

South Africa - Zimbabwe Seminar



31st August 2015, University of Cape Town

South Africa- Zimbabwe relations: An Assessment of South Africa's mediatory role In Zimbabwe (2007-2013), as well as the current state of South Africa- Zimbabwe relations and possible future developments

Executive Summary

Since the publication of its highly successful South Africa- Zimbabwe Relations Volume I, SALO has been steadily working on Volume II. The dialogue intended to serve as a premise for SALO's South Africa/Zimbabwe's Volume II Study/Book, building on the first volume which focused on the layered political, historical and economic relationship between the two countries with an emphasis on the crisis that engulfed Zimbabwe in 2000, and South Africa's response, engagement and support up until late 2006. Volume II intends to cover the period of Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity (GNU) reaching a new phase and the 2013 elections, as well as contemporary concerns pertaining to South Africa- Zimbabwe relations.

This Dialogue followed the landmark official state visit by President Mugabe to South Africa in early April 2015, President Mugabe's second only official state visit to SA in 21 years, (the previous and only time he came to SA on an official state visit was in 1994). During this official state visit, President Zuma noted the support that Zimbabwe rendered to South Africa during the Apartheid struggle, the historical and cultural and kinship ties, and the strong economic cooperation that exists between the two nations, thereby affirming the richness of the relationship that has existed between the two neighbours.

The event was supported by the EU, under the SA-EU dialogue facility and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). In her welcome address, Renate Tenbosch, the Resident Director for FES noted the importance of the dialogue and

underscored FES's commitment to supporting democracy, solidarity and peace and security in Germany, EU and worldwide, as well as promoting "... robust, informed, fact-based as well as broad public dialogue on international affairs and foreign policy issues and participatory Foreign Policy making..". She captured the relevance of the workshop by noting that "... in today's reality, international and domestic politics are entirely interdependent. What happens in China's or the EU's domestic economies directly affect South Africa's own economy". The meeting was addressed by four speakers, who included two well established academics, a researcher on SA foreign policy and one activist and member of the ANC alliance. Participants were drawn from diplomats, civil society, activists, students and SA policy makers.

Summary of Presentations

Professor Mills Soko- *Associate Professor of International Political Economy at the Graduate School of Business, UCT.*



Professor Soko spoke about the need for a South African strategy with regards to the issue of succession in Zimbabwe. He spoke about how during his Zimbabwe study tour in 2005, he encountered a persistent comment amongst some Zimbabweans, that South Africa was intent on seeing Zimbabwe fail, and wanted the Zimbabwean economy to collapse so that South African commercial enterprises could reap dividends

Though South Africa's approach to Zimbabwe was influenced by economic and commercial considerations,

Thabo Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' was influenced by a number of ideological and political issues which merely encapsulated Mbeki's policy and ideological approach to the African continent, "pan-Africanism", namely;

- ANC's sensitivity to and need to do away with SA's big-brother image on the African continent, and move away from a history of destabilising our regional neighbours to be seen in a more positive light.
- The belief that African leaders, rather than Western powers should resolve Africa's problems.
- Reinforcing South Africa's identity as an African state and ensuring integration into Africa. Historically SA had been seen as part of the Western sphere of influence and a bulwark against communism in the southern African region. To move away from this, SA has ceaselessly promoted the 'African Agenda,' by championing the African renaissance, the creation of the AU, supporting the pan-African Parliament and NEPAD inter alia.
- Belief in multi-lateralism meant that SA saw the issue of Zimbabwe as an issue that had to be resolved multilaterally, through SADC.
- Domestic political concerns – for some disenchanted with the political settlement in South Africa, Zimbabwe represented a potential model of radical transformation for South Africa, causing many to sympathise with Mugabe.

According to Soko, though president Jacob Zuma was at first "more balanced and assertive", (for example calling on Zimbabwe's military to guarantee neutrality), his approach, like Mbeki's, was shaped by these considerations.

He argued that although from SA's perspective, SA's mediation did bring about relative political and economic stability, the conclusion of the Government of National Unity demonstrates two things, namely;

- the failure of South Africa's model of conflict resolution which the country has tried to export post-1994. Similar attempts had failed in the DRC and Burundi.
- MDC's weakness, that it was divided and lacked seriousness in approaching the negotiations.

Professor Soko was concerned that SA has disengaged since the end of the Government of National Unity, noting that "there is something to be said about a lack of a strategic orientation on the part of the Zuma administration with regard to its Africa policy". This he thought might be due to an increasing focus on domestic challenges, "[s]o it's not only Zimbabwe it's also on the broader African continent..."

The other reason that he put forward was that there is "... a lot of focus on the BRICS countries, especially China, and I am not against that I think it has been at the expense of our engagement on the African continent". He flagged the issue that, "China has made incredible inroads into Zimbabwe in terms of its influence, and I dare say that China is now the most influential foreign power in Zimbabwe. At the same time, China is very intent on safeguarding its interests, especially commercial interests in Zimbabwe", even "making very explicit, political demands ... to Mugabe to appoint a successor, to deal with the reform of State enterprises, to deal with corruption, to reform the economy" something which is according to Soko, unprecedented for China. He concluded by arguing that "SA needs to re-engage in Zimbabwe, because of all the countries that are involved, especially those that have a vested interest in Zimbabwe, South Africa has the most vital interest [political, security and economic], because we bear the brunt of the conflict in Zimbabwe". South African companies that operate in Zimbabwe, want the SA government to help resolve some of the challenges that they face and some of the problems that the country continues to face.

Professor Brian Raftopoulos - *Director of Research in Africa, of the Solidarity Peace Trust and a recognised Zimbabwean scholar and activist.*



Professor Raftopoulos expressed his agreement with most of the comments made by the previous speaker. In addition, he argued that stabilisation was a key factor in Mbeki's mediation, to the extent that democratic issues were often neglected, as can be observed by how the GPA was negotiated and implemented. This according to him was not surprising since Mbeki's preference was always for reform within the liberation movement, rather than the opposition coming to power. There was thus concern around the question of succession in Zanu-PF.

When president Zuma took office, his approach towards Zimbabwe seemed more critical and assertive at first, but power relations were always in favour of ZANU-PF as the incumbent. Therefore, security sector reform-key for the MDC- was never really addressed within the GPA. Another challenge was that SADC had no real coercive ability to enforce good behavior by parties, while the AU was very much on the sideline. ZANU-PF was therefore able to block key reforms which had a bearing on the fairness of elections.

Without resorting to the violence of June 2008, Prof. Roftopoulos asserts that ZANU-PF won the election that concluded the GPA through “a combination of blocked reform processes, the legacy and memory of violence, but also because, whether you like it or not, Zanu-PF has a support base...”

Relations with the international community have been normalising since the July 31 2013 elections. Despite the democratic deficits, once the election had been concluded without violence, SADC and South Africa were quick to accept the outcome. The EU, AU and SADC positions are now the same around Zimbabwe, while the US still maintains sanctions only, because Zimbabwe is of no serious importance to US politics. Zimbabwe has almost restored relations with the international financial institutions..

On China’s engagement with Zimbabwe, Prof. Raftopoulos has argued that China doesn’t see itself as being in competition with anybody and can therefore afford to be more assertive, something also seen in China’s engagement with Sudan.

Was the South African response successful? The mediation stopped the violence, slowed down the destabilisation, produced a respite, but that brief period of respite is over. The Zimbabwean economy is now facing serious challenges. Zimbabwe’s situation exposed the limitation of the South African model of a CODESA style compromised agreement. He warned against idealising the model, arguing that it “has a limited lifespan, depending on the country”. It is particularly difficult when you have a ruling party that is unwilling to respond to change and continues to see the country as a personal property. While the country is facing serious challenges, both the opposition and ruling party are imploding, thereby creating an uncertain future for the country. The ruling party’s crisis is around succession in light of Mugabe’s advanced age, whilst the opposition is struggling to respond to a changed social base, in particular the diminished organised labour force which used to be its social base, due to the massive informalisation of the economy.

He concluded by concurring with Professor Mills that South Africa currently sees Zimbabwe as “off the agenda”, although the continued flow of Zimbabweans into SA means that long term economic and political stability for Zimbabwe still matters for SA. SA faces its own challenges, though the ANC is different from ZANU-PF, for example, within the ANC they are multiple centres of power and a different way of doing things; which means the outcome in SA will be different. South Africa’s domestic challenges mean that the “... Zuma Government is ..happy to keep Zimbabwe on the back burner for the time being”.

Sanusha Naidu- *South African Foreign Policy Expert and Researcher*

Ms Naidu observed that SA’s model of mediation has been “let’s do what we did domestically and let’s export it to the rest of the world, if not the continent” and that this has not been entirely successful citing Burundi, DRC, South Sudan, Ivory Coast, and Madagascar. She argued that 21 years later, the short comings of this approach are beginning to show- Zimbabwe and Burundi being the most striking examples. “The real crack” she observed “... is that only now, the (SA) government is considering the setting up of a mediation unit to understand and inform mediation”.



Ms Naidu suggested that since the success of the SA model domestically is in question, it is problematic to use it as a benchmark for success elsewhere. The approach has not always been inclusive, with some groups being consistently left out, and often there has been no real attempt to address the root causes.

Ms Naidu further notes, "... one of the immediate difficulties for South Africa in its mediation is how it views peace and stability. Does it view it in the way of just consensus building, a kind of compromise or does it really include everyone in there?"

She went on to add "... we have all kind of used the one size fits all approach, but not necessarily understanding that it's not achieving the kinds of impact or the kinds of issues we want..."

Though SA has tried to shed off the big brother image, mediation gets conflated with commercial interests, as SA companies end up becoming recipients of business contracts in some of the countries where SA has been mediating (the peace dividend). She also pointed out that the acceptance of SA regional power status is not a given, thus sometimes impinging on the country's legitimacy as a mediator. China, she argued might have more legitimacy on the continent than South Africa, noting that China is increasingly involving itself in mediation.

Even where SA was once involved in mediation, it appears that efforts have not been sustained, with Angola for example now being more involved in Burundi and DRC where SA once played a leading role.

Mega-regional projects and the program of infrastructure development, are becoming key drivers of SA Foreign Policy success under the Zuma leadership. This is why, she argued, stability in Zimbabwe matters, so that the country "... can be part of the North/South corridor". The BRICS nexus is also linked to infrastructure with SA hosting the BRICS regional bank. Ms Naidu asserted, "[s]o we are going to do all of these nice things for the infrastructure, but the real politics of the region, we are getting out of".

Mr Webster Zambara- *Senior Project Leader for the Southern Africa Desk at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, IJR*

Mr Zambara set out to address the question of why South Africa is seemingly disengaging, and to discuss possible future developments.

South Africa's mounting domestic challenges provide a reality check about what the country can achieve on the continent.

Zambara posited that South Africa has not disengaged with Zimbabwe and that Thabo Mbeki was quite genuine in his efforts, and was successful in securing reforms that led to a relatively free election which the MDC won in March 2008, though failing to get an outright majority in presidential vote, leading to a re-run in June that year. Zambara's view is that Mbeki was surprised by the MDC's victory, having underestimated the MDC's popularity. This he argued led to serious reconsideration between the ANC and Zanu-PF given their ties as former liberation movements. He therefore argued that "at the moment there is not much reason to engage because Zanu-PF is at peace – isn't it?"



Zambara questioned the neutrality of the SA government, citing its refusal for Zimbabwe to be discussed at the UN, hiding the Kampepe report on the election violence of June 2008 and colluding with Zanu-PF Government to disband SADC Tribunal after it made an adverse ruling against the Zimbabwe Government. He also doubted the ANC would want to see a labour backed party (MDC) take over power in Zimbabwe given the permutations in SA where labour is becoming more and more critical.

Webster however lamented the current weak state of the opposition in Zimbabwe which means ZANU-PF is largely unchallenged from outside.

Mr Zambara drew some comparisons between Zimbabwe 21 years after Independence and South Africa 21 years post-apartheid. The economic challenges, power outages, labour and students unrest, declining health system, the land question, allegations of corruption and struggling parastatals among other things. There is a concern that "... South Africa is walking the road that everyone (African countries) walked, they are going to face the same potholes". He hoped that the ANC would learn from ZANU-PF's mistakes.

South Africa treats Zimbabwe differently compared to say, Burundi where President Zuma can openly criticise President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term. This he says is because, the ANC and ZANU-PF "need each other politically". South Africa and Zimbabwe have a permanent joint commission on peace and security which meets annually, a sign of strong ties.

Economic relations between SA and Zimbabwe are uneven, with SA products and companies now dominating the Zimbabwean retail market. President Mugabe expressed this concern when he visited South Africa, early 2015. Positive change he said will likely come from young people from both countries as they start to raise critical questions about socio-economic transformation.

Bram Hanekom- *member of the ANC Alliance, renowned refugee activist and Founder and Chairman of People Against Suffering Suppression, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP)*



Bram started off by sharing his assessment of SA's mediation in Zimbabwe. His view was that the MDC entered into the election fully aware of the nature of the playing field. SA's role he argued was that of a referee and once all parties agree to enter into a contest despite misgivings about the fairness of the rules of the game, one cannot turn back after loosing and "... seek the intervention of the referee". The MDC thus legitimised the outcome by participating even, against advice from some influential quarters not to do so.

The opposition has thus become irrelevant as it tries to reconfigure itself, while the political future of Zimbabwe now rests with ZANU-PF's two main competing factions. Zimbabweans, particularly political leadership both in ZANU-

PF and MDC, he argued, must take responsibility for where the country is, rather than blame SA.

Mr Hanekom questioned why leaders in Zimbabwe's GNU settled for a big cabinet and spent money on expensive vehicles for ministers at a time when the country was broke, facing an unprecedented health

emergency in the Cholera outbreak and seeking a bail-out from SA. Mr Hanekom posited, “I think that made the majority of people [not] see much difference between the leadership of Zanu-PF and the leadership of MDC”. Yet, SA still helped Zimbabwe financially, put a moratorium on deportation of Zimbabweans and introduced a special policy to allow unskilled Zimbabweans to work and stay in South Africa. On its part the government of Zimbabwe has encouraged SA to take in Zimbabweans. Bram argued that the Diaspora are an important part of the Zimbabwean economy as they send money back home through remittances.

“Some of the previous speakers spoke about how Zimbabweans are eating South African chickens and lemons, they also failed to mention, maybe, who grew those chickens and lemons and who planted them – Zimbabweans are working in the economy of South Africa”.

Bram noted that Zimbabwe and South Africa have become more and more entwined.

Mr Hanekom challenged the view that ANC was not a neutral mediator. President Zuma has personal ties with Welshman Ncube, the leader of one of the MDC formations. ANC has been openly concerned about ZANU-PF’s relations with EFF to the extent that ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe had to address a ZANU-PF congress. Mr Hanekom cited an incident where Mugabe accused a South African minister (Lindiwe Zulu), a key member of South Africa’s mediation team on Zimbabwe of bias. Though President Mugabe later apologised, Mr Hanekom argues that this is evidence that the relationship has not always been cosy.

As a mediator, SA’s role was limited to that of a referee, and not to go as far as fixing Zimbabwe’s economy or changing government - that is the responsibility of Zimbabweans. “And if the mediation process was intended by some in this room to put Morgan Tsvangirai as president of Zimbabwe, then you are not acknowledging the role of mediation”. Mistakes were made as can be expected, but SA’s mandate, he contended, was “... to bring stability which was achieved, to [support] an election which was achieved and to provide humanitarian support”. He believed that Zimbabwe was better off because of the mediation process.

Mr Hanekom defended president Zuma’s track record as a mediator both locally (in KwaZulu Natal) and internationally. He was also critical of some countries in trying to influence how SA should handle the Zimbabwe question, citing the alleged attempt by the UK to arm and fund a military intervention in Zimbabwe.

Mr Boniface Mugobogobo- *Consul General, Consulate of Zimbabwe in Cape Town*

Mr Mugobogobo emphasised that the two countries, SA and Zimbabwe ‘need each other’ and have a ‘special relationship’ underpinned by a shared history of colonialism as well as shared kinship ties and values. He also noted that the two countries ‘share cordial diplomatic relations’, through which tense issues and potential problems are addressed in a peaceful and thoughtful manner. Mr Mugobogobo stated: “Zimbabwe needs South Africa and South Africa needs Zimbabwe, since these two countries have this special relationship: we were all once colonised, we are also coming out of protracted liberation wars, and we also share commonalities between our people, especially values that are basically the same.” He went on to explain: “Whether you agree with the state of relationship now is debatable and the question on whether South Africa and Zimbabwe need each other politically can always be debated, but, I think the two countries in general do maintain very close diplomatic relations and we always use these channels to solve any tensions that might develop between the two countries. Like in any relationship, issues are bound to arise at some point or other. I am happy to say that they are always solved using these channels.” Mr Mugobogobo also acknowledged the crucial mediation role South Africa played in Zimbabwe between 2009 and early 2013. Mr Mugobogobo noted that the key challenge faced by the

two countries, was the formulation and implementation of “appropriate policy interventions” by key stakeholders such as politicians and policy makers (from both countries) “so that we can transform this relationship into a more beneficial relationship between our two countries and peoples”.

Conclusion

In his concluding remarks the chair of the meeting summed up key points from the discussion and noted some of the mutually beneficial aspects of the South Africa- Zimbabwe relationship. He appreciated the frankness of the discussion, and commended how the speakers did not shy away from differing with each other. Though there are reasons to be critical of SA’s role in Zimbabwe, there are a lot of positives. Mediation by its nature tends to be conflicted with issues of sovereignty and finding a balance is always difficult. While SA has really helped by taking in a large number of Zimbabweans, this is not sustainable in the long run and the economy of Zimbabwe needs to be fixed. Zimbabweans will have to take responsibility for this process. South Africa-Zimbabwe relations will have to address tense issues such as xenophobia, which flares up in South Africa from time to time, as well as political reform and stability in Zimbabwe. The two countries will have to find a way to come together and have constructive discussions on the aforementioned concerns. South Africa needs to find a way of addressing questions of stability, democracy and development in its mediation as these are interlinked. The Zimbabwe situation is testament to this.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

SALO would like to thank (in alphabetical order) the European Union; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES); Irish Aid and the Embassy of Ireland, Pretoria; the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in South Africa; the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Pretoria; The Olof Palme International Centre; Open Society Foundation; the Southern African Trust and UK aid, among others, for their for their ongoing support of our Policy Dialogue Series.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

