

# How firm the handshake? South Africa's use of quiet diplomacy in Zimbabwe from 1999 to 2006

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The social, political and economic climate in Zimbabwe has worsened over the past six years and has now reached catastrophic proportions with vastly negative consequences for both Zimbabwean citizens and the country's regional neighbours.

South African President Thabo Mbeki is very aware of the importance of stability in Zimbabwe. He has been quoted on numerous occasions as stating that South Africa and Zimbabwe are inextricably linked to each other, insisting that South Africa is "materially and directly interested in a Zimbabwe that is democratic, peaceful, stable and prosperous".<sup>1</sup> Yet Mbeki has consistently employed a policy of quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe and its president, Robert Mugabe. This soft approach has been the target of local and international speculation and criticism, especially in light

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of Mbeki's stated commitment to the African Renaissance and good governance in Africa.

In addition, the concept 'quiet diplomacy', which has progressively become the *bon mot* of international relations, is a loose term, which is potentially problematic because as such it is bandied about in reference to many kinds of 'soft' diplomatic approaches. As such, this paper is an attempt to clarify the concept 'quiet diplomacy' through the use of a list of criteria assembled by this author<sup>2</sup> and applied to South Africa's use of quiet diplomacy in Zimbabwe from 1999 to 2006.

## Personal or direct diplomacy between heads of state or senior officials

It is generally agreed that there is a better chance of success in attaining foreign policy objectives if there is direct communication between states conducted by heads of government or chosen representatives who meet face to face to talk, reason and discuss.<sup>3</sup>

During the course of his presidency, Mbeki has met personally with Mugabe on many occasions and has always emerged from the meetings with a positive view about the situation and stating that there continues to be goodwill, progress and agreement between himself and Mugabe on several issues.<sup>4</sup> At times, Mbeki's enthusiastic efforts to side with Mugabe have resulted in feuds at home with African National Congress (ANC) allies.

For example, When a Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe was deported by order of the Zimbabwean government in late October 2004, Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma defended Zimbabwe's right to expel foreigners and told the press that South Africa's relations with Zimbabwe had not been affected by the incident.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, at the ANC caucus meeting held soon after the deportation took place, South African Minister of Defence Mosiuoa Lekota expressed his irritation with COSATU's actions, insisting that its lack of conferring with its alliance partners prior to the trip was an embarrassment to the ANC. It is instructive that the government chose to take issue with its own alliance partner, but did not utter a word of public criticism over Zimbabwe's expulsion of the COSATU delegation, a decision that has significant implications in terms of how far Mbeki is willing to go to defend Mugabe's actions.<sup>6</sup>

That being said, Mbeki has been forced by sheer public pressure at home and by the international community to criticise some actions that Mugabe has taken. Mbeki

first spoke out about human rights violations when he expressed concern over the Zimbabwean government's "actions, which deny the right of people to protest peacefully."<sup>7</sup> Mbeki even extended the hand of friendship to Zimbabwe's opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai (leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC) and emphasised the importance of dialogue between the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the opposition.<sup>8</sup>

On more than one occasion Mugabe has promised Mbeki good behaviour. Following one meeting, Mugabe appeared on camera to declare that he would uphold the rule of law, that veterans who harassed farmers would be arrested and that all war veterans would soon be forced to leave the farms they had invaded in 2000. In return Mbeki promised to provide aid and mediate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for funds. When Mbeki left, however, Mugabe publicly asserted that he had never said any of the things that he had in fact said the day before.<sup>9</sup>

Even after Mugabe's blatant defaulting on his promises, Mbeki continued to back him in the international community. At the UN Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, Mbeki tried to broker deals between the UN, UK and Zimbabwe, only to have them ripped apart when Mugabe once again refused to concede transparency and uphold the rule of law.<sup>10</sup> In an interview with the BBC in 2001, Mbeki conceded that Mugabe had ignored his quiet diplomatic advice and that he [Mbeki] had tried persuading Mugabe to reform, but that he "didn't listen to me".<sup>11</sup>

Mbeki and South African government officials have met personally with Mugabe and Zimbabwean government officials on many different occasions. This is in keeping with a quiet diplomatic approach, but has not proved productive in any real sense.

## The appearance of limited action or even inaction and media involvement

The principle behind quiet diplomacy is that it should be quiet. That is, it should take place away from critical public and media scrutiny. However, the unfortunate result of such tentative dialogues is that they are often seen as being ineffectual.

Mbeki's policy towards Zimbabwe has been severely criticised and even referred to as a 'non-policy' since it is "non-verifiable, non-specific, has no clear or given objectives or deliverables".<sup>12</sup> Critics argue that quiet diplomacy is a flawed approach as it assumes that Mugabe, who has ignored basic principles of democracy and rule of law, will be influenced by a soft diplomatic approach to change. Even the governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni, acknowledged that Zimbabwe would "never be moved by diplomacy".<sup>13</sup>

Some suggest that South Africa's diplomacy has amounted to "a complete and public excusing of Mugabe's human rights atrocities" and has given the domestic public and the international community the general impression of acquiescence.<sup>14</sup> Domestically, the independent media has consistently and strongly criticised the Mbeki government for its apparent inability to solve the Zimbabwean crisis.<sup>15</sup>

Foreigners looked to South Africa to use its considerable power in the region to influence Mugabe's government.<sup>16</sup> Initially it did appear that the South African government had a method in mind to deal with the situation. It did not criticise Mugabe on the grounds that it was attempting "to make President Mugabe more amenable to negotiate behind the scenes".<sup>17</sup> This step is a legitimate method of quiet diplomacy as defined by the theory. As the months passed, however, the lack of an effective engagement strategy only weakened South Africa further and emphasised its apparent inability to promote adherence to the rule of law in the region.

The South African government has mostly excluded opinions from others on its foreign policy towards Zimbabwe. Businesses and labour unions' views have not been taken into account.<sup>18</sup> Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu's criticisms have also been ignored. Until this stage Tutu was the only leading black figure to overtly criticise Mugabe, who he referred to as "almost a caricature of all the things the people think black African leaders do".<sup>19</sup>

In addition, two members of the tripartite alliance, COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP), have been ignored. Whereas the ANC has consistently shown support for ZANU-PF, COSATU has asserted that the increasingly violent situation in Zimbabwe is the direct result of a 'careless' government and an 'arbitrary' land reform programme. The SACP previously stated that it was "extremely concerned about the unacceptable levels of intimidation, violence, abuse of state resources and the enactment of repressive laws since the Zimbabwean parliamentary elections in 2000".<sup>20</sup>

Former President Nelson Mandela himself initially backed a quiet diplomatic approach to Zimbabwe. In an interview with BBC Radio, he argued that "[a]n approach through diplomatic channels without much publicity is more likely to bring about a positive result".<sup>21</sup> However, the day after Mbeki publicly embraced Mugabe, Mandela burst out denouncing liberation leaders who "despise the people who put them in power and want to stay in power forever. They want to die in power because they have committed crimes."<sup>22</sup> Although Mandela did admit to disagreeing with Mbeki on the Zimbabwe issue, he loyally continued to back Mbeki's policy of quiet diplomacy.<sup>23</sup>

The South African government's choice of policymakers could also easily have contributed to its failing quiet diplomacy. After all, many actors involved appear to have misread the situation in Zimbabwe or at least perceived it differently to the

international community. For example, Dlamini-Zuma responded to Zimbabwe's very harsh media laws, which required all journalists to register, by stating that they posed no threat to media freedom. In similar vein South African Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana went to Zimbabwe and then came back giving Mugabe's government a clean bill of health on its human rights conduct. The director-general in the Presidency, the Reverend Frank Chikane, accused those religious leaders who had demanded that the South African government take a tougher stance on Zimbabwe of "resorting to fabrications and clubbing together with political self-seekers in order to achieve their goals".<sup>24</sup>

Similarly Dlamini-Zuma's visits to Harare did not include meetings with the opposition. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai noted in frustration that "the last time Dlamini-Zuma was in Harare she refused to accept that the murder, torture, political violence, rape and all the other brutalities associated with the Mugabe regime constituted a crisis that needed international attention".<sup>25</sup>

Despite this initial choice by the South African government, Mbeki has since held discussions with the MDC on several occasions. In October 2004, he engaged in private talks with the MDC leadership four times to discuss ways to stop the growing rift between the opposition and ZANU-PF in light of Zimbabwe's parliamentary elections in March 2005.<sup>26</sup> However, despite these and other attempts to mediate between Mugabe and the MDC, talks have completely broken down, owing in part to the bickering within the MDC that resulted in it splitting in two in early 2006.<sup>27</sup>

When the heads of state and government met at the African Union (AU) summit in Durban in July 2002, they accepted the Durban Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. Once again African leaders declared their "commitment to the promotion of democracy and its values" in their countries through ensuring that the rule of law is upheld; good governance prevails; all citizens are regarded as equal; individuals have an inalienable right to participate freely in elections; and that individual liberties and collective freedoms are safeguarded.<sup>28</sup> The following year Mbeki addressed the heads of state and government of the AU and remarked that African leaders, including himself, were taking "our destiny into our hands, creating for ourselves a continent of peace, democracy, prosperity and African and human solidarity".<sup>29</sup>

These moral principles are commendable on paper and yet there has been little evidence of their application in practice. Not only has South Africa's vague policy on Zimbabwe resulted in extensive international criticism, but South Africa is also in danger of losing its moral authority on the continent. Mbeki's silence on the issues of law and good governance in Zimbabwe undermines the credibility of his loudly proclaimed vision of a new Africa and an African Renaissance.<sup>30</sup>

To be fair, when the crisis in Zimbabwe was beginning to spiral out of control in 2000, Mbeki was also attempting to translate his vision of an African Renaissance into what would eventually become the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) by the end of 2001. As a result, he was extremely sensitive to how South Africa was perceived by the rest of Africa. He needed the continent's support for this new economic programme.<sup>31</sup>

Part of the NEPAD deal is that African countries pledge themselves to applying self-regulatory measures, which include isolating members who flagrantly disregard good governance and democracy.<sup>32</sup> Hundreds of newspaper articles emphasised South Africa's lack of credibility as a result of its quiet approach to Zimbabwe.<sup>33</sup>

As the champion of good African governance, the world waited for Mbeki's response to Mugabe's re-election in 2002.<sup>34</sup> When it became clear that Mbeki accepted the results of the presidential election, as did other neighbouring African countries, it indicated to the world that African states do not intend to take NEPAD seriously as a guide to political and democratic conduct. Furthermore, South Africa's apparent acquiescence in the questionable election results has jeopardised its reputation as "the African state with the keenest appreciation of global economic and political dynamics".<sup>35</sup>

Apart from its dented credibility as the leader of the African Renaissance, South Africa is also increasingly in danger of losing its credibility as a powerful peacemaker in Southern Africa. The so-called 'Mbeki doctrine' refers to his belief that while South Africa cannot force its own views on others, it can assist in dealing with regional instabilities by offering its leadership to bring opposing groups to the negotiating table. In Mbeki's view, the model of 'peace, power-sharing and reconciliation' that worked in South Africa could be applied elsewhere with effective results.

Another very important reason for South Africa's lack of effective action against its neighbour is rooted in historical ties. Since the ANC was a former liberation movement supported by the frontline states throughout their struggle, it stands to reason that the ANC has a large debt to repay.<sup>36</sup> South Africa feels indebted to Zimbabwe for its outspokenness against apartheid and its help during those years. The ANC feels it cannot turn its back on Mugabe and ZANU-PF, which it refers to as its 'sister party', since both the ANC and ZANU-PF fought colonialism and oppression in their respective countries.<sup>37</sup>

Mbeki's quiet diplomatic approach to Zimbabwe is rooted in a number of good reasons. However, this has not altered the local public and international opinion that South Africa's policy on Zimbabwe is ineffectual. Mbeki himself has recently appeared to rely on the efforts of others to affect some change in Zimbabwe. In May 2006, he admitted that he was waiting for the outcome of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's

intervention in Zimbabwe on a visit there later in 2006 (a move that has been rejected by the Zimbabwean government).<sup>38</sup>

## Constructive engagement through persistent negotiations

‘Quiet’ diplomacy is the opposite of ‘loud’ diplomacy and as such refers to non-violent measures. The principal idea behind constructive engagement is that it is possible to pressure a country to institute constructive change in its policies through negotiation, mediation and critical dialogue rather than military force.<sup>39</sup>

When Mbeki became president in 1999 the South African government began to employ a strategy of constructive engagement with Zimbabwe while publicly keeping quiet on many disturbing issues developing there. For example, when Aziz Pahad was probed on Mbeki’s policy towards Zimbabwe, especially in light of its human rights abuses, he sidestepped the question saying only that matters were being taken up “in diplomatic channels”.<sup>40</sup>

This policy continued over the next year and was designed “to encourage Mugabe to change course from lawlessness, violent coercion and racial scapegoating”, which he had been supporting since his defeat in the constitutional referendum. Even after the war veterans invaded farms and farmers were killed, South Africa continued to insist on a policy of ‘good neighbourliness’ and ‘non-interference’ with Mugabe.<sup>41</sup> By the end of 2001 it was obvious there had been few substantial results from this constructive approach. However, the most important test of South Africa’s policy would be how it ensured that the 2002 presidential elections would be free and fair.<sup>42</sup>

Numerous South African political figures have argued that the principal objective of South Africa’s soft approach has been to try to avoid a complete collapse of authority in Zimbabwe.<sup>43</sup> Mbeki was quoted as saying that such a collapse would not only be disastrous for Zimbabwe but also for South Africa. “We cannot afford a complete breakdown. I don’t know how we would cope with it,” he declared.<sup>44</sup>

The South African government has a distinct view on its constructive approach to Zimbabwe. Dlamini-Zuma has insisted that quiet diplomacy is an inherently African form of foreign relations and that “if your neighbour’s house is on fire, you don’t slap the child who started it. You help them put out the fire. This is the African way.”<sup>45</sup> Dlamini-Zuma has also asserted on many occasions that South Africa will never condemn Mugabe’s regime, emphasising instead that the government “should work toward bringing the Zimbabweans back from the brink not to throw people over the precipice”.<sup>46</sup>

The new South Africa is still attempting to gain acceptance as a genuine African country. This attitude was perpetuated by South Africa's handling of the Nigerian crisis in 1995 when it was accused of not being 'African enough' and for acting like a bully on the continent.<sup>47</sup> Mbeki is constantly trying to erase the suspicions that South Africa's agenda in the region is less than well intended. If the ANC government had threatened Mugabe's government with punitive measures, other regional states would have been furious.<sup>48</sup> Mbeki is determined that South Africa cannot afford to lose face with its African 'brothers' again.

In Zimbabwe the ideology of a 'North-South' struggle and the African belief that "hegemonic powers continue their dominance and exploitation of the poor"<sup>49</sup> are very apparent, with Tony Blair and international financial institutions being the so-called Western forces. Because of the Africanist diplomacy of solidarity that exists throughout the continent, South Africa has suddenly become a 'puppet of the West' and traitor to the 'struggle'.<sup>50</sup> Black solidarity, brotherhood and support for former comrades in arms take precedence over the need to ensure freedom, rule of law and respect for human rights – which are ironically the very values that were fought for in South Africa's (and Zimbabwe's) liberation struggles.<sup>51</sup>

Mbeki had reason to worry about accusations of being un-African or of siding with the West. For example, when he spoke out finally against the unfolding crisis in Zimbabwe towards the end of 2001, the state-owned *Herald* newspaper in Zimbabwe lashed out at him: "President Mbeki's alleged utterances neatly dovetail into Britain's grand plan for a global coalition against Zimbabwe."<sup>52</sup> When Mbeki later sent a confidential letter to Mugabe in which he urged him to return to reconciliation talks with the MDC, the letter was leaked to Zimbabwe's state-owned media. Mbeki was once again accused by the Zimbabwean state-owned press of being 'manipulative' and of "furthering the agenda of a domestic and imperialist lobby".<sup>53</sup>

Another example of this antagonistic response to South Africa's constructive engagement occurred in August 2005. South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel and Reserve Bank Governor Tito Mboweni met with Zimbabwean Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa and Central Bank Governor Gideon Gono to negotiate South Africa's proposed aid package. The negotiations included a series of reforms among which was a new constitution that was agreed to by the MDC, as well as new elections as a prerequisite to South Africa releasing between US\$200 million and US\$500 million in aid. Following the meeting, a response came from a Zimbabwean minister rejecting the money and stating, "If South Africa wants to help us in good faith, fine, but if they try to hold us to ransom then we won't put up with that."<sup>54</sup>

It is no wonder that Mbeki persists in soft diplomacy when any constructive proposals by the South African government are instantly refuted by the Zimbabwean government as proof that Mbeki is siding with the West.

## Bilateral and multilateral efforts to resolve the Zimbabwean situation

Since Mbeki assumed the presidency he has been at great pains to assure fellow Africans that South Africa will not adopt a ‘big brother’ attitude on the continent. He has often declared that South Africa claims no right to impose its will on any country and will act only “within the context of its international agreements”.<sup>55</sup>

Mbeki’s preference has always been for an intra-African multilateral approach to Zimbabwe. While the rest of the world remains flabbergasted over South Africa’s response to the crisis, Mbeki wants the international community to leave it to the AU and Southern African Development Community (SADC) to resolve it in “the African way”.<sup>56</sup>

It has been suggested that behind the scenes Mbeki is only too aware of how disastrous a leader Mugabe is, but feels that he could have more impact on the situation if he uses “an attitude of sympathy and friendship to nudge Mugabe in the right direction”.<sup>57</sup> Such was the atmosphere when Mbeki, Mugabe, Sam Nujoma (of Namibia) and Joaquim Chissano (of Mozambique) attended the Victoria Falls Summit in April 2000 to try to persuade Mugabe to stop the illegal occupation of white-owned farmland. The international community, particularly the UK, viewed this summit as a good opportunity for South Africa to take a stronger stand against Zimbabwe, but Mbeki continued his constructive engagement policy.<sup>58</sup>

Mbeki’s spokesman declared that Mbeki and his three counterparts had managed to get Mugabe to agree to stop the violence and withdraw the war veterans from white farms, while Mbeki had also asked Mugabe to stop his public attacks on Blair and Britain. In return, Mbeki and the other presidents would give Mugabe their full and public support and Mbeki would press Britain to provide funding for land reform in Zimbabwe. Mbeki was apparently so confident that he phoned Blair and told him that “a new chapter had been opened on the land reform question” and that there would be swift progress in settling all of the other remaining issues.<sup>59</sup> However, Mugabe refused to stop the violence and continued to show disrespect for the rule of law. Mbeki’s hopes that Mugabe would fulfil his promises were dashed.

In the run-up to the presidential election in 2002, the international community looked once again to South Africa as the regional leader to begin applying some real pressure on Mugabe. However, this was not forthcoming. The South African observer mission described the elections as “legitimate” but not necessarily “free and fair” – a statement which resulted in its immediate ridicule. The ANC supported the mission’s findings instantly.<sup>60</sup> South Africa was not alone in showing support for Mugabe as the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU), SADC, Kenya and Tanzania supported the elections as free and fair.<sup>61</sup>

Despite South African election observers regarding the poll as legitimate, the opposition in Zimbabwe said that Mugabe had “rigged the ballot and stolen the election”.<sup>62</sup> The

Commonwealth Observer Team also concluded that the conditions in Zimbabwe “did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electors”.<sup>63</sup> Mbeki, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Australian Prime Minister John Howard formed the *troika* created by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Based on the finding of the Observer Team, the *troika* decided to suspend Zimbabwe from the decision-making councils of the Commonwealth for one year.<sup>64</sup>

Ever mindful of his fervent desire not to alienate South Africa from the rest of Africa, Mbeki was not comfortable with his position in the *troika*. This discomfort was perhaps most obvious when he came out so strongly against the decision of the 2003 CHOGM to continue Zimbabwe’s suspension, which he referred to as “undemocratic and unhelpful”.<sup>65</sup>

In accordance with the policy of good neighbourliness, South Africa and its fellow SADC neighbours have generally refused to criticise Mugabe openly, insisting instead that Zimbabwe’s problems were internal and therefore the business of the Zimbabwean people.<sup>66</sup> For example, when Mugabe launched ‘Operation *Murambatsvina*’ or ‘Operation Restore Order’ in April 2005, which resulted in a public outcry by the international community, the AU stressed the right that national governments had to conduct business inside their own borders without outside interference.<sup>67</sup>

Despite this display of solidarity, which is so traditional of African countries, several of them have taken Zimbabwe to task. In September 2001 a special Commonwealth delegation met in Abuja to discuss Zimbabwe. Three African states attending the meeting, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, informed Zimbabwe’s foreign minister that Zimbabwe’s problems were basically Mugabe’s fault.<sup>68</sup>

It has to be said that despite criticism of his policy, Mbeki has received support from African countries and even from US President George Bush, who unexpectedly backed Mbeki’s soft approach to Zimbabwe on a visit to South Africa in July 2003. Following private talks, Bush referred to Mbeki as the ‘point man’ on the subject of Zimbabwe.<sup>69</sup> Mbeki even assured Bush that Zimbabwe’s political crisis would be over by mid-2004, an assurance that he had to renege upon when in May 2004 the situation had not improved.<sup>70</sup>

What the above discussion proves is that Mbeki and the South African government are balancing on a rather fine line between attempts to show firm disagreement with Zimbabwean policy and keeping fellow Africans happy.

## Mbeki steers clear of sanctions

Zimbabwe is largely dependent on South Africa for its fuel supplies, and on parastatals Zisco, Telkom and Eskom. Despite this vast economic leverage and the ability to use it

coercively against Zimbabwe by way of economic 'sticks', Mbeki remains adamant that South Africa will not alter its policy of quiet diplomacy.<sup>71</sup>

The South African government's choice of actions are limited by the fact that it believes there are no alternatives to quiet diplomacy other than 'loud diplomacy' or 'throwing stones', which it will not resort to anyway.<sup>72</sup> Trevor Manuel was quoted as asking, "What should we do on Zimbabwe? Act like Ariel Sharon? Kick butt, blow them up, drive over their car, should we send in tanks?"<sup>73</sup> Manuel's statement is clearly in line with the theory of quiet diplomacy, which insists that there be no military involvement.

However, numerous alternatives to quiet diplomacy do exist without resorting to military intervention. These range from imposing sanctions to offering myriad incentives.<sup>74</sup> After the questionable presidential election results in 2002, the EU and US imposed personal or 'smart' sanctions, including travelling bans on Mugabe, his wife Grace, and other prominent officials of the ZANU-PF government. Their assets were also frozen.<sup>75</sup> The leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance (formerly DP) in South Africa, Tony Leon, insisted that South Africa apply smart sanctions as well. In addition he urged South African parastatals to "review their soft loans and easy credit terms with Zimbabwe".<sup>76</sup>

Yet, sanctions are a powerful tool in implementing foreign policy and therefore the impact of sanctions on the Zimbabwe regime would need to be set apart from the population with only specific individuals and organisations targeted. These 'smart' sanctions could be aimed at individuals associated with Mugabe's government and could include the freezing of bank accounts, restrictions on travel and seizure of property. Sasol, Eskom, Telkom and Transnet could also curtail credit on oil, electricity, and transport and telecommunication services.<sup>77</sup>

Should further measures need to be imposed, these could be in the form of multilaterally mandated sanctions in agreement with the UN, SADC, EU, AU and Commonwealth, and could include border blockades on imports and exports and either suspending or removing Zimbabwe from leadership positions in international organisations. Mugabe would perhaps need to exit his position as president, possibly through obtaining a leadership amnesty. Moreover, key states would need to be involved in applying sanctions, such as Mozambique, which is a large fuel supplier to Zimbabwe, and states would have to be united in the measures undertaken so that uneven application of sanctions could be avoided.<sup>78</sup>

Among the reasons for South Africa's 'softly-softly' approach to Mugabe was that punitive economic measures would have potentially destabilising consequences, only hastening the political and economic destruction of Zimbabwe.<sup>79</sup> The consequences for South Africa included the possibility of a massive influx of refugees, disrupted trade links and an atmosphere of 'generalised chaos' on its borders.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, it is South Africa's soft

approach to Zimbabwe that has resulted in precisely that, with an estimated two million Zimbabweans pouring over the border to escape famine and high inflation and to seek employment.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

The international community has expected South Africa to assume the lead role in dealing decisively with Mugabe, given its vast moral authority and its considerable economic power in the region. This expectation is not unwarranted, given that Mbeki has espoused good governance and democracy as imperatives in the African Renaissance. However, this expectation is perhaps overly optimistic since Mbeki's policy of quiet diplomacy with Zimbabwe has so far proved ineffective.

In an application of the quiet diplomacy indicators, the following became evident.

Mbeki has met personally with Mugabe several times. However, most of these meetings have proved fruitless, with Mugabe either renegeing on his promises or denying that he ever made them in the first place.

Mbeki's choice of actors has also been questionable. He seems to have surrounded himself with policymakers who appear unable to overcome Mugabe's assistance to the liberation struggle during apartheid and who choose not to see what is really taking place in Zimbabwe. He has ignored views from respected public figures such as Desmond Tutu and former President Mandela.

The South African government has followed a policy of constructive engagement, which Mbeki insists is working, although there are no results to back up this claim. Mbeki also continues to assert that Africa has to solve its own problems and must be left to do so by the rest of the international community. However, it is evident that even in African multilateral forums, the Zimbabwe crisis remains unresolved since South Africa is unwilling to step on any toes.

Evidently, South Africa's humiliation in its unilateral dealings with Nigeria in 1995 has influenced its subsequent foreign policy choices. South Africa cannot afford to be shunned by the rest of Africa. Consequently, African solidarity has once again been given more weight than respect for good governance principles.

Moreover, South Africa does not view any other alternative to quiet diplomacy as being viable. Mbeki has warned against using any sanctions, which he insists will be detrimental to the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. He believes that such harsh action will exacerbate the situation in Zimbabwe even further.

Mbeki's quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe has not effected purposeful change in that country. The result has simply been that South Africa appears to have, once again, chosen pragmatism over principle, sacrificing its high ideals of African renewal to appease its fellow Africans.

## Notes

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