

Since 1994, democratic South Africa has a noteworthy history of advocating for a more just and inclusive global order. In addition to pushing for African economic development, South Africa has consistently spoken in favour of multilateralism, negotiations and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In recent years, though, it would appear that South Africa has lost some of its strategic nous in international relations and runs the risk of sleepwalking into various geo-political minefields.

The current world situation is changing and there is an urgent need for South Africa to review, recalibrate and sharpen its foreign policy framework. The country's economic problems will be worsened if missteps occur, and we lose access to overseas markets for our exports of motor vehicles, agricultural goods and other products.

A cleared-eyed approach to our economic interests, including export markets and job creation, must inform our foreign policy stance. We need to work over-time to ensure ongoing market access to key trading partners like the United States, Europe and China, just as we work with rising economic powers like India and Brazil in developing new economic relationships.

South Africa's national interest must shape the country's strategic approach – ill-informed nostalgia and grubby vested interests should not play any role in shaping our foreign policy. To be effective, our stance in favour of non-alignment and a more just global order will need to be forward-looking, actively pursued and astutely navigated.