



Transcript

The Future of South Africa's Mediation in Zimbabwe

Dr Siphamandla Zondi

Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue

13 May 2010

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/ speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions, but the ultimate responsibility for accuracy lies with this document's author(s). The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

Alex Vines :

Welcome to everyone to today's roundtable. Let me briefly introduce our speaker, Dr Siphamandla Zondi, who is Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue, a leading independent NGO with focus on South Africa and its international relations. Dr Zondi studied sociology and history at the University of KwaZulu-Natal before reading for an MPhil and a DPhil in African Studies at the University of Cambridge. He worked as Programme Head for the Africa and South Africa Foreign Policy Programme at the Institute for Global Dialogue and headed the Africa Institute's Regional Integration and Sustainable Development Programmes prior to his current position. Dr Zondi has published widely on regional integration and governance in Africa, South Africa's foreign policy and international relations as well as public health and migration-development issues.

Dr Zondi:

For South Africa the topic of mediation policy in Zimbabwe has been subject of fixation for a long time and it has usually appeared in the scheme of 'Zimbabwe plus something or someone', such as Zimbabwe and Gaddafi. The focus of attention has also been strongly on the person Robert Mugabe, who is often named a moron or dictator. Nowadays, we have a considerable amount of research about the problems in Zimbabwe and to understand the mediation approach of South Africa as a country and in the context of SADC - first under Mbeki and now under Zuma - one need to go back to the root causes of the conflict in Zimbabwe. There are two different views on what might have been the prime cause. Some analysts see the problems mainly as a result of imperialistic intervention by the UK and/or the US whilst other focus on post-colonial politics mostly in form of the person Robert Mugabe. It is important to understand that what is seen as main cause in the past influences how current events are analysed. Advocates of the 'colonial reasoning' believe that the country's problems are inherited because there has been a willingness to take over rather than to transform the colonial structures and institutions in order to get into power quickly. Advocates from the 'post-colonial reasoning' see the situation as result of Mugabe's one-party state project. Its origins can be traced back until the 1970s and over the years, Mugabe has pursued the elimination and corruption of all elements which are competing with him for power.

After Mugabe's election win in 1980, opposition in Matabeleland erupted and ended only after ZANU and ZAPU reached a unity agreement in 1988 that merged the two parties, creating ZANU-PF. The elections in March 1990 resulted in another victory for Mugabe and his party but voter turnout was small and the campaign was not perceived as free and fair. Not satisfied with a *de facto* one-party state, Mugabe called on the ZANU-PF Central Committee to support the creation of a *de jure* one-party state in September 1990, which was not successful. During the 1990s students, trade unionists and workers often demonstrated to express their discontent with the government. However, the government managed to keep organized political opposition to a minimum through most of those years. But finally, opposition to Mugabe and the ZANU-PF government grew considerably and led to the creation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999.

The situation of Zimbabwe today can be seen as a result of unfinished issues from the colonial period. First of all, there is the failure to transform the state, or the willingness to take on any changes. Second, the government has failed to transform the economy successfully. Finally, there is the issue of the one-party system.

How do you respond to the problem in Zimbabwe? Academics such as William Zartman suggest that the successful resolution of a conflict is critically dependent on the timing when the efforts are made. Parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so, that is when the conflict is ripe. This happens usually when alternative means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament. South Africa's peace diplomacy towards Zimbabwe in the years 2001-2006 was a result of the fact that the conflict simply was not ripe. It was common to speak out about the problem and 'name and shame' but a united strategy was not well supported by the African Group. The situation changed in 2007, when the African Group asked Mbeki to intervene after some of the leaders of the MDC were beaten up and ZANU-PF realized that it can not continue with the way it treated the MDC. Mbeki facilitated the negotiations and was more successful than in his earlier attempts, which had failed for a number of reasons. One of the major reasons was that he did not manage to bring Angola on board. From 2007 onwards, the region was much more united in its approach towards Zimbabwe and progress has been achieved quickly in the last years. This progress can be seen in the following achievements:

- A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed.

- Amendments 18 and 19 have been approved, which include the reform of the parliament and a harmonised election system. One improvement was the posting of election results at the door of the polling station. This was thought to be a small change but it did cause a major impact.
- The MDC managed to reach out to other African countries and improved its external relations.

All points above contributed to the presidential election run-off and the decision to form a coalition in 2005.

The Global Political Agreement (GPA), which was announced in 2008 to address the many crises facing Zimbabwe, is more comprehensive than the Kenya Agreement. It covers institutional issues such as how to create a post-colonial structure and a new macroeconomic framework. It also lays out how parties are going to share power and addresses the important topic of reconciliation. When the agreement was announced, Mugabe was very unhappy as he felt pushed into the agreement by Mbeki.

Zuma's success is based on a number of factors. First of all, he managed to include Angola and bring the country on South Africa's side so that it now does not want a joint approach to fail. He also brought a team of leading diplomats and high-class politicians on board: South African cabinet ministers Charles Nqakula and Mac Maharaj as well as Zuma's International Relations Adviser Lindiwe Zulu. He made the agreement time-bound for all parties which support the mediators' work. Finally, he engaged other parties such as the EU with Zimbabwe and created the possibility for a coherent, united approach.

With regards to the future, everyone needs to be patient as mediation will be a long process which can only be made in a series of steps. Other issues to keep in mind is that there are currently talks about a possible election next year and there is the potential for the current government to collapse as it is lacking sufficient support, especially in the international community.

Q&A SESSION:

Q: There have been many talks about South Africa's role in Zimbabwe but what about China? What role does the Chinese model play in Zimbabwe and in the Southern Africa region?

A: The situation in Zimbabwe surely must be read in a global context. The rise of Asian powers and especially China creates a space between the East and the West. This can be positive or negative but it has become clear that the quickest way for China into Africa is often in areas which the West neglects, be it because of high risk or uncertainty or be it because of a disagreement with the government in power. China sees an opportunity in Africa and in Zimbabwe and its approach and intervention does complicate the situation in Zimbabwe.

Q: What are your thoughts on the recent interview from Graça Machel in the Guardian, in which she asked Britain to re-examine its relationship with its former colonies and with view to Zimbabwe 'keep quiet'?

A: It is understandable where this view comes from. The best solution is often a conversation with all interested parties. However, with external actors, it is often difficult to bring them all together.

Q: I want to express that my institution agrees with the quality and seniority of Zuma's current mediation team and efforts. What can South Africa do to support the potential elections in Zimbabwe in 2011?

A: South Africa should support the implementation of the GPA and aim to put institutions into place, support the de-securisation of the government and improve capacity building in Zimbabwe.

Q: Firstly, there is a common statement which says that if you want to understand the problems of Africa, you need to understand the political elite. Is this true for Zimbabwe and what role does the emergence of a new political MDC elite play? Secondly, what is the role of South Africa's economic interest for the country's mediation approach?

A: Yes, South Africa has a strong economic interest and this has made South Africa act in a more aggressive way. Compared to China, South Africa's

investment has been smaller; however the country has realized that the situation will become better sooner rather than later.

Q: You spoke about the challenges of the GPA and de-securitisation but what changes can really be made when it comes to security reform if all the power lies with the ZANU-PF?

A: It is very difficult to decide for both parties which issues to put on the table. The ZANU-PF invests too much in sustaining its power rather than on transforming the state. The military issue really needs to be addressed because if the MDC would win the next election, it would not be able to run the country. They would inherit a state that they are not able to govern. At the moment, they do not have enough staff to analyse their position. This puts them into a big disadvantage compared to the ZANU-PF and creates a wrong balance of power.

Q: You have spoken about South Africa's role in much detail but what is the role and current position of other countries such as Angola?

A: While Angola used to get other African states on its side and divide the mediation process in the African Group, it is now working in cooperation with South Africa. This has been very beneficial to the process and it is important that it continues in the future.

Q: The car crash of Morgan and Susan Tsvangirai was officially reported as accident but you called it earlier an 'attempted assassination'. Could you elaborate a bit more on this issue?

A: It is difficult to provide evidence but the circumstances around her death are very suspicious. It could have been done by actors from the government or other actors who are in support of the government. Surrounding the election in 2005, there had been a rise of military forces which also could have been involved. There certainly have been a number of accidents leading to the death of high-profile politicians in Zimbabwe.