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Between Scylla and Charybdis: Challenges Facing South African Policy on Zimbabwe

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Abstract

For several weeks beginning on 7 October of 2001, American-led military planes began the bombardment of Taliban targets in Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States that left about three thousand people dead. The U.S., President George W. Bush warned, would not make a distinction between the terrorists who committed the acts and the governments that harbor them: "You are either with us or you are with the terrorists." With those words, Bush outlined the basic parameters of America's new foreign policy. It was as if the United States – a state with its own history of support for organizations that could be described as terrorists – had just discovered what much of the world already knew, that terrorist activities could be deadly, and that a state's foreign policy choices can have dire domestic consequences. With his words, Bush also provided his government with the opportunity, logic, and raison d'être for isolating and pursuing a retributive foreign policy against Osama bin Laden and other reputed anti-American targets.

The United States is neither alone nor unique in manipulating events and externally oriented decision processes in the service of the national interest, however perceived by those in positions of authority. Like the United States, South African officials have been forced since 2000 to wrestle with difficult and emotive events in Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe's land reform policies have attracted domestic and international condemnation and opposition. Our task in this paper is three-fold. First, we will examine the idea of foreign policy with an eye on contextualizing South African policy towards crisis-torn Zimbabwe. Second, we will examine and situate the various influences that help give shape to the foreign policies of South Africa. Finally, we will link the various influences on South African foreign policy to the twists and turns of official responses to events in Zimbabwe.

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Formulating a Response to the Zimbabwe Crisis: South African Foreign Policy Parameters

No meaningful understanding and assessment of the externally oriented decisions and actions of governments is possible without an awareness of the workings of foreign policy making. Whether large or small, all states and their governments are driven to formulate and pursue a variety of policies that are aimed at a world outside of their national frontiers. Foreign policy refers to the ideas and courses of actions by the authorities of a state aimed at addressing a problem or promoting an interest beyond that state's territorial borders. Put simply, foreign policy is the strategy adopted by the government of a state to guide its actions in a relationship situation with other states or non-state international actors. Whilst some regard foreign policy as a set of actual measures taken by leaders representing national entities with specific interests and needs, many others consider it the pursuit of universal purposes in a global field of human relations. Moreover, there are those who regard it as a "boundary" activity where policymakers straddle two environments: a domestic environment where organizational structures and societal forces combine with individual policymakers to influence the specific trajectories of policy; and the international environment where national domestic policies and laws cannot ordain conditions and where relevant forces may reject the fiat of even the most powerful states within the international system (Marshall, 1968; Goldstein, 1994; Holsti, 1995). Policymakers and the policy system itself stand at the juncture between the two and must therefore seek to mediate between them (Evans and Newnham, 1990: 123).

Typically, foreign policy decisions reflect the net outcome of tense interactions and processes involving – more or less – individual decision makers, bureaucrats (cliques and organizations), assorted interest groups, the general public, and interested external players (Goldstein, 1994: 95-133). Also crucial to the policy process is the nature of specific tradeoffs between foreign policy and domestic policy objectives. While some foreign policy objectives may be consistent with domestic policy objectives, some others may clash directly with them. Even in the often-unlikely scenario that all major interests or stakeholders within a state agree on the nature and scope of national interests and objectives, they may still be confronted with the problem of ranking them in terms of importance. For instance, they may disagree about the weighting and placement of a variety of issues such as domestic employment, HIV-AIDS, agricultural productivity, deforestation, and regional conflict within the ranking system. In essence then, a country's foreign policy decisions reflect how its domestic values and priorities are translated onto the international stage. Why is this relevant? As technological advances reinforce

the idea of a 'global village' in an increasingly interdependent world, foreign policy assumes new significance: the values and principles that we promote through foreign policy will not only determine our survival and prospects in the international arena but also shape our relationships with other actors. In this sense, the values and principles that drive foreign policy are especially critical to a South Africa that has reclaimed its position on the international stage after a period of apartheid isolation.

Despite the tragic character of political and social problems bequeathed by the apartheid regime, post-apartheid South Africa's pursuit of foreign policy was based on high moral principles, specifically the promotion and preservation of human rights. This was despite the fact that South Africa's first priority was to ensure that she would be able to compete on the global playing field in her own right, thus guaranteeing the security and well-being of her own citizens. However, the remarkable transition from political pariah to regional pedagogue has not been all smooth sailing. Among other things, South Africa's post-apartheid governments now find themselves expected not only to take on a set of onerous international obligations but also to act in concert with other actors in pursuit of diverse bilateral, multilateral, and regional expectations. Furthermore, South Africa has now come to appreciate the dilemma of foreign policy decisions that face governments when they emphasize the importance (and intrinsic value) of human rights – a dilemma that is exacerbated when the reality on the ground includes the challenge to promote national economic interests.

South African Policy Towards Zimbabwe: A Case of Pragmatic Leadership?

In spelling out South Africa's foreign policy principles, Alfred Nzo (former South African Minister of Foreign Affairs) declared that the underlying principles, which would serve as "guidelines in the conduct of our foreign relations", would include a commitment to:

- the promotion of human rights and democracy

justice and international law in the conduct of relations between nations

- international peace and internationally agreed upon mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts
- the interests of Africa in world affairs (including the promotion and attainment of the African Renaissance)
- economic development through regional and international cooperation in an interdependent world.

(South African Foreign Policy Discussion Document, 1996: 19)

To what extent have these principles underscored or influenced South Africa's policy towards Zimbabwe? The popular perception within South Africa – fanned primarily in some intellectual circles and by some political

opponents of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) – is that President Thabo Mbeki's government has been exceptionally soft on President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government (Baker, 2000; Barrell, 2000; Mail and Guardian, 2000a and 2000b). As we will show, although the shift to a post apartheid society has created the context of a South African foreign policy that is shaped by a new culture of human rights, it remains an interest-based and pragmatic activity rather than an exercise in the projection of ethical values or ideological principles. The clash between South Africa's basic needs of political identity and economic viability reflects the difficulty in conducting a traditional foreign policy with a strong ideological overlay and has spurred the debate over whether her foreign policy is to be conducted on the basis of expediency or principle. Faced with this dilemma, South Africa is often reduced to straddling the fence by half-heartedly supporting principles on one occasion and keeping its hands off altogether on another. The government's basic goal of developing fruitful political and economic linkages without sacrificing the principles that underpin wider policy has proved elusive thus far.

Perhaps, in order to hold on to what little moral influence she now enjoys, South Africa may have to re-formulate her foreign policy away from a mercantilist-orientation that is laced with narrowly defined economic considerations. Of course, such a rework would have to be done bearing in mind that a foreign policy that champions human rights in absolutist terms is also not feasible in the present competitive international arena. So where does this leave South African foreign policy? A crucial argument here is that the defining parameters of South African foreign policy have remained largely indeterminate because of the realities of the conflicting interests posed by its domestic and external concerns. In essence, the inability to reconcile primary foreign policy goals (preservation of national economic interest) with new foreign policy aspirations (promotion of human rights and peace through the pursuit of justice and fair-play) reflects a tense ambivalence in the founding principles of post apartheid South African foreign policy. This, along with the fraternal relationship and legacy of the liberation struggle, explains why the ANC government's policy towards Zimbabwe appears so tentative and conjectural.

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that, at the very least, a state's foreign policy is usually in the service of the national interest as defined by the dominant coalitions in political office, and subjected to their needs, hopes, purposes, and perceptions of dangers and opportunities within the international arena. This suggests that the making of foreign policy is founded on self-interest. Given the character of the contemporary international system, of sovereign states and the conventions upon which they rest, foreign policy can only make sense in so far as it is calculated to advance or,

at least, defend the interests of the state concerned. Even where foreign policy is projected in moral or social terms of general relevance and validity – such as peace, human prosperity, and democracy – and even where it entails some sacrifice or surrender on the part of the society in whose name it is advanced, it must be fundamentally self-seeking to be politically tenable. More often than not, "the blood of national security considerations may run thicker than the water of ideological sympathy" (Wolfers, 1967: 128). Indeed, if the argument that peace in Zimbabwe (and Southern Africa in general) is in the interest of peace in South Africa, why did the South African government not adopt a more aggressive posture towards the peaceful resolution of the Zimbabwean crisis? Several considerations seem pertinent here. Clearly, one crucial factor was that the adoption of a hard stance towards President Mugabe would have meant the effective protection of white Zimbabwean interests above those of the indigenous people. Considering its own turbulent past, a fundamental problem for the ANC government centered around not only the domestic and external costs (political and economic) but also the sheer difficulty of a sanctions regime against an African government campaigning against unjust white landholdings.

Certainly, President Mbeki and his government may have been influenced to some extent by the political, ideological, logistical, and financial support that Mugabe and ZANU-PF provided to the ANC in the liberation struggle against the apartheid system. President Mandela acknowledged this fact publicly during a 1994 state banquet for President Mugabe:

> The people of Zimbabwe and you [Mugabe], in particular, deserve our profound gratitude for the role you played in the national liberation effort, both as members of the OAU and in your capacity as leader and Chairman of the Front-line states. Of particular significance to us is the role you played in ensuring the removal of racial domination in South Africa. This was often at a great cost to your country and your people, given the destabilization campaign carried out by the apartheid regime against Zimbabwe and other neighboring countries (www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/1994/sp0816.html).

Mandela's words have also been reaffirmed over the years by other ANC members. For instance, the former ANC Chief Whip, Tony Yengeni, pointed to the relationship between his party and ZANU-PF: "The ANC has historic links with ZANU-PF – they fought the same liberation struggle against colonialism and racism" (www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/2001/sp0227.html). Nevertheless, the thinking in Pretoria seems to have been driven primarily by a genuine concern about the close parallel between the events and administrative processes in Zimbabwe and the objective conditions within South Africa itself where land issues have remained a very sensitive social and political problem (Samayende, 2000; Streek, 2000;

Freedberg, 1999). Given the severely skewed land ownership structure within South Africa as well as the growing disquiet about the slow pace of meaningful land reforms, the ANC government could oppose aggressively President Mugabe's policies in Zimbabwe only at the risk of unleashing serious dissent within its ranks. Indeed, a significant and growing body of evidence point to deepening frustrations within South Africa about the government's land redistribution program (Dickson and Streek, 2000; Kindra, 2000; Streek, 2000). A recent survey conducted in a number of African townships revealed a 54% support for Zimbabwe's land seizures (Africa Confidential, 2000: 4). This is despite the decidedly negative slant of South African news reports about events in Zimbabwe. These supportive attitudes by black South Africans regarding events in Zimbabwe are beginning to be reflected in land claims and seizures in many parts of South Africa including Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern provinces. In Mpumalanga province alone, studies show that land claims by the African population total more than 41% or 3.2-million hectares of the province's commercial agricultural land (Samayende, 2000).

Quite aside from the fact that a strident internal opposition has the potential of aggravating disharmony within the increasingly restless South African tripartite partnership, Mugabe's high-handed and seemingly extrajudicial land reform process, and the related opportunistic use of the war veterans and their mob-like cohorts, also provided an object (albeit, largely unappreciated) lesson to white South Africans on the perils of racial isolationism, petulant opposition politics, and flatulent resistance to meaningful transformation (Khumalo, *2001;* Smith, *2001). As one observer notes, efforts by the ANC government to "redress some of the past racial imbalances" by ensuring active black participation in the mainstream of the economy " have been opposed and continued to be opposed by white business and white-based political parties like the DP" (Edigheji, 2000:34–35).* Direct and subtle forms of resistance are often displaced in debates on assorted domestic issues in the South African parliament. For instance, *Dr Willem Odendaal* of New National Party *observed that:*

> It is not possible to make large areas of land available to everyone in South Africa. We will all have to understand that land is a commodity that does not grow in size; it rather diminishes in area as development daily consumes more and more agricultural land... All South Africans should understand that there is no such thing as vacant land in our country any more. They should be prepared to be satisfied with owning a small piece of land... The need for security of tenure is probably the most important facet of land ownership to be addressed. Zimbabwe has proven this by setting a very bad example. Owning a farm where people are allowed to invade one's land without the owner being protected by the state, results in such land becoming worthless (www.natweb.co.za/news/speech3.htm).

The high importance given to national interests is also explained by the fact that it is easier to achieve than South Africa's other central value, the promotion of human rights. While it is easy to articulate a commitment to human rights, finding a way to effectuate it is a whole other ball game. Such commitments have normative strength but procedural weakness. This is basically because they are composed of widely accepted and substantive norms but very limited scope for effective implementation. With its long list of guiding principles, based more on rhetoric than matters of real substance, there is a danger of South Africa developing a self-image as a benign foreign policy godmother. This gets it into trouble in situations such as Zimbabwe where South Africa's actions, no matter how right they may be, are not in line with the expectations of some influential domestic actors as well as powerful and highly valued Western allies. Already, the much vaunted 'new diplomacy' has been accused of being cut from the same cloth as former US President, George Bush's somewhat fraudulent 'new world order' of the late 1980s (Evans, 1991: 4).

To be effective, South African foreign policy should be formulated against the background of what the government can realistically hope to achieve. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfred Nzo, often stated in parliamentary and other speeches that South Africa's initiatives in Africa (in particular) and internationally (in general) should take place within the realistic parameters of her capacity to implement decisions (South African Foreign Policy Discussion Document, 1996: 25). In addition, a fundamental question pertaining to human rights policy centers around the degree to which a nation can, or is obligated to, impose its values on others. The basic parameters of established international law do not permit intervention – even for the protection of human rights – except for the defense of collective interests when there are breaches to international peace and security (Uzodike, 1999:65). Although humanitarian and human rights norms are fast evolving away from the notion of absolute non-interference in a nation's domestic affairs, states must still thread carefully by not only avoiding any suggestions of self-interest but also by intervening only with the backing of a broadly-based international coalition of states and organizations. In this sense, South African policy makers need to analyze their true intentions or risk being subjected to the same criticism as their American counterparts who declared that "the purpose of our foreign policy is not to bring enlightenment or happiness to the rest of the world but to take care of the life, liberty, and happiness of the American people" (Russell, 1990: 209). As the Lesotho incident has demonstrated, South Africa has to walk the foreign policy plank carefully – bearing in mind not only her regional ambitions but also the perceptions, concerns, and weariness of her neighbors about any

hegemonic tendencies. In part, this is why Mbeki's government has pursued a policy of dialogue with Mugabe rather than the preference in some quarters for a more hard line or militant posture. An editorial in the *Natal Witness* (2001a: 8) epitomizes the sort of outlook and pressure on Mbeki that has become commonplace in South African media:

> [South Africa] is extremely well placed to take action [against Zimbabwe]. The bulk of Zimbabwe's trade flows through South Africa, and South Africa supplies Zimbabwe with both electricity and fuel – reputedly on credit. As [Moeletsi] Mbeki points out, 'we can stop the Zimbabwean economy tomorrow". There is a precedent. It was former South African prime minister B. J. Vorster who pulled the plug on Ian Smith a generation ago, forcing him to the negotiating table. There is no doubt that President Mbeki could as easily apply irresistible economic pressure on President Robert Mugabe.... Can he be persuaded to see things the way his brother does? Does he have Vorster's ruthlessness to act in South Africa's interest?

Sadly, many such proposals of drastic action to punish Mugabe are anchored frequently on naive assumptions about the power relationship between Zimbabwe and South Africa. To make such points, facts and figures are often deceptively spewed out in ways that distort objective reality. While South Africa is depicted as all-powerful, Zimbabwe is described as a virtual minion devoid of viable or meaningful alternative courses of action. Quite aside of the tendency to ignore or miscalculate the full range of options available to either country, there is a shocking unwillingness to reflect at all or fully on the medium and long-term regional implications to South African interests of any hegemonic pretensions and actions – particularly on the emotive issue of land maldistribution in Zimbabwe. To his credit, Mbeki has not only refused to be baited into unwise actions but also has argued that in working to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis, "...we must do this without arrogance, without seeking to impose ourselves on anybody and without the intoxication of the delusion of the exercise of power we neither have nor desire" (www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/2000/sp0504a.html).

Enthusiasm for a more militant or activist regional policy is tempered by the recognition of the thin line between leadership and hegemony. In 1999, a study by the Institute for Security Studies found that the intervention in Lesotho had left "a legacy of bitterness" towards South Africa (*Southern African Monthly Regional Bulletin, 2000*: 4). Given this context, Pretoria's cautious approach to regional political crises may be visionary. For instance, if Mugabe is pressured too hard by South Africa, he may appeal to other states for help against South African 'bullying'. Given regional and subregional political dynamics between small and large states, such appeals may resonate favorably in support of Mugabe – thereby, not only widening

the nascent split within SADC but also creating impediments to short and medium-term regional recovery and sustainable development. Seen from this point of view, it is in South Africa's national interest to prevent a situation whereby resentment and hostility emerge and grow as a result of actual or perceived domination of neighboring countries by a more powerful South Africa.

Thus far, the South African government's 'quiet diplomacy' has been buttressed with a parallel channel of engagement between the ruling ANC and its Zimbabwean counterpart, ZANU-PF. Mbeki has been talking to Mugabe regularly since the World Economic Forum meeting in Switzerland (*Africa Confidential*, 2000c: 3). As Yengeni noted: "Our President has said that he will meet President Mugabe to engage him on the challenges faced by his country. This is a bold political statement by our head of state. It indicates that our government will not hesitate to engage, but will not attempt to impose its will through irresponsible actions" (www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/ 2001/sp0227.html). This silent diplomacy is aimed at averting an even bigger human rights crisis and it shows that the South African government is interested in negotiating – rather than dictating – a regional understanding. Yengeni makes the same argument pointedly: "History is littered with the devastation caused by foreign powers interfering in the internal affairs of foreign states – Vietnam is only one example. We must offer Zimbabwe something else. The issue of land must be resolved through the broad context of development, democracy and human rights as envisaged in the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan" (www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/2001/sp0227.html). The South African policy not only reaffirms Alfred Nzo's point about South Africa's commitment to the interests of Africa and the African Renaissance but also contrasts starkly with the dictatorial approach of the United States where the Senate and House have passed two bills – the Zimbabwe Democracy Act of 2000 and the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001 respectively – setting the conditions for the sovereign state of Zimbabwe to follow in carrying out land reform (Paton, 2000: 17; www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/2001/sp0227b.html). As was demonstrated by southern African foreign ministers during a December 2001 meeting to assess Zimbabwe's land reforms, hard line tactics against Zimbabwe on the land issue do not find much favor within the sub-region and through much of the continent. The SADC ministers reacted sharply to the US House of Representatives bill by criticizing the West over attempts to impose sanctions on President Robert Mugabe's government: Speaking as the chairwoman of the SADC foreign ministers, Lilian Patel, Malawi's Foreign Minister, cautioned that: "The situation in Zimbabwe needs a careful and mature approach because it is complex.... We would like to make it clear that we don't support sanctions"

(*Mail and Guardian*, 2001a). Clearly, South Africa's ambition of continental leadership cannot take place if it is seen as existing and acting in spatio-temporal off-step with its regional counterparts. Of course, while that is not to say that it must act in concert with other regional members, it does point to a need that its policies towards Zimbabwe must reflect broad commitment to justice and fairness. Indeed, South Africa's policies should be seen to adhere to its formally stipulated commitment to international peace and internationally agreed upon mechanisms for the resolution of conflict as well as her commitment to justice and international law in the conduct of her relations. As a regional power, South Africa realizes the limits to that power and, consequently, relies more centrally on non-coercive instruments of foreign policy such as diplomacy, trade, and economic cooperation.

The Limits of Human Rights as a Foreign Policy Tool

The government of America's President Jimmy Carter epitomizes the limits of human rights as a foreign policy instrument. Carter assumed office in 1977 with a resolve to alter the nature and thrust of foreign policy making from one driven by considerations of realpolitik to one underpinned by a new moral tone – human rights. What he found out was instructive: verbal commitment is one thing; implementation is quite another thing. Carter's government quickly ran into a brick wall when it came down to the matter of implementation. The bureaucrats in Washington not only found it difficult to agree on what human rights meant, they found it even more difficult to agree on what it meant for people living in other countries and cultures. Even when there were agreements on the basic framework, issues arose about the specifics of the approaches to be used. How does one express concern about the violation of rights? In what specific ways should one government interfere in the internal affairs of other governments in opposition to human rights violations? What should the government do – voice disagreement with the violations, chastise the leadership of the violating state, impose sanctions, or intervene militarily? How does one deal with the problem of consistency in policy application, especially given the vast differences in national power and capabilities between states? Given similar circumstances, would Washington be as prepared and able to intervene equally in big and powerful states such as the Soviet Union and China and in small and weaker states such as Iraq and Grenada? The difficulties associated with an absolutist ideological commitment to human rights around the world reinforced the resistance of Washington's foreign policy establishment, which remained unconvinced about the wisdom of linking morality to foreign policy making. The struggle and associated tensions soon created a foreign policy environment that was roundly viewed not only as lacking clarity and direction but also as 'confused', 'incoherent', and 'inconsistent'.

Clearly, the American experience should serve as an object lesson for other states that sought to entrench human rights in absolutist fashion in the conduct of their foreign policy. If a state such as the United States with its superior array of military, political, and economic resources is unable to formulate and implement a human rights driven foreign policy, it would be far more difficult for other states to undertake such policy successfully. More than most states, the new South Africa was the child of a human rights struggle. The war against apartheid was fought as much inside as it was outside South Africa. Not surprisingly, the formal end of apartheid brought into power an administration that was committed to the idea of not sitting idle while atrocities take place elsewhere, particularly within the sub-region and continent of Africa. The new government quickly placed human rights, justice and democracy at the forefront of South Africa's foreign policy. Unfortunately, problems quickly arose between Mandela's near absolutist approach to issues and the tempered and less aggressive process favored by Alfred Nzo (the former South African Minister of Foreign Affairs) and his foreign policy team. As with Carter's presidency, there was a perception that South African foreign policy has lacked direction and coherence under both Mandela and his successor, President Mbeki. Much of such criticisms, however, seem unable to recognize the pragmatism that has underscored South African foreign policy since 1996, and especially under Mbeki. While South Africa does not refuse to conduct diplomatic and trade relations with countries with unsatisfactory human rights or democracy records, it does not automatically ignore, marginalize or subordinate these principles to its trade and diplomatic interests with the governments of rights abusing countries. Aziz Pahad, addressing the issue of South Africa's foreign policy priorities, explained that:

> Although an important consideration, the human rights situation in a particular country is not the only element taken into account when deciding whether to engage in diplomatic relations. South Africa's overall national interest (in terms of commercial factors, historical considerations, political ties, etc.), the geo-political importance of a country and its influence in world affairs also have to be assessed. South Africa may decide to maintain existing or establish diplomatic relations with a country, despite a poor human rights record, because our presence in that country will enable us to promote human rights and democracy (Alden, 1998: 91).

A crucial point is that by trading or conducting diplomatic relations with a particular country, South Africa is not necessarily expressing approval of the domestic policies of that country's government. This is especially important when considering Zimbabwe and the expectation from some sections of the South African public that the Mbeki government has been too soft on Mugabe. A high-ranking official from the Department of Foreign Affairs

(DFA) argued: "We have to interact with all types of states and try to nudge them into [the acceptance of] international norms."[1] The expectation that Pretoria should impose sanctions or use force to compel a particular sort of outcome ignores not only the issue of justice and fair play but also the geo-political implications and economic impact of such a policy on Zimbabwe and other states within the SADC region. Beyond those, it would be paradoxical to go to war with another country over its human rights record – the loss of lives and other hardships that accompany any war fly in the face of such a position.

South Africa has opted for a policy of 'quiet diplomacy' and 'constructive engagement' in response to the Zimbabwean crisis. In the past, Alfred Nzo stated that high-handed actions by the Mugabe government against journalists and others were a domestic matter and South Africa would not involve itself in them (Muller, 1999: 17). Clearly, the continued engagement of Mugabe and ZANU-PF through unobtrusive or inoffensive strategies as imbedded in the idea of 'quiet diplomacy' suggests that South African non-interference was a pragmatic rather than an absolute principle. Although committed to the pursuit of human rights and democracy in Zimbabwe, South African foreign policy makers under Mbeki appear to have adopted the position that a discreet or pragmatic approach would be more efficacious in achieving desired outcomes than the confrontational attitude and loud insults emanating from Britain and the rest of the western world.[2] South Africa's approach has not yielded major dividends in terms of a full resolution of the problems, particularly as desired by some of Mugabe's western critics (a return to the status quo for white farmers and the purging of Mugabe). Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that the strategy has not been fruitless. For instance, the non-confrontational posture contributed not just to Zimbabwe's openness to dialogue but also to the Abuja pact of September 6 of 2001 under which Britain agreed to fund land reforms if Zimbabwe returns to the rule of law and ends violence on white-owned farms (*Mail and Guardian*, 2001b).

Given the complexity of the land issue in Zimbabwe, if an amicable process of land reform evolves as anticipated out of the Abuja process, then Mbeki's preferred policy of constructive engagement would have been vindicated. Regardless of the outcome, however, it bears pointing out that despite many arguments to the contrary, the Zimbabwean land reform crisis is not merely about legality per se; rather, and at bottom, it is really about social justice. This was why Britain agreed to fund the land reform process under both the Lancaster House agreement and the Abuja pact. Although frictions between the governments of Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Mugabe over ancillary matters such as the latter's intemperate use of language (especially his homophobic remarks, among others),

served to sour relations and cooperative work on land reforms, it is crucial that analysis of the crisis keep focus on the issue of social justice for both the white farmers and the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. Indeed, South Africa's difficulty in applying a human rights-based foreign policy to the Zimbabwean situation lies in the dual nature of the rights in question. It was aggravated in Zimbabwe by the problem of upholding two different sets of rights (political and socio-economic) for two different groups of people (indigenous Zimbabweans and white farmers) with competing claims. On the one hand, the "arbitrary amendment of the constitution" and the occupation of white-owned farms indicate a "clear violation of civil and political rights of white Zimbabwean farmers"(Rotberg, 2000: 48). On the other hand, there is little doubt not only that many of the targeted farms were acquired immorally but also that the socio-economic deprivation of the black Zimbabwean community has been ignored for too long. Under the present arrangements, Zimbabweans have the right to vote and engage in politics but lack the right of "participating meaningfully in the economy" (*Herald*, 1997: 4).

Most critics of South African foreign policy towards Zimbabwe have tended to emphasize in legalistic terms one set of rights over the other, ignoring as it were the problematic of justice. In fact, the Mbeki government strategy has been fair in many ways: justice not only for the white farmers who live and work the land in Zimbabwe and who have invested years of toil in developing what they believe is legally theirs but also for the masses of black people who were deliberately dispossessed of ancestral lands by British colonial policy and who suffered countless other indignities and societal distortions under British colonial and white domination. What is wrong with that? It is precisely for similar reasons that many governments and keen observers within Africa have been reluctant to criticize Mugabe on the issue of land reform. In fact, Patel (the Malawian Foreign Minister) echoed the feelings of many persons around Africa both when she cited the efforts by "some western forces to demonize Zimbabwe" and when she argued that the SADC foreign ministers were collectively concerned about the "distorted and negative perceptions of Zimbabwe projected by the international and regional media" (*Mail and Guardian*, 2001b).

Whatever the case, it should be noted that states do not make foreign policy, governments do. In foreign policy, as with domestic policy, government decisions in pursuit of overarching national objectives are the outcome of factors, processes, and pressures from different sources involving events (domestic and international), time (short, medium, or long-term frames), interests (including national survival, maintenance of economic vitality and prosperity, as well as preservation of core values), opportunities (that may affect policy objectives), threats (emanating within the domestic context or

the international system), capabilities (of the state including military, economic, and political attributes), and the interplay of principal actors and stakeholders. As with many other states, South African foreign policy is influenced or sometimes decidedly shaped by a combination of such factors, processes and pressures. In the Zimbabwe case, it is important to look at how human rights concerns and the imperatives of national economic prosperity are shaped by both the external environment and domestic factors, which interact to impose choice dilemmas on South African policy makers. Foreign policies are not made in a vacuum; this is as true for South Africa as it is for all other states. Typically, foreign policy decisions are made in relation to other competing bodies and interests similarly (and simultaneously) acting in the global arena. Quite frequently, the external situation can determine the course of policy or, at least, severely limit the options open to the policy maker - thereby restricting or enhancing his or her freedom to maneuver. "The eternal experience of Ministers is to find that their choices are predetermined, above all, by the intractable facts of international life. Effective freedom in foreign affairs...is the capacity to choose between relatively few options" (Wallace, 1971: 17)

It is important to bear in mind that although South African foreign policy has a human rights dimension, it is flexibly applied, and the degree or level of flexibility appears to depend on a number of general and strategic factors. Given such factors as well as the assorted influences on foreign policy outcomes, it becomes easy to appreciate the fact that the DFA is not the only department that makes foreign policy. As with the Carter administration, the South African experience shows that no country in the world can have a human rights-driven foreign policy without some trade-offs. Surviving in a competitive and interdependent global system whilst vainly trying to maintain a commitment to human rights, justice, fair play and peace has been more burdensome than rewarding for South Africa. Indeed, the wider a state's foreign policy commitments, the more limited is its freedom of action in foreign policy matters. Having learnt that the hard way, South African foreign policy makers now claim that "while being more committed than ever to the promotion of human rights, we are much the wiser in how to attain our objectives" (Selebi, 1999: 215).

South Africa's past has compelled her to attempt to fill a leadership vacuum in the quest towards preserving or enhancing human rights worldwide. Pahad describes the increasing pressure on South Africa to take a stand on human rights abuses all over the world as 'understandable': "because with the majority of South Africans having come through the experience of apartheid and the battle for democracy in the most confrontational way, the issue of human rights is fundamental to people's thinking" (Pahad, 1996: 9). In some ways, the conflict in Zimbabwe

between the rights claimed by white farmers and black war veterans (and community) is a microcosm of the larger conflict between civil and political rights on the one hand and socio-economic rights on the other. Contradictory as it may seem, a high degree of pragmatism is required in pursuing a didactic foreign policy based on human rights. Under the circumstances, South Africa's quiet diplomacy, which cautiously refrained from taking sides (while putting subtle pressure on Mugabe to resolve the matter expeditiously and fairly), was probably the best option both in terms of her need to preserve national economic interests and her aspiration to promote human rights. After all, an effective and judicious foreign policy should include not just a concern for the respect for human rights but also its various manifestations in terms of civil, political and socio-economic rights of all citizens.

Constraints to South African Policy Towards Zimbabwe

There is a popular perception within some elite circles in South Africa that the government talks a lot about her commitment to democratic norms while actually condoning, through her silence and inaction, the behavior of a tyrant on her doorstep. Many fail to realize or appreciate the constraints on South Africa, which inhibit her adoption of a more aggressive foreign policy. Identifying a human rights violation determines a country's options (in terms of international law in particular, which generally protects state sovereignty) but not what a country has the capacity to do. In addition, geographical distance further reduces a country's options. A Department of Foreign Affairs employee noted: "Zimbabwe is our immediate neighbor, our biggest African trade partner and the second largest economy in SADC. You can't act against it in the same way as you would with a country miles away. The British can do that; we can't."[3] One obvious implication of that comment is that there are crucial cost factors to bear in mind as one ponders how to address the Zimbabwean crisis. As the Zimbabwean Foreign Minister, Stan Mudenge, cautioned regarding the calls for sanctions against his government: "There can be no sanctions smart enough to affect Zimbabweans alone. Our destinies are intertwined" (*Natal Witness*, 2001b).

Despite claims and criticisms that the 'quietly, quietly' approach towards the Zimbabwe crisis has been ineffective in stemming the resultant tide of regional economic decline, it seems reasonably clear that South African policy makers are focused not so much on short-term band-aid solutions but on overarching issues of long-term national interests, which are anchored on regional peace and stability, and the attendant economic resurgence and prosperity. From this point of view, a rupture in Harare-Pretoria relations would have lost South Africa what little leverage it had in the DRC war – particularly, in light of Mugabe's crucial role. As the former Botswana

president and the DRC conflict mediator, Ketumile Masire, has noted, Mugabe could play "the most decisive role in resolving the conflict, since it was the presence of his army that sustains the present situation" (*Southern Africa Monthly Regional Bulletin*, 2000: 6).

Furthermore, Pretoria's leverage is constrained by its belief that Mugabe's ZANU-PF remains the only viable guarantor of stability in Zimbabwe. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a youthful party of trade unionists, human rights activists, academics, and some business owners, has provided little clue on how it intends to pursue and resolve the all-important and seemingly defining land reforms. Furthermore, it is regarded by some as utilizing a coalition formula that went terribly wrong with Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in Zambia (*Africa Confidential*, 2000b: 1).

A crucial influence on Pretoria's attitude towards Zimbabwe is closely linked to the South African policy makers' perceptions of the personality of President Mugabe. It has long been recognized that the personality of key actors can substantially influence or shape decisions in critical situations as well as in the actual course of world events. Similarly, key actors can display character traits that may predispose them to behave in certain ways – given certain conditions. In a study of top American government officials (including former presidents and secretaries of state), Lloyd Etheredge (1978) demonstrated that certain types of decisions reflect the personality traits of key actors. Foreign policy makers at South Africa's Zimbabwe desk stress that President Mugabe is a very sensitive person who does not take kindly to public criticism. If you attack him through the media or openly you will not get positive results. The deterioration of the relationship between Britain and Zimbabwe was largely due to the attacking position adopted by Prime Minister Blair and Peter Hain, the British Foreign Minister. The Zimbabwe crisis illustrated Mbeki's pursuance of his goals through a combination of quiet diplomacy (private talks with Mugabe and constructive engagement instead of a hard-line position) and assertive multilateralism (campaigns on behalf of Zimbabwe to the IMF). This contrasts sharply with the adventurous or quixotic postures of confrontation and defiance adopted by Mandela during the early years of his presidency. Understandably, political leaders, especially in a democracy, live a precarious life in which the plethora of demands made upon them always exceed their capacity to provide satisfaction. Unlike a private citizen, a political leader has huge and competing responsibilities and may not always have the freedom to do the right thing. Machiavelli's contemplation is enlightening: "A prince...cannot observe all those things for which men are considered good, for in order to maintain the state he is often obliged to act against his promise, against charity, against humanity, and against religion" (Machiavelli, 1969:139).

As previously noted, South Africa's approach to the Zimbabwe crisis was also influenced by an awareness and consideration of the historical circumstances. Robert Mugabe and his party, ZANU-PF, justified and supported the invasion and occupation of white farms by arguing that they were acquired by imperial conquest, not the rule of law. Under both British imperial rule and illegal white Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith, the African population was systematically stripped of the country's most productive land without any compensation. Although the Zimbabwean government has been criticized for 'land-grabbing', these accusations need to be assessed within the broader context of the past (that is, who grabbed the land first). The undercurrent implication of unredressed injustice prompted Mugabe to argue at the UN's Millennium Summit that most of Africa was still burdened by the unfinished business of the twentieth century. Given the historical context, the responsibility for compensating the farmers lies with Britain not only because of its status as the former colonial power but also because Margaret Thatcher agreed to provide the funds as a condition of ZANU's signature to the Lancaster House agreement which finalized Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 (*Africa Confidential*, 2000c, 1; 2000d). Moreover, during the Lancaster House talks, the British government did its utmost to protect the privileged position of its descendants by insisting on constitutional provisions that would prevent the black majority from redressing the imbalances created by nearly a century of white domination and subjugation (Electronic *Mail and Guardian*, 1997). Hampered by the constitutional straitjacket of the Lancaster House Agreement, the ZANU-PF government has struggled to achieve rapid and far-reaching societal transformation in Zimbabwe. In this regard, it is not surprising that whenever the post-independence government attempts to create laws that seek to reverse the imbalances, they are regarded as unconstitutional. The same people who have denied black Zimbabweans many of their rights are now appealing to the courts for the protection of their constitutional rights. Is it fair to talk about political and human rights as a sectional matter? In other words, should the economic interests and human rights of white farmers supersede the human rights and economic interests of other Zimbabweans? How fair is it to dwell on the constitutional rights of white farmers (Zimbabweans) when by so doing, those of their black compatriots are effectively rescinded? Why is it acceptable that nothing should be done to address the issues surrounding the rights of indigenous Zimbabweans to the resources of their country?

Perhaps, it is worth mentioning that land seizures were not new in Zimbabwe. Since independence in 1980, smaller groups of land-hungry Zimbabweans had invaded white-owned farms on numerous occasions but were usually held back and required by the government to wait for land

redistribution. How long can the government's credibility be maintained when people are repeatedly told to wait? Mugabe has said that no white farmer would have to go without a farm, but with 12 million hectares of land (half of all prime farmland) and 30% of the entire country in the hands of just 4000 white farmers, land reform was urgent (Malala, 2000; Bartlett, 2000).

Conclusion: The Future of South Africa's Policy Towards Zimbabwe

Events in Zimbabwe have not exactly followed the seemingly 'noble' intentions of Mugabe. Although the Abuja pact appears to have stilled the land invasions and intimidation tactics which spiraled out of control for a while, Zimbabwe remained in serious crisis at the end of 2001. There were continuing indications of disregard for good governance, probity and the rule of law. For instance, the government has proposed legislation that seeks not only the banning of foreign journalists but also that would require Zimbabwean journalists to adhere to a stringent code of conduct. Another 'anti-terrorism' bill, which seeks the death penalty for anyone convicted of acts of 'insurgency, banditry, sabotage and terrorism', is suspected of being a tool to crack down on the MDC members. Perhaps, because of both the intractability of the problems and the growing truculence of the Zimbabwean government towards opponents and the opposition party, President Mbeki appears to have modified his 'quietly quietly' approach in favor of a harder stance – or, at least, a more critical posture. While this may not be a dramatic policy shift, it may presage Pretoria's growing impatience with the persistence of the Zimbabwe problems and the lack of adequate progress towards the realization of the Abuja process. This is despite claims by Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister, Stan Mudenge, that the situation on white farms had calmed and that "the Abuja process is in full swing" *(Mail and Guardian*, 2001a).

As mentioned earlier, foreign policy is not made in a vacuum. South Africa's seemingly more critical foreign policy outlook towards Zimbabwe can therefore be explained in terms of the changing foreign policy environment. There are two significant events in this regard. First is the change of government in the DRC, which has speeded up the conflict resolution process in that country. South Africa no longer needs the same leverage it once did. Secondly, Mugabe's government has not only become more confrontational towards the opposition but also his actions have become more inconsistent with his words. In this regard, South Africa finds herself in similar position as the allies before World War II[4] when the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, pursued a policy of 'appeasement' towards Germany. So far, South Africa's 'softly softly' approach has not resulted in the desired out-

come. As such, the positive developments in the DRC have provided Pretoria a foreign policy window of opportunity that has allowed her to take a stronger posture towards the Zimbabwean government. Mbeki seems to be tiring from a Zimbabwean crisis that not only continues to distract attention and energy from regional renewal projects such as NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) and the African Union but also provides his many opponents with ammunition to claim that his policy framework lacks rudder: "South Africa's approach on the most important foreign policy issue in our region is an inchoate mess" (*Mail & Guardian*, 2001c).

While there is no better time for South Africa to demonstrate her commitment to the region, hopes for a dramatic shift in her policy towards Zimbabwe needs to be tempered by an awareness that South African foreign policy is constrained by a wide range of internal and external factors. Most of those factors cannot be wished away and may be ignored only at the peril of the nation's medium and long-term interests. Even in the unlikely event that the external foreign policy environment was to change dramatically, assorted internal constraints will continue to influence the policy towards Zimbabwe (and the region). As things now stand, an array of domestic issues and problems impede state resource outlay and ideological commitment to certain types of foreign policy decisions. For instance, only about 4% of land has been redistributed in South Africa since the 1994 democratic elections. Also, more than 600 000 jobs have been lost in the formal economy and an estimated 450 000 (mostly black) annual new entrants to the labour market go largely unabsorbed (Edigheji, 2000:35). Given its own internal problems and challenges, South Africa is actually in no position to dictate and lead the subregion and region without a demonstrable capacity both to commit substantial amounts of resources (financial and otherwise) to regional problems and to lay a path worth emulating by resolving its own sticky problems. As the Zimbabwean case demonstrates, it is unlikely that black South Africans will accept their continued marginalization in the economy for too long. How much longer can anyone reasonably expect black Zimbabweans to ignore the issue of land redistribution? Even if Mugabe were to retire or lose the next election, it is quite unlikely that the land problem will disappear. Rather than looking elsewhere for blame regarding South Africa's internal problems (such as the rand's volatility and rapid depreciation) or to pre-empt meaningful redress of South Africa's own land distribution problems, serious attention should be devoted on a fair assessment and even-handed resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis. So far, and despite the disapproval of his critics, President Mbeki has tried to pursue a cautious and balanced – albeit inefficacious - foreign policy towards Zimbabwe. For all intents and purposes, President Mbeki and his government are trapped between the devil and a hard rock.

Notes

1. Telephonic interview with a representative from the Asia and Oceania Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria: 13 September 2000
2. Personal interview with an official from the Zimbabwe Desk of the Africa Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria: 12 September 2000. "President Mugabe is a very sensitive person who does not take kindly to public criticism. If you attack him through the media or openly you will not get positive results. The deterioration of the relationship between Britain and Zimbabwe was largely due to the activist position adopted by Tony Blair and Peter Hain."
3. Personal interview with an official from the Zimbabwe Desk of the Africa Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria: 12 September 2000
4. Growing aggression by Adolf Hitler needed to be dealt with, but at the same time the allies, scarred by World War I, were determined not to adopt a too militant position.

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