CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

4.1. Conclusions

This research systematically explores the advancement of South Africa's foreign policy toward Palestine in the post-apartheid era, highlighting a profound shift driven by ideological reorientation and strategic recalibration under President Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership. The findings demonstrate that South Africa's evolving stance transcends mere diplomatic realignment; it reflects a deep reconstruction of national identity shaped by the country's historical experience and its repositioning within the international system. This evolution cannot be fully explained by rationalist theories alone but requires the application of constructivist theory, which emphasizes the centrality of ideas, identities, and social interactions in shaping state behavior.

Constructivism, as employed in this study, provides a critical lens to understand how South Africa's foreign policy preferences and interests toward Palestine are socially constructed through ongoing interactions and shared understandings. According to constructivist thought, state identities are not fixed but are continuously formed and reformed through engagement with both domestic and international actors. This perspective aligns with James N. Rosenau's framework, which integrates micro and macro levels of analysis, allowing for a nuanced examination of how South Africa's collective identity—rooted in its anti-apartheid legacy—interacts with global norms and power structures to influence

foreign policy decisions. Constructivists argue that interests derive from identities, meaning that South Africa's solidarity with Palestine is grounded in a constructed national identity that sees parallels between its own past struggles and the Palestinian quest for self-determination. Through participation in international forums and normative frameworks, South Africa both shapes and is shaped by the social context of global politics, reinforcing its foreign policy orientation toward justice and human rights. Thus, this research confirms that South Africa's foreign policy under Ramaphosa is best understood as a dynamic process of identity construction and norm internalization, as emphasized by constructivist theory.

Rosenau's theory distinguishes between micro-level and macro-level factors as mutually constitutive yet analytically distinct spheres influencing foreign policy. At the micro level, the focus is on individual policymakers, their roles within political systems, social values, and governmental structures. These factors capture the domestic, ideational, and institutional dimensions that shape how foreign policy preferences are formed and articulated. In the South African context, this includes the influence of the African National Congress's historical anti-colonial ideology, the personal convictions of leaders like Nelson Mandela and Cyril Ramaphosa, and the institutional embedding of human rights principles in the post-apartheid state apparatus.

At the macro level, Rosenau highlights the systemic environment in which states operate, including the logic of anarchy in the international system, the actions of other states, and broader geopolitical pressures. For South Africa, this macro environment encompasses the global power dynamics shaped by Western

dominance, the rise of the Global South as a political bloc, and the international normative frameworks concerning human rights and self-determination. South Africa's alignment with Palestine can thus be understood as a response to these macro-level pressures, seeking to assert a postcolonial identity and challenge prevailing global hierarchies.

The historical trajectory of South Africa-Israel relations during the apartheid era reveals a partnership built upon pragmatic considerations and shared international isolation. Both states, facing condemnation from the international community, developed symbiotic relationships encompassing military cooperation, technological exchange, and diplomatic solidarity. This alliance, however instrumental to both parties' survival within a hostile international environment, fundamentally contradicted the anti-colonial and anti-oppression principles espoused by the African National Congress and other anti-apartheid movements. The apparent paradox of a regime built upon racial segregation aligning with a state engaged in territorial occupation created an ideological dissonance that proved unsustainable following South Africa's democratic transition.

The emergence of a new South African identity post-1994, anchored in principles of human rights, equality, and anti-colonialism, necessitated a recalibration of foreign policy priorities to maintain ontological coherence. Nelson Mandela's explicit parallels between South African and Palestinian struggles for self-determination signaled this shift, establishing ideological solidarity as a cornerstone of the new South Africa's international positioning. This reorientation represents not merely a rational calculation of interests but a profound assertion of

collective identity-what South Africa is and what it stands for in the post-apartheid world order. The constructivist framework employed in this study illuminates how this identity reconstruction permeated policy formulation, transforming abstract ideational factors into concrete diplomatic actions.

The research findings indicate that South Africa's post-apartheid identification with Palestine derives substantial legitimacy from shared historical experiences of colonization, dispossession, and resistance. Both entities experienced systematic oppression justified through colonial-settler narratives, creating a powerful basis for solidarity that transcends conventional strategic alignments. The African nationalist ideology, emphasizing self-determination and rejection of external domination, provided the theoretical underpinning for this solidarity, transforming historical memory into political action. This identification process demonstrates the potency of constructed historical narratives in foreign policy formation, particularly among states emerging from colonial legacies.

The institutionalization of this ideological position within South Africa's diplomatic apparatus represents a critical mechanism through which identity translated into policy outcomes. The progressive downgrading of relations with Israel-from the 2018 reduction of the Tel Aviv embassy to a liaison office to the 2023 genocide case at the International Court of Justice-illustrates the integration of ideational factors into formal policy structures. These actions, far from representing impulsive decisions, reflect a systematic alignment of diplomatic practice with core identity principles. The constructivist approach employed throughout this research elucidates how normative positions, once embedded within

institutional frameworks, acquire remarkable durability and resistance to conventional interest-based recalibration.

The analysis further reveals that South Africa's stance toward Palestine functions simultaneously as both an expression of domestic identity and a strategic positioning within the evolving global order. By championing Palestinian rights, South Africa asserts its moral authority as a voice for the Global South, leveraging its unique historical experience to claim leadership within international forums. This positioning, particularly within organizations like BRICS+, enables South Africa to challenge Western dominance of global governance structures while building coalitions based on shared anti-colonial narratives. The research thus demonstrates how identity-based foreign policy can serve instrumental purposes without reducing ideational factors to mere strategic calculation.

The interplay between micro and macro determinants of foreign policy emerges as a central finding of this investigation. At the micro level, domestic political imperatives-including the legitimation needs of the post-apartheid state and the ideological commitments of the ruling African National Congress-created powerful incentives for Palestinian solidarity. At the macro level, shifting global power dynamics and the emergence of alternative centers of influence provided the structural context within which South Africa could operationalize its pro-Palestinian stance. Rather than privileging either domestic or international factors, this research demonstrates their mutually constitutive relationship in policy formation-a finding consistent with constructivist understandings of agency-structure interaction.

President Cyril Ramaphosa's explicit comparison between Israeli actions and the South African apartheid regime represents the culmination of this identity-based foreign policy approach. By drawing this parallel, South Africa mobilizes its unique historical experience as moral capital within international discourse, positioning itself as uniquely qualified to recognize and condemn systems of oppression. This rhetorical strategy demonstrates the performative dimension of foreign policy-how diplomatic stances not only reflect identity but actively constitute it through public articulation. The genocide case against Israel serves simultaneously as a concrete policy action and a powerful statement of South African identity on the global stage.

The temporal dimension of South Africa's foreign policy transformation warrants particular attention. Rather than representing an abrupt rupture, the shift toward Palestine occurred gradually, reflecting the complex process of identity reconfiguration following major political transitions. This evolutionary rather than revolutionary pattern suggests that identity-based foreign policy changes require both ideological articulation and institutional embedding-processes that unfold across generations rather than electoral cycles. The research thus contributes to understandings of foreign policy temporality by highlighting how foundational identity shifts produce enduring policy reorientations resistant to short-term fluctuations in material interests.

In the broader theoretical context, this case study provides compelling evidence for the explanatory power of constructivism in understanding foreign policy formation in post-colonial states. While rationalist approaches might

interpret South Africa's stance as contrary to conventional interest calculations, constructivism illuminates how identity-consistent behavior serves deeper ontological security needs that transcend material considerations. The South African case demonstrates that states emerging from profound identity transitions prioritize normative coherence alongside-and sometimes above-conventional security and economic interests. This finding has significant implications for international relations theory, particularly regarding the foreign policy behavior of states with complex colonial histories and contested national identities.

4.2. Recommendations

This research has illuminated the shifting contours of South Africa's foreign policy toward Palestine through a constructivist lens, emphasizing the interplay between national identity and international systemic factors. However, a more detailed domestic approach focusing on grassroots movements, public opinion, and civil society engagement could offer valuable insights into how these internal actors influence or challenge official policy narratives. Exploring these bottom-up dynamics would complement the elite-driven discourse analysis presented here and deepen understanding of the domestic foundations underpinning South Africa's foreign policy orientation.

Comparative studies examining other postcolonial states with similar liberation histories and their foreign policies toward Palestine could further enrich the field. Such research would clarify whether South Africa's identity-based foreign policy is unique or reflects broader postcolonial patterns, while also highlighting

how different political and institutional contexts mediate the translation of solidarity into action. Additionally, longitudinal analyses tracing discourse and policy shifts over time, particularly in response to leadership changes and international developments would provide a more dynamic understanding of the evolution and durability of South Africa's stance.

Finally, future research could benefit from a closer examination of the institutional mechanisms and bureaucratic processes that shape policy formulation and implementation on this issue. Investigating how South Africa navigates multilateral forums, balances normative commitments with strategic interests, and addresses inconsistencies in its human rights advocacy would offer a more nuanced picture of the complexities involved. Integrating Rosenau's micro-macro framework with other constructivist and interdisciplinary approaches could also yield richer theoretical insights into the relationship between identity, discourse, and foreign policy in transitional states.