new entrant with left-wing populist leanings, made significant gains. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF),

representing far-left ideologies, retained a consistent level of support. Conservative parties like the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Freedom Front Plus (VF+) secured seats, as did the populist Patriotic Alliance (PA). ActionSA, with its classical liberal/libertarian platform, also gained seats, while the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) retained a smaller presence.

2.3.1. African Nationalism

A powerful political ideology in South Africa that brought a significant change of landscape during the apartheid and post-apartheid regime is African nationalism. According to scholars, African nationalism is defined as a very complex ideology, including the nuances of self-determination, resistance, cultural identity, and aspirations to rewrite the narrative about the Black majority. One of the eminent threads of African nationalism is designed as a reaction to European colonialism. According to Dompere (1992), African nationalism arises to facilitate the idea that people with a shared history and culture should be able to govern themselves (Dompere, 1992). African nationalism, in the first instance, was created in order to display a crucial role in driving the decolonization process and gaining self-determination. Notwithstanding, this ideology is often confused with Pan-Africanism, which aims at the unity of all African states and is very different from the core value of African nationalism (Rotberg, 1966).

In the context of foreign policy, African nationalism is associated with the political ideology embraced by the major political party, ANC, which influences their views of the apartheid state and the concept of self-determination for countries

that they believe have not been liberated from occupation, which in this case refers to Israel as the state that practiced an apartheid regime against the Palestinians. In South Africa itself, African nationalism is not only established by one single party or one particular individual, but it is mostly a combination of different thinkers and ideas that have been brought by the African National Congress (ANC), which sought to promote a multiracial, democratic society with fairness and equality by bringing all indigenous communities together in the struggle for liberation and against racism (South African History Online, 2019). Since the main value of the political ideology of African nationalism is to emphasize the formation of an independent state and self-determination, South Africa thinks that countries who still suffer from occupation, apartheid, and other types of colonization deserve to gain self-determination and be free from any colonial rule.

2.3.2. Social Democracy

Social democracy, as a political ideology, seeks to navigate a path between the extremes of unfettered capitalism and state-controlled socialism. At its core lies a commitment to social justice within a market economy. This approach involves utilizing the power of the state to regulate markets, redistribute wealth through progressive taxation and robust social welfare programs, and ensure universal access to essential services like healthcare and education. The aim is to mitigate the inequalities inherent in capitalism, providing a safety net for vulnerable populations and fostering a more equitable and humane society where individual freedoms are balanced with collective well-being (Mavrozacharakis & Tzagkarakis, 2018).

The ANC, which is the political party that embraced social democratic principles during its long struggle against apartheid and in its post-1994 governance, has seen this ideology significantly shape South Africa's foreign policy. Rooted in a history of fighting for social and economic justice for a marginalized majority, the ANC's social democratic orientation informs its solidarity with developing nations facing similar challenges of inequality and underdevelopment (Gumede, 2009). This dedication translates into South Africa's advocacy for a more equitable global economic order, its support for South-South cooperation initiatives, and its emphasis on the social dimensions of development in its international engagements. Furthermore, the ANC's commitment to democratic values and human rights, integral to social democracy, underpins its foreign policy stance on promoting good governance and peaceful conflict resolution across the African continent and beyond (Habib & Bentley, 2008). The historical fight for a just society within South Africa thus resonates in its pursuit of a fairer and more socially conscious global landscape.

2.3.3. Liberalism

Liberalism, at its heart, champions individual rights and freedoms, advocating for a limited government that protects these liberties. It emphasizes the rule of law, free markets, and open societies where individuals are empowered to make their own choices. Historically, liberalism emerged as a reaction against authoritarianism, promoting principles of tolerance, pluralism, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. It envisions a world where individuals and nations engage in mutually beneficial exchanges, fostering prosperity and cooperation through free

trade and diplomatic engagement. The belief in individual autonomy and rational discourse forms the bedrock of liberal thought, shaping its vision for both domestic and international affairs (Starr, 2012).

The Democratic Alliance (DA), South Africa's main opposition party, embodies liberal principles, and these ideals subtly influence South Africa's foreign policy debates, even if the ANC has historically dominated policy formation. The DA's emphasis on free-market economics translates into calls for policies that attract foreign investment and promote trade liberalization, reflecting a belief in the power of open markets to drive development. Moreover, its strong commitment to the rule of law and human rights informs its critiques of certain foreign policy decisions, particularly those considered compromising democratic values or aligning with authoritarian regimes (Butler, 2009). While the DA's direct influence on foreign policy may be constrained by its opposition status, its liberal ideology serves as a counterpoint, shaping public discourse and holding the government accountable for upholding principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for individual liberties in its international relations (Mattison, 2011).

2.3.4. Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism is an ideology that advocates the unity, solidarity, and freedom of the African people and heritage all around. Rooted in the shared history of colonialism, enslavement, and racial injustice, it claims a common destiny for all African people, irrespective of country borders. The fundamental principles of Pan-Africanism are the belief in African self-determination, the celebration of African

culture and legacy, and the quest for political and economic integration throughout the continent and the diaspora. The fundamental principles of Pan-Africanism include the belief in African self-determination, the celebration of African culture and legacy, and the search for political and economic unity. The ideology also envisions an empowered and unified Africa that is ready to handle its issues and claim its proper position on the world stage (Esdebe, 1994).

The formal establishment of Pan-Africanism was notably influenced by the contributions of key individuals within the African diaspora in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Pan-African Conferences, initiated in London in 1900, functioned as a critical platform for defining the movement's principles and cultivating a shared identity among participants. After World War II, Pan-Africanism gained significant momentum across the continent, aligning with the emergence of independence movements throughout Africa. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania were key proponents of African unification, a movement that led to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The initial concept of a fully unified African state encountered numerous challenges; however, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and subsequently the African Union (AU) emerged as important organizations focused on fostering collaboration, conflict resolution, and advocating for continental interests globally (Murithi, 2005).

Regarding foreign policy, Pan-Africanism has a massive influence due to the country's own history of racial oppression and its commitment to the liberation and development of the African continent. Emerging from the struggle against

apartheid, South Africa views itself as an integral part of Africa and actively promotes Pan-African ideals through its diplomatic engagements, economic partnerships, and participation in continental bodies like the AU. The main prioritization of South Africa's foreign policy is to come up with solutions to African problems, ignite regional integration, and advocate for the collective interests of the nation in global forums. The principles of solidarity, independence, and the pursuit of a prosperous and peaceful Africa are deeply embedded in Pan-Africanism and continue to shape South Africa's approach to its relations with other African nations and the wider world (Oloruntoba, 2023).