

SOUTH AFRICA'S POLICY TOWARDS ZIMBABWE – A SYNOPSIS

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February 22, 2016

Historically, with regard to the Zimbabwe liberation struggle, the ANC had good relations with ZAPU and none with ZANU when it broke away from ZAPU. This was a product of a continuous process in Zimbabwe which had started with the establishment of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress in that country and the membership in the South African ANC of Zimbabwe students and workers while they were studying and working in South Africa.

ANC relations with ZANU

Despite this history, in 1978 ZANU sent a delegation from Mozambique to Lusaka, led by the late former Vice President of Zimbabwe, Simon Muzenda, to meet the ANC. The delegation had come to propose that the ANC should send Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadres to Mozambique to join the units of ZANLA, the ZANU military wing, which were operating along the Limpopo River. The delegation suggested that this would give MK the possibility to infiltrate its cadres and material into and through the then Northern Transvaal.

Though the political leadership of the ANC warmly supported this proposal, the MK leadership opposed it on the basis that there were already MK cadres embedded in units of ZIPRA, the military wing of ZAPU, which were also operating along the Limpopo. These might end up fighting their comrades in the ZANLA units as there were occasional skirmishes between ZIPRA and ZANLA. Consequently we did not take up the ZANU offer.

However we interacted warmly with the ZANU delegates at the 1979 Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka which decided on the Lancaster Conference on Zimbabwe.

ANC relations with the Zimbabwe Government

On the very day that Zimbabwe achieved its independence in 1980, the President of the ANC, the late O.R. Tambo, met then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe in Salisbury, later Harare, to discuss the possibility of the ANC opening an office in Harare and using Zimbabwe as a base to carry out underground political and military work in South Africa.

Prime Minister Mugabe suggested that the ANC should assess whether it could operate from Zimbabwe, given that the new Zimbabwe administration would include many people it would inherit from the Smith regime. These included General Peter Walls who led the Zimbabwe Defence Force and Mr Ken Flower who headed the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO).

A few weeks thereafter, President Tambo informed Prime Minister Mugabe that we had conducted our on-the-spot assessment within Zimbabwe and thought that we could indeed operate from Zimbabwe despite the presence in various Zimbabwe state organs of people inherited from the Smith regime.

Prime Minister Mugabe immediately agreed that we could then operate in Zimbabwe as President Tambo had proposed. I was therefore directed to interact with then Minister of Security, and now Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, to work out all the details for our 'underground' work and open representation in Zimbabwe, which was done.

The late Chris Hani was then put in charge of our 'underground' operations in Zimbabwe, while the late Joe Gqabi, who was later murdered in Harare by agents of the apartheid regime, served as our public Chief Representative, with Geraldine Fraser, now Fraser-Moleketi, as one of his assistants.

Zimbabwe land reform and South Africa

In 1990 as we began our negotiations to end the system of apartheid, the then Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, engaged President Mugabe to persuade him that the Government of Zimbabwe should not proceed with any programme to implement a radical

land reform, given that the Lancaster House Constitutional 10-year prohibition of this had expired.

Chief Anyaoku and the Commonwealth Secretariat feared that any radical land redistribution in Zimbabwe at that stage would frighten white South Africa and thus significantly complicate our own process of negotiations.

President Mugabe and the Zimbabwe Government agreed to Chief Anyaoku's suggestion and therefore delayed for almost a decade the needed agrarian reform, which had been a central objective of the political and armed struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe.

ANC intervention in Zimbabwe

All the foregoing resulted in the establishment of firm fraternal relations between the ANC and now ZANU-PF, which created the possibility for the two organisations to interact with each other openly and frankly.

During these years of our interaction and working together with President Mugabe, the Government of Zimbabwe and ZANU-PF, we came to understand that all these were committed to such objectives as improving the lives of the people of Zimbabwe, defending the independence of our countries and advancing Pan Africanist goals.

We supported all these objectives. However their achievement required that as a country Zimbabwe should remain a democratic and peaceful country with a growing economy of shared wealth, and a country which would continue to do everything possible to eradicate the legacy of colonialism.

When the ANC felt that problems were arising with regard to these objectives, it did what nobody else in the world had done. It prepared and shared a document with ZANU-PF which was a comprehensive critique of developments in Zimbabwe, with suggestions about what ZANU-PF should do to correct what was wrong. Done in 2001, the document was entitled "How Will Zimbabwe Defeat Its Enemies!" It dealt with a whole variety of issues, including the political and economic.

Though the then planned ANC/ZANU-PF meeting to discuss the document did not take place, ZANU-PF never raised any objection to the fact that the ANC prepared the document to assist Zimbabwe to overcome some of its challenges.

We probably made a mistake when we did not insist that this meeting should be held.

The South African Government and the Zimbabwe land question

When the war veterans and others began to occupy white-owned farms, we intervened first of all with Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998 to encourage the UK Government to honour the commitment that had been made at Lancaster House in 1979 to give the Government of Zimbabwe the financial means to carry out the required land redistribution in a non-confrontational manner.

This led to the September 1998 International Donors' Conference on Land Reform and Resettlement held in Harare, which the British Government attended, but whose very positive decisions were not implemented, thanks to the negative attitude adopted by the very same British Government.

Unfortunately, contrary to what the Conservative Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major had agreed, Tony Blair's Secretary of State for International Development, Claire Short, repudiated the commitment to honour the undertaking made at Lancaster House.

In a November 1997 letter to Zimbabwe Minister of Agriculture and Land, Kumbirai Kangai, she wrote: "I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know, we were colonised not colonisers."

In a February 22, 2015 article in The Telegraph, the Conservative Party Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, commented about the parlous state of Zimbabwe and said:

“But it is vital to recognise that Zimbabwe was not always like this, and did not have to be like this...And Britain played a shameful part in the disaster. Readers will remember the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement, by which Margaret Thatcher granted independence to Rhodesia...So it was crucial that the Lancaster House Agreement protected the interests of these white farmers. They could, of course, be bought out, but their land could not be simply seized. There had to be a “willing buyer, willing seller”. The British government agreed to fund the arrangement, compensating the former colonial farmers for land that they gave up... And then in 1997, along came Tony Blair and New Labour, and in a fit of avowed anti-colonialist fervour they unilaterally scrapped the arrangement...It was Labour’s betrayal of the Lancaster House Agreement – driven by political correctness and cowardice – that gave Mugabe the pretext for the despotic (land) confiscations by which he has rewarded his supporters.”

Later, Prime Minister Blair told me that the British Governments he led never formally took this decision to repudiate the Lancaster House Agreement and regretted that in the end, his Government had to accept it because Claire Short had succeeded to convince the UK public that it was indeed Government policy!

Further to help resolve the conflict on the land question, at some point we also got commitments from three (3) other Governments to finance land acquisition by the Zimbabwe Government which would then distribute the land to those who had started to occupy some farms. The Zimbabwe Government welcomed this initiative.

At the suggestion of the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the UNDP assumed the responsibility to work with the Zimbabwe Government to implement this land acquisition and redistribution. Unfortunately the UNDP acted in a manner which led to the failure of this initiative.

The South African Government and Zimbabwe politics

Our Government started to work more intensely with the opposition MDC after the 2000 Zimbabwe Constitutional Referendum, which rejected the Constitution that had been put to the nation by the Government.

The MDC approached us to help secure the agreement of ZANU-PF to amend the extant Constitution by including in it various matters, many of which had been included in the Constitution which had been rejected.

From then onwards we did our best to encourage ZANU-PF and the MDC to work together to find solutions to the constitutional, political, economic, security and social challenges which faced Zimbabwe.

It was exactly this same approach we took which resulted in the conclusion in 2008 of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) by the Zimbabwe political parties.

Though we acted as a Facilitator, the fact of the matter is that the GPA was negotiated and elaborated by the three Zimbabwe Political Parties which had been democratically chosen by the people in the 2008 elections. No part of the Agreement was imposed on the Parties by the Facilitator.

This approach was informed by our unwavering determination to respect the right of the people of Zimbabwe to determine their future, firmly opposed to any foreign, including South African, intervention to impose solutions on the people of Zimbabwe.

Writing in the privately-owned Zimbabwe Independent on September 25 last year, Wilbert Mukori said: "The best chance the nation has had to end Mugabe's dictatorship was by far during the Government of National Unity (GNU) when all the nation had to do was implement the raft of democratic reforms already agreed in the 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA).

“However, MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai and other opposition parties, who were tasked with implementing the reforms, sold out and joined Mugabe’s gravy train. So after four or five years of the GNU, no meaningful reforms were implemented...The people of Zimbabwe failed to recognise the importance of the 2008 GPA reforms and so they did not pressure GNU leaders to implement the reforms.”

Regime change in Zimbabwe

There were others in the world, led particularly by the UK, who opposed our approach of encouraging the Zimbabweans to decide their future. These preferred regime change – the forcible removal of President Mugabe and his replacement by people approved by the UK and its allies.

This is what explained the sustained campaign to condemn us for conducting the so-called ‘quiet diplomacy’. What was wrong with ‘quiet diplomacy’, which led to the adoption of the GPA discussed by Mukori, was that it defended the right of the people of Zimbabwe to determine their future, as opposed to the desire by some in the West to carry out regime change in Zimbabwe and impose their will on the country!

In the period preceding the 2002 Zimbabwe Elections, the UK and the US in particular were very keen to effect this regime change and failing which to impose various conditions to shorten the period of any Mugabe Presidency.

Our then Minister of Intelligence, Lindiwe Sisulu, had to make a number of trips to London and Washington to engage the UK and US governments on their plans for Zimbabwe, with strict instructions from our Government to resist all plans to impose anything on the people of Zimbabwe, including by military means.

Accordingly it was not from hearsay or third parties that we acquired the knowledge about Western plans to overthrow President Mugabe, but directly from what they communicated to a representative of our Government.

In its 11 November, 2007 edition, the UK newspaper, the Independent on Sunday, reported that during its interview of Lord Guthrie, former Chief of Defence Staff of the UK armed forces, it learnt that "Astonishingly, the subjects discussed (with Prime Minister Tony Blair) included invading Zimbabwe, "which people were always trying to get me (Guthrie) to look at. My advice was, 'Hold hard, you'll make it worse.'"

According to John Kampfner in his book, "Blair's Wars", Blair once told Claire Short that "if it were down to me, I'd do Zimbabwe as well – that is send troops." In his Memoir "A Journey", Blair explained that the reason he could not "get rid of Mugabe" which he "would have loved to" was because "it wasn't practical (since...the surrounding African nations maintained a lingering support for him and would have opposed any action strenuously)."

South Africa and the Zimbabwe elections

The 2002 elections in Zimbabwe were observed by two South African Observer Missions among others. One of these was a multi-party Mission deployed by our Parliament, not Government. The second was composed of people seconded by civil society organisations. The Government contributed to this latter Mission by appointing Ambassador Sam Motsuenyane as its leader.

With no intervention by Government, these two Observer Missions, like all others, determined that the declared outcome of the elections reflected the will of the people of Zimbabwe.

The same thing happened with regard to the 2008 elections which resulted in the MDC (Tsvangirai) gaining 100 House of Assembly seats as opposed to 99 for ZANU-PF and 10 for MDC (Mutambara). None of the two leading Presidential candidates, Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai, got the required 50%+1 to emerge as the outright winner.

The second round of the Presidential election was marked by a lot of violence, resulting in the withdrawal of Tsvangirai. Our view was that the level of violence had made it impossible for the people of Zimbabwe freely to exercise their right to choose their President.

I therefore met President Mugabe in Bulawayo to propose that the election should be called off and conducted afresh in conditions of the total absence of any violence. President Mugabe did not accept our suggestion, arguing that the action we were proposing would be in violation of the Constitution.

During the 2013 Harmonised Elections, ZANU-PF won 196 of the House of Assembly seats as opposed to 70 for the MDC (Tsvangirai), and President Mugabe was elected during the first round. All the Observer Missions which actually observed these elections agreed that the announced results 'reflected the will of the people of Zimbabwe'.

Over the years ZAPU, ZANU and, later, ZANU-PF saw it as part of their responsibility to contribute to the victory of our struggle against the apartheid regime and system and the building of the democratic South Africa, and acted accordingly. The ANC took the same position with regard to the struggles of the people of Zimbabwe to defeat colonialism and reconstruct the new Zimbabwe, and acted accordingly.

Throughout these years we defended the right of the people of Zimbabwe to determine their destiny, including deciding on who should govern the country. This included resisting all efforts to impose other people's solutions on Zimbabwe, which, if this had succeeded, would have served as a precursor for a similar intervention in our country!

Consciously we took the position that democratic South Africa should at all costs avoid acting as a new home-grown African imperial power which would have given itself the right unilaterally to determine the destiny of the peoples of Africa!