Defence diplomacy: conceptual and practical dimensions with specific reference to South Africa

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Abstract:
This article explores defence diplomacy with reference to South Africa. Although the use of military means for diplomatic purposes is an established practice in South Africa, it is argued that as defence foreign relations, South African defence diplomacy approximates a military adjunct to diplomacy rather than a distinct type of diplomacy. At one level, its importance in a changing environment and use for foreign and security policy purposes are recognised in principle, whereas, at another level, defence diplomacy has become an overarching term for defence foreign relations. As a result, defence diplomacy does not receive the recognition it deserves. Conceptually, this is due less to the precarious relationship between various foreign policy instruments, and more to an underestimation of the nature, scope and utility of defence diplomacy. Practically, and due in part to conceptual ambiguity, this underestimation is reinforced by a lack of integration with foreign and defence policy and corresponding military policy and strategy, as well as by defence diplomacy being restricted to its military-defence policy context rather than enhanced by its diplomatic-foreign policy context. These conclusions are based on a brief exposition of the relationship between the military and diplomatic instruments of foreign policy; an account of the nature and scope of defence diplomacy and related concepts; an overview of what accordingly constitutes South African defence diplomacy; and a concluding assessment and evaluation of its future prospects and constraints.

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