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Mediating a convoluted
conflict: South Africa's
approach to the inter-party
negotiations in Zimbabwe



By Lawrence Mhandara and Andrew Pooe

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
EU	European Union
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
JOMIC	Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai
NP	National Party
OPDS	Organ on Politics, Defence and Security
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement

Abstract

In the late 1990s, Zimbabwe became trapped in a ditch of multifaceted crises that were pronounced in the contest for political power between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This conflict revolved around the legitimacy of electoral processes, related institutions and the credibility of electoral outcomes. By 2007, the conflict had escalated to the extent that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and countries neighbouring Zimbabwe decided to mediate between the two parties to end the standoff, which had begun to negatively affect the entire southern Africa region. Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa (1999–2008), was then mandated by SADC to facilitate dialogue between the parties. Mediation efforts led to relatively credible harmonised parliamentary and presidential elections held on 29 March 2008. These elections, however, did not come up with a clear winner, forcing the country to call for a run-off. This second round of elections, held on 27 June 2008, was tainted by allegations of electoral flaws and widespread institutionalised violence. The result was a predictable regression into the pre-29 March era, prompting SADC to mandate South Africa to facilitate negotiations for a political solution among the key political players. In the face of varying interests converging on the Zimbabwe situation, South Africa's role became even more difficult.

This paper analyses South Africa's facilitation approach to the inter-party negotiation process in Zimbabwe – from Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' to current President Jacob Zuma's assertive stance – amid competing domestic and international interests. The analysis is based on critiques of realities confronting South Africa throughout the process. The paper presents South Africa's facilitation approach as a consequence of four streams: historical experiences, South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy, African conflict resolution approaches, and a diagnosis of the dynamics of the Zimbabwean conflict.

Introduction

Mediation as an approach to conflict resolution has been used for a long time in both formal and informal ways. Moore (2003) defines mediation as an extension of the negotiation process that involves the intervention of an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party, which has no authoritative decision-making power, to assist contending parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable and implementable settlement. Mediation is most relevant in attempts to resolve election- and governance-related conflicts.

Zimbabwe's political landscape changed during the last few years of the 1990s, culminating in the formation of the MDC in 1999. The MDC sought to institutionalise democratic change in response to the ruling ZANU-PF policies, which were largely blamed for stunting the country's socio-economic and political development, after a period of substantial growth in the 1980s and 90s. The political conflict escalated after the ZANU-PF-sponsored constitutional reform process was defeated during a referendum held in February 2000. From then, the political situation in Zimbabwe steadily deteriorated, with every election period since then characterised by an alleged systematic strategy to muzzle multi-party democracy to secure ZANU-PF control of the state (Raftopoulos 2013, Zondi 2012, Sachikonye 2011 and Masunungure 2011). Thus, while ZANU-PF's rhetoric in explaining Zimbabwe's political impasse since the early 2000s has been related back to colonialism-induced inequalities, the contestation was triggered, and worsened by the internal power struggles between the ruling and opposition parties which reached a climax in 2008 (Kaarhus, Derman and Sjaastad 2013 and Raftopoulos 2013).

While SADC was involved in mediating in Zimbabwe as far back as 2000, its efforts were mainly informal. But the events of 11 March 2007, which saw anti-Mugabe coalition leaders under the Save Zimbabwe Campaign beaten by the police in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, when they attempted to address their supporters, forced SADC to intervene. A special SADC summit to deliberate on the governance crisis was subsequently held in Tanzania on 27 March. The summit expressed displeasure at the turn of events in Zimbabwe and took a decision to mandate South Africa to facilitate dialogue among the key political players to find a solution to the governance question. The communiqué released

at the end of the meeting mandated former President Thabo Mbeki to continue facilitating dialogue among Zimbabwe's main political parties ZANU-PF, the MDC and the MDC-T¹ – and to report to SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS) Troika.

From the onset, South Africa's mediation had to overcome a number of internal and external challenges. Internally, South Africa had to deal with a deep mistrust between the parties, as well as address credibility concerns regarding the questioned impartiality of the mediator, Mbeki, given the historical links between South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and ZANU-PF. South Africa also had to contend with constant demands by countries in the West for a forceful approach against Robert Mugabe.

This paper examines South Africa's SADC-mandated mediation in Zimbabwe. The roots of the conflict in the country are explored first in order to facilitate an appreciation of the basis for SADC's intervention, before presenting an examination of the competing interests of various internal and external actors, and how these complicated the resolution strategy. South Africa's mediation approaches under both Mbeki and Zuma's leadership are analysed as a prologue to the lessons learnt, recommendation and conclusion.

The gestation of the Zimbabwe conflict

Post-colonial Zimbabwe was fundamentally shaped by two legacies which, even in 2013, continued to define the country's political landscape. First, the legacies of the brutal and authoritarian settler colonial state and, second, that independent Zimbabwe was in the main a product of a protracted armed struggle (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003 and Moyo 1993). The two points form an essential historical context in understanding the actions, emotions and roles of the various actors in Zimbabwe. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003), the other major consideration for the post-colonial Zimbabwe era was the approach taken to deal with the practical peace and security perspectives arising out of the geopolitical realities of the southern Africa region, particularly the sharing of a border with apartheid South Africa.

1 Prior to 2005 there was one MDC in Zimbabwe. The party split into two parties – the smaller MDC which retained the name, and the MDC-T, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, the founder of the original MDC.

As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003:114) notes, the 1980s were characterised by an ‘ambiguous’ and ‘contradictory situation whereby the powerful aspirations of the ordinary citizens for rights, democracy and human security co-existed with the strong and resilient practices of authoritarianism and violence’. Major incidences of violence during the first decade of Zimbabwe’s post-colonial era happened during what is known as the *Gukurahundi*² in the country’s Matebeleland regions, and some parts of the Midlands. According to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation (1997), after the failure to fully integrate former Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe Peoples’ Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) forces into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), as demonstrated by fighting witnessed at assembly points during the demobilisation period, some ex-ZIPRA forces fled into the countryside in Matebeleland and Midlands provinces to become dissidents. *Gukurahundi* was a military operation undertaken by the North Korea-trained 5th Brigade of the ZNA to eliminate the threat of dissidents, who sought to destabilise and undermine the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) government. The operation set a precedence for how the nationalist government would deal with political opponents in the future. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003), the conflict, which led to more than 20 000 deaths, only ended with a unity accord signed by the Zimbabwe African Peoples’ Union (ZAPU) and ZANU. The 1987 Zimbabwe National Unity Accord was less a negotiation between ZANU and ZAPU, but was rather a mere presentation of a completed document to ZAPU for minor amendments and subsequent acceptance. The Accord paved the way for the creation of ZANU-PF. In essence, the amalgamation of the two rival political parties created a de facto one-party state. Zimbabweans resisted this state of affairs by forming opposition parties, including the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), the United Parties and the Zimbabwe Union for Democrats.

2 *Gukurahundi*, which in Shona refers to the early rain that washes away chaff before the spring rains, relates to the brutal suppression of civilians who mostly supported Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU in the predominantly Ndebele-speaking regions of Zimbabwe. The *Gukurahundi* operation was in response to the dissident activities of former disgruntled ZIPRA combatants who sought to oust Mugabe and his party from power. Because the operation claimed more than 20 000 lives, it has sometimes been concluded that it was an attempted genocide of the Ndebele ethnic group.

The second decade after independence saw the Government of Zimbabwe attempting to liberalise the economy through the implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), launched in 1990. The implementation of the ESAP represented change from the state-led economic development of the 1980s to a more market-driven economy (Kanyenze et al. 2011 and Raftopoulos and Savage 2005). The ESAP elicited a domino effect in the political discourse, and consequently contributed to the socio-economic and political crisis as it unfolded between 1999 and 2013. Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010), Sachikonye (2008), Moss (2007) and Mashingaidze (2006) concur that Mugabe's government compounded the situation when it took a decision in 1997 to give in to the demands of war veterans, and made unbudgeted payouts³ in recognition of their role in the liberation struggle. The decision taken to deploy troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on 19 August 2008, to support Laurent Kabila's regime in a war that ultimately cost Zimbabwe an estimated US\$1 billion, also contributed to political problems in the country.

The end of this decade – as was the case in 1989 with the birth of Edgar Tekere's ZUM and other parties – saw the 1999 formation of a new political party, the MDC. Since independence, no political party had threatened the dominance of ZANU-PF as much as the MDC – which the former dismissed as a front for Western neo-imperialism working to reverse its land policy.⁴ However, competition for

3 Each war veteran was paid a lump sum of Z\$50 000 and a monthly pay-out of Z\$2 000. Mhanda (2011) calculates that the Z\$50 000 was equivalent to US\$4 000, while the Z\$2 000 monthly payout was equal to US\$150. The amounts were paid to more than 35 000 former ZANLA and ZIPRA combatants.

4 ZANU-PF's position was justified to some extent given the pronouncements by British government officials of their fondness for the MDC. For instance, former British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, during an address to the House of Commons in January 2010, indicated that Britain's policy on Zimbabwe was 'guided by what the MDC says to us...'. Further evidence supporting Mugabe and ZANU-PF's claims emerged as a result of the WikiLeaks saga, which exposed the complicity of Western governments with the MDC to effect regime change in Zimbabwe. *The Herald* of 7 February 2011, in an article entitled 'MDC-T working with West on sanctions – WikiLeaks', reported that the WikiLeaks website revealed that the MDC-T had been working with the European Union (EU) to determine the kind of sanctions to be imposed on Zimbabwe. The same report claimed that London admitted it was receiving direction from the MDC-T on how to conduct its sanctions policy on Zimbabwe.

power became a fatal business as ZANU-PF began to institutionalise violence and intimidation through co-opting security forces to protect its incumbency (Raftopoulos and Savage 2005, Sachikonye et al. 2007, Masunungure 2011 and Sachikonye 2011). The rising popularity of the MDC corresponded with ZANU-PF's waning political fortunes. This set the stage for a showdown, not only between ZANU-PF and the MDC, but also between the ruling party and white commercial farmers, whom ZANU-PF had been quick to identify as the main culprits behind the success of the MDC. This set in motion a phase of bitter racial politics⁵, which were underlined by the systematic suppression of any activity that threatened ZANU-PF's political hegemony (Chan 2010, Mlambo and Raftopoulos 2010 and Chikane 2012).

Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010) note that the state of the conflict in Zimbabwe could best be described as one rooted in the long-term structural political-economic legacies of colonial rule, combined with the legacies of African nationalist politics. They add that the explosion of the crisis should be understood in the context of a major threat to the political future of the ruling party. In relation to the two main internal actors, Cawthra (2010) notes that perspectives on the nature of the crisis differed dramatically between the two sides, with the MDC focusing on governance issues, whilst ZANU-PF blamed Western neo-imperialism.

The events that finally brought about the intervention of the African Union (AU), through SADC, occurred at the Zimbabwe show grounds in Harare on 11 March 2007, when civil society and opposition leaders were attacked by police. Opposition and civil society leaders had intended to attend a scheduled prayer meeting under the banner of the Save Zimbabwe Campaign. Police tried to prevent the meeting, but participants insisted on it going ahead. This resulted in a violent response from police as they desperately sought to disperse the gathering.

5 For example, after announcing the triumph of the 'No' vote in a 2000 constitutional referendum, the then minister of information and publicity in Mugabe's government launched a tirade against Zimbabwe's white community. He noted that 'preliminary figures show there were 100 000 white people voting. We have never seen anything like that in this country. They were all over town. Everyone who observed will tell you there were long queues of whites. The difference between the 'yes' and 'no' vote would not have been what it was had it not been for this vote.' (Chan 2010:10).

The trajectory of the inter-party negotiations: Internal and external interests

Chan (2010:44) notes that ‘although committed to gentle-manly manners, [international diplomacy] is a viper’s nest of ungentle-manly conduct’. The process that culminated in the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) – in particular, the actions of key stakeholders, both domestic and international – was certainly not a process reserved for ‘holy cows’, nor is it possible to isolate its trajectory from a ‘viper’s nest of ungentle-manly conduct’. This chapter will assess the conduct, interests, motives and roles played by the multiple actors towards the formulation of the GPA, as well as the inter-party negotiations on political and electoral reforms that occurred after the inauguration of the inclusive government. This understanding paves the way for locating South Africa’s approach in Zimbabwe within dominant conflict management and resolution approaches on the African continent.

Domestic actors: The expedition for state power

Whilst SADC was involved in the Zimbabwe crisis as far back as 2000 and the contentious 2002 presidential elections,⁶ the ongoing stimulus for its involvement was the controversy that often accompanied elections in the country. Badza (2009), Raftopoulos (2013) and Kaarhus et al. (2013) agree that although the March 2008 harmonised elections were relatively free and fair, the need for inter-party negotiations was necessitated by the controversy related to the flawed 27 June run-off.⁷

Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010:8) note that Mbeki made it known, after receiving the SADC mandate, that South Africa’s, and his, role was essential to speedily ‘... begin the process leading to the normalisation of the situation in

6 Zondi (2012) observes that prior to the 11 March 2007 incident, SADC’s effort was part of the AU’s approach to find political solutions through behind-the-scenes efforts of former presidents Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique), Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria) and Thabo Mbeki (South Africa) and former AU chairpersons.

7 The run-off was flawed because of incidences of violence during the campaign period, where opposition supporters were targeted. *World News* (2008) reported that a week before the run-off contest between Tsvangirai and Mugabe, about 70 opposition supporters were tortured and killed by supporters of Mugabe. The toll grew as the date of the poll approached. Also see Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (2008).

Zimbabwe and the resumption of its development and reconstruction process intended to achieve a better life for all Zimbabweans on a sustained and sustainable basis'. The electoral reforms that ZANU-PF and the two MDC parties, the MDC and MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), agreed on partially succeeded, as demonstrated by the generally accepted conditions of the March 2008 elections, even though the results were not conclusive.

Primarily as a result of the incidences of violence that occurred during the presidential run-off, it became clear to SADC and the AU that it was necessary to work on creating conditions that would allow parties to close ranks and pave the way for a compromise solution. Consequently, the inclusive government to which the parties agreed appeared to be consistent with Mbeki's aim for a sustainable solution that would curtail the deepening socio-economic crisis. The formation of an inclusive government could also have been influenced by Mbeki's experience in South Africa's transition talks, which resulted in a Government of National Unity (GNU) between the ANC and the National Party (NP).

For the MDC-T and ZANU-PF, the GPA was not necessarily a popular concept. In the MDC-T, a hardliner faction was strongly opposed to the idea of an inclusive government. Within this faction was the influential party treasurer, Roy Bennett. He remarked: 'We won't touch a government of unity – over my dead body, under no circumstances. The people will never accept a GNU' (Godwin 2010:179). This stance highlights one of the challenges that Mbeki faced in working towards ensuring the acceptance of the GPA. On the other hand, Bennett's observation about what happened to ZAPU in its talks with ZANU, which led to the 1987 Unity Accord, may be interpreted as an acknowledgement by the MDC-T leadership of ZANU-PF's experience in coalition politics. Yet, the MDC-T was faced with real and practical limitations that made the possibility of the GPA and the inclusive government unavoidable. Eppel and Raftopoulos (2008) explain some of the considerations that influenced the MDC-T to accede to the GPA. These include:

- failure to dislodge ZANU-PF from power through the ballot box
- escalating socio-economic and political suffering of the ordinary people
- a degree of uncertainty over the efficacy of Western pressure against Mugabe's government to cede power.

They further note that one of the MDC-T's key strategies was to frustrate the mediation process, primarily due to the party's discomfort with what it perceived as Mbeki's closeness to ZANU-PF (Eppel and Raftopoulos 2008). This was done with the intention of pushing the mediation process from SADC to the AU, and ultimately the United Nations (UN) in the MDC-T's quest for full control of the state through participation in the GPA. This position was not only consistent with the party's distrust of Mbeki and his 'quiet diplomacy' approach; it also resonated strongly with the position of the EU and United States of America (USA). This is because South Africa, SADC and the AU frustrated both the EU's and US's efforts to influence the UN Security Council (UNSC) to impose sanctions on Mugabe's government. By attempting to isolate SADC from the mediation process, the MDC-T not only demonstrated lack of experience and understanding of the dynamics within the AU and the SADC region, but also pushed South Africa's sympathy more towards ZANU-PF. MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai's frustrations and his party's offensive against the mediation efforts were consistent, as demonstrated by his public calls for Mbeki's removal as facilitator of the process. Others were also of the opinion that Mbeki's facilitation was ineffective. Three months after the GPA was signed, former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer pointed out: 'We think the facilitation is over, it led to [a] power sharing agreement that is flawed' (Chikane 2012:137).

For ZANU-PF, the concept of sharing power, following years of unlimited access to and grip on the state machinery and most levers of power in Zimbabwe, was highly unattractive. According to Masunungure (2011), ZANU-PF was caught in a quandary that can best be described as a 'crisis of legitimacy', which refers to the party's loss of popular support, and a 'crisis of efficacy', which speaks to ZANU-PF's failure to provide goods and services and to keep the economy and state infrastructure from deteriorating. In addition to these internal dynamics, there was also pressure on the country from SADC and the AU, following the violence that accompanied the 2008 presidential run-off. The GPA therefore became a necessary tool for ZANU-PF to regroup and consolidate its position, both in the country and on the continent.

The MDC split in 2005 after Tsvangirai objected to a decision by key figures in his party, led by the party's secretary-general, Professor Welshman Ncube, to participate in the 2005 senate elections. Tsvangirai's objection was in line with the MDC's decision in 2004 that it would not participate in any further elections in Zimbabwe until it believed the conditions were conducive for free and fair elections. The split, which happened on 12 October 2005, created a larger party led by Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and a smaller party, which retained the MDC name, then led by Arthur Mutambara and currently led by Ncube. The smaller MDC positioned itself as a kingmaker and voice of reason⁸ during dialogue leading up to the signing of the GPA. At the time, the MDC leaned towards supporting ZANU-PF, mainly because it did not enjoy much support from the West. The leaders of the reconstituted MDC supported ZANU-PF by calling for the removal of Western sanctions, which Mutambara maintained were spoiling the negotiating environment.

The material conditions prevailing at the time were such that the possibility of applying the 'winner takes all' approach was minimal, if not non-existent, given that the outcome of the March 2008 election failed to produce an outright victor as president. The contradictions and cleavages among the main political voices in Zimbabwe presented further challenges for Mbeki in his attempts to balance interests in the negotiation process.

External actors: Self-determination versus regime change agenda

The genesis of SADC's attempts to find a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe may be traced back to 2000, amid worries harboured by regional leaders that the country's deteriorating economy and governance situation directly threatened the stability of the region. In 2000, SADC despatched Mbeki and the ex-presidents of Mozambique and Namibia, Joaquim Chissano and Sam Nujoma respectively, to engage with Mugabe on Zimbabwe's land reform process following the occupation of white-owned farms by war veterans. According to Mbeki, Mugabe was fully supportive of the SADC initiative, but

8 When both Tsvangirai and Mugabe were unable to agree on the sharing of cabinet posts under the envisaged inclusive government, the leader of the smaller MDC, Mutambara, addressed the nation, appealing to both Tsvangirai and Mugabe to work for the national interest rather than self-interest and partisanship.

blamed the ‘world powers’ for failing to honour the commitment they made at the 1998 donor conference on the Zimbabwe land question (Chikane 2013). At this conference, both the United Kingdom (UK) and Zimbabwe governments agreed on the framework and principles of international assistance on land resettlement. According to Thomas (2003), the international donor assistance framework was supposed to be implemented in two phases. The first phase was concerned with the establishment of a task force of major donors, who were assigned to work out the modalities of a two-year resettlement programme. This was to be followed by a second phase, which was supposed to achieve the implementation of a donor-supported land acquisition and resettlement programme. It is alleged that the UK backtracked on its commitment by refusing to join the task force, effectively stalling the reform programme.⁹

SADC’s intervention highlighted a genuine consideration of both the domestic situation, as represented by the discontentment and frustrations of war veterans, which led to the occupation of white-owned farms, and the recognition that these occupations were wrong, as they made a mockery of the rule of law. At international level, Mbeki had to engage with the ‘world powers’ – in particular the UK government – to try and encourage the adoption of a different stance that would result in a solution acceptable to both Mugabe and the white farmers, whose interests were intrinsically linked with those of the UK, as Zimbabwe’s former colonial master. At southern Africa level, it has been argued that Mbeki had to grapple with a dilemma of a different sort. On the one hand, he realised that if ZANU-PF were to remain in power, this would result in further state repression, resulting in mass migrations in the region, particularly affecting Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. On the other, he suspected that if the MDC were to have its way, Western powers would achieve their strategic goal of regime change in Zimbabwe as they remained adamant that they were not interested in any other outcome except to change

9 This position is dismissed by Paul Boateng, the former British high commissioner to South Africa. He argues that the UK was committed to supporting the land reform programme in Zimbabwe, but Mugabe’s government violated the principles agreed at the conference – that is, the land reform programme was to be undertaken with due respect to the principles of transparency, the rule of law and poverty reduction, among others (Boateng 2009).

the Mugabe-led government. Allowing this would go against SADC and AU positions.

The non-agreement of Western countries with the SADC initiative's objectives appeared to have a direct impact on how Mbeki and SADC approached the Zimbabwe crisis. It has been put forward that the attitude of Western nations may have sent a message that they were arrogant to SADC and AU leadership, and in the process benefited Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

It can be argued that the worst moment for UK-Zimbabwe relations, particularly in relation to the issue of land, was when Tony Blair's Labour Party assumed power in May 1997. A letter, written on 5 November 1997 by UK secretary of state for international development, Claire Short, to Zimbabwe's former minister of agriculture and land, the late Kumbirai Kangai, repudiating the UK's responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe, solidified the diplomatic fall-out (Nyakudya 2013). The public spats that took place between Mugabe and his government, and the UK government, can be traced back to the UK's position on the land question. The UK government's position vindicated Mugabe and ZANU-PF's stance that the sanctions and international hostility were triggered by the land question.

The West's refusal to appreciate the deep emotions and sensitivities of the land issue set the stage for antagonism with SADC on the Zimbabwe issue. The UK and US governments, rather than engage in constructive dialogue with the region, opted to push for regime change. Key to this objective were attempts to categorise Zimbabwe as a 'rogue state' and target Zimbabwe's economy in hopes that the deteriorating economic and humanitarian crisis would lead to a popular revolt that would unseat Mugabe and ZANU-PF. According to Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010), the post-9/11 world order and the Zimbabwe regime change agenda, as advocated by then US President George W. Bush, heightened the sensitivities of many African states to opposition movements viewed as agents seeking to achieve the same in their territories. The contradiction was that while SADC and the AU regarded Mugabe and ZANU-PF as important in consolidating stability and democracy in Zimbabwe, the West sustained a superficial view based on the false assumption that the panacea to the conflict was the removal of Mugabe from power.

Mbeki also had to be sensitive to the SADC decision-making culture, while at the same time maintaining the perception that he was not alienating the West and Zimbabwe's opposition parties. SADC's decisions and responses to issues in the region are based on consensus. However, this does not mean that there are competing or opposing ideas in the regional body. That SADC was not always united on the Zimbabwe issue was demonstrated by Botswana's open criticism of the 2008 presidential election when President Ian Khama labelled Mugabe 'repressive' and called for elections to be supervised by the international community. Other countries, most notably Zambia, with minor variance, supported Botswana's position (Cawthra 2010). It has been argued that governments led by former liberation movements (Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa) tended to be more favourable to Mugabe and ZANU-PF than those which did not engage in armed struggle for their liberation – among them Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia (Kaarhus et al. 2013). Therefore, to some extent, it can be argued that South Africa's approach was influenced by its location in the same group with Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF.

South Africa's approach to the facilitation process under Mbeki and Zuma

The inter-party negotiation process in Zimbabwe can be captured in three phases: the pre-2008 harmonised election phase; the post-harmonised election phase; and the period after the inauguration of the inclusive government leading to the 2013 harmonised elections. The mediation was conducted by two South African presidents, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma.

Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy'

According to Dzinesa and Zambara (2011), Mbeki's mediation goals were three-fold. First, the three parties had to endorse the decision to hold the harmonised presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2008. Second, they had to agree on the conditions that would result in an environment which would produce fair and credible elections. Third, they had to agree on measures that would facilitate the acceptance of the outcomes of the elections. However, it was clear from the onset that Mbeki's mediation was going to face enormous challenges, mainly owing to the interplay of the domestic and

foreign interests already discussed. At domestic level, 'battle lines' were drawn by ZANU-PF between itself and the opposition political parties. Raftopoulos (2013) posits that on the one hand, the ruling party emphasised its privileged role in delivering both independence and the land to the people, in the process denigrating the post-nationalist alternative¹⁰ movements as voices bent on mortgaging the country's independence and resources to Western countries. On the other, the post-nationalist voices, including the MDC, devised a strategy that depicted ZANU-PF as a fearsome authoritarian organisation seeking to monopolise power through unorthodox means, thereby subverting popular will. Similarly, Dzinesa and Zambara (2011) posit that political processes are complex and are not immune from the totality of global activities and events. With the Zimbabwe conflict widely reported on and, at the same time, proving to be a highly divisive topic among many countries on the continent and internationally, the different positions adopted by both domestic and international actors, and how they shaped South Africa's approach to its SADC-mandated mediation role in the inter-party negotiations, deserve scrutiny.

In 1996 Mbeki, who was then deputy president of South Africa, delivered a speech titled 'I am an African' in South Africa's parliament. The speech laid the foundation for the ANC government to develop and implement its African Renaissance vision, whilst simultaneously putting Mbeki as a central figure in its implementation (Chikane 2012 and Kagwanja 2006).

From the time of his inauguration as the president of South Africa in 1999, Mbeki was confronted with the responsibility to correct some of the pitfalls of unilateralism in diplomatic consultations on African peace and security concerns that had occurred under Nelson Mandela's leadership – among them South Africa's military intervention in Lesotho, and in the Nigerian political crisis which led to the hanging of the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, Ken Saro-Wiwa, during then President Sani Abacha's tenure. South Africa under Mbeki was thus placed in a position where it considered it prudent to consult on matters of international relations with African counterparts. Perhaps central to the decision to consult were two critical

10 According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003:101) a 'post-nationalist alternative is grounded in civil society and social movements and predicated on empowerment and participation of people in governance'.

considerations: first, Mbeki's government was concerned with being viewed as resuscitating the hegemonic tendency that defined apartheid South Africa by dictating a solution to the Zimbabwe conflict. As Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010) highlight, the South African government under Mbeki was sensitive about being viewed as a regional bully, pushing its own agenda in conflict situations. However, McKinley (2006) advances the argument that since South Africa's policy was constructed out of fear of being perceived as hegemonic, its policy could also have been suited to the political and economic interests of the ruling elites in South Africa. Despite this possibility, the foremost aim of democratic South Africa was to distinguish itself from the destabilising practices of the apartheid regime. In this regard, the pursuit of economic interests became secondary. Mbeki seized the Zimbabwean situation as an opportunity to relocate South Africa's policy within the context of the regional multilateral framework.

In addition, Mbeki had to engage with Mugabe, a liberation leader with substantial support within SADC and beyond. The South African government could not afford to risk isolation by advancing solutions that appeared to contradict progressive African opinions. South Africa's policy required adherence to pan-Africanism and resonance with the ambition to be the leading voice from the global South (Barrow 2001 and Calland 2003). These considerations advance the view that South Africa could not openly criticise a neighbour that was seemingly addressing the fundamental needs of Zimbabweans, especially through its implementation of the land reform programme. This was despite international denigration of non-antagonistic policy towards Mugabe. These realities perhaps explain Mbeki's approach, which was heavily coloured by his earlier perception of the 'white community' as having stubborn and arrogant mindsets that sought to dictate the outcome of everything.¹¹

Lipton (2009) posits that South Africa's stance on Zimbabwe needs to be understood in the context of the former's wider foreign policy, as spelt out by the ANC. This policy prioritises non-racism; playing a leading role in the African Renaissance; state sovereignty and multilateralism; non-violence and

11 This was a sentiment expressed by Mbeki on the eve of the tense 2002 presidential election in Zimbabwe in which Mugabe and Tsvangirai were the main contenders. The statement revealed frustration with the demands of the 'white community', who were pressuring Mbeki to condemn Mugabe's policies.

diplomacy to solve inter-state disputes; democracy; the upholding of human rights; and good governance. This was reinforced by Mbeki as quoted in McKinley (2006:96) when he explained ‘...as patriots who occupied the same trench of struggle with the people of Zimbabwe ... we together, battled to end white minority rule in the region and continent...’ It can thus be argued that Mbeki’s stance on Zimbabwe, on behalf of South Africa, SADC and the AU, in defence of Zimbabwe’s sovereignty was a patriotic duty. In this way, pre- and post-independence historical linkages and personal contacts influenced the character of SADC mediation and South Africa’s conflict resolution approach in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011).

Chikane (2013:56) notes that since taking up the presidency in 1999, Mbeki and his team of advisors assumed that the practical approach to the African Renaissance vision was for ‘Africa to reassert its sovereignty and capacity to make its own decisions about its future without the dictates of superpowers. African countries had to stop being ‘client states’ that governed in the interests of powerful groups and interest groups and not in the interest of the people of Africa or their countries’. This stance augured well with Mugabe’s assertive foreign policy which was based on pan-Africanism; hence South Africa and ZANU-PF were more likely to find common ground, compared to the MDC-T which was compromised by perceptions that it was advancing Western interests.

The political immaturity of the MDC-T, whose strategy sought to appease whites – especially Zimbabwe’s former commercial farmers and Western governments – rather than focusing on the plight of the poor majority, provided South Africa with the basis for its policy of seemingly siding with the liberators (Mugabe and ZANU-PF), despite their shortcomings, and even in the face of internal opposition and pressure.¹² South Africa was also aware of the fact that Mugabe’s government took advantage of the racial discourse of its empowerment policies, especially the land reform programme, to construct and propagate the idea that the Zimbabwean government’s policy was a bulwark against neo-imperialism. As Mugabe’s government argued, at the core of this strategy was the struggle to free the majority from the negative effects of

12 As far back as 2003, ANC alliance partners, among them the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU), publicly criticised Mbeki’s quiet diplomacy.

dominant white interests. This message appealed to the emotions of the rural population that made up Mugabe's primary support base. South Africa did not want to fall into the trap of openly criticising Mugabe, bearing in mind that any negative criticism of Mugabe's policies would be met with equally virulent responses from Harare. Those who publicly challenged Mugabe's policies were accused of working with the enemy, and they were pejoratively labelled agents of 'white interests'. South Africa's policy was therefore designed to avert the 'sell-out' tag. Mbeki's approach seemed to accept Mugabe and his party's definition of the major issues as being about the legacies of imperialism, rather than an internal struggle for power.

For South Africa, Mbeki and his facilitation team, the broader vision of the African Renaissance was more about a clear definition and understanding of the roles to be played by different actors in the international arena, than antagonising any block. The view also demonstrates the high level of sophistication and pragmatism in Mbeki's foreign policy approach. Thus, Mbeki's vilified 'quiet diplomacy' on Zimbabwe, which was consistent with his African Renaissance project, was also informed by material and practical considerations. These considerations included:

- Mugabe's support on the African continent
- fear of isolation owing to the 'big brother' label
- that the outcome of having a peaceful and stable Zimbabwe was more strategic than the alternative of having to deal with a failed state
- the history of Zimbabwe and South Africa's liberation struggles; in particular, the relations between Mbeki's ANC and Mugabe's ZANU-PF (Kagwanja 2006). The historical connections between Mbeki and Mugabe are equally important. While in exile in the 1980s, Mbeki was hosted by Mugabe in Zimbabwe (Gevisser 2007).

In this regard, it was strategic for Mbeki to use SADC as leverage to mitigate some of South Africa's limitations. Kagwanja (2006:29) posits that Mbeki's multilateral approach to the Zimbabwe dialogue falls within the realm of diplomacy necessary to put society back on track through 'the instruments of persuasion, mediation, negotiation, and peer pressure, compared with 'hard

power' represented by the military might' – one that seeks to project an image of a 'gentle giant' rather than a 'big brother'.

Despite sustained regional and international media reports and criticisms seeking regime change in Zimbabwe, South Africa's approach remained consistent with the solidarity and pan-African framework that characterises African politics. Polarised views on the Zimbabwe crisis, which were often loaded with racial undertones, were not only reserved for the domestic landscape – in most cases South Africa was not only a springboard, but also a target, of this media onslaught. This is primarily because being mindful both of its role as a mediator and diplomatic etiquette, South Africa refused to denounce Mugabe publicly – a position which was unacceptable to the media. South Africa's former President Kgalema Motlanthe (September 2008–May 2009) explained the conduct of the media as follows: 'They go on as if we have the authority and right to tell Zimbabweans what we want them to do in their own country. After all is said and done, it is only the Zimbabweans themselves who can resolve the crisis there. All we can do at the best of times is to play a facilitative role and try and share our views on problems in their country' (Harvey 2012:136). This kind of view is often championed in the public domain by media as South Africa's blind endorsement of ZANU-PF. It may also capture how intrinsically the views of the media were in sync with perceived Western interests of regime change in Zimbabwe.

Mbeki located the root of the crisis in Zimbabwe to the unfinished land reform programme. To the facilitator, the issue of land reform was heavily intertwined with the transition of South Africa from apartheid to democracy. Mbeki explained the sacrifices Mugabe and Zimbabwe had to make to allow for a smooth transition in South Africa. He noted: 'As an outstanding act of African solidarity, the Government of Zimbabwe decided on this delay expressly to facilitate the then ongoing negotiations in South Africa, from 1990 onwards, concerned that nothing should be done in Zimbabwe which would so frighten the white South African population that it will oppose our own country's transformation' (African Globe 2013). As far as South Africa was concerned, at the core of Mugabe's land reform programme were efforts to address the large-scale white ownership of land at the expense of the majority. McKinley (2006)

observes that for the majority of the 'white community', the land policy was a political instrument used by Mugabe to maintain power at the expense of white Zimbabweans and black Zimbabweans who did not support his government. The result is that the majority of countries which opposed Mugabe were mainly from the global North, with a white majority, while mainly non-whites and countries from the global South supported Mugabe and his ZANU-PF government. South Africa, as part of the global South, found it increasingly difficult to criticise Mugabe's policy.

The West's failure to capture the depth of emotions running in countries such as Namibia and South Africa regarding the land issue only served to entrench the isolation of the MDC parties from the region, particularly given that at the time the MDC, especially the Tsvangirai-led party, lacked a coherent strategy to diffuse the 'Western puppet' stigma it had attracted. In addition, given fresh memories of how the US and UK governments sided with South Africa's apartheid government, support for the MDC-T against another liberation movement and contempt directed at SADC initiatives demonstrated serious deficiencies in the West's policies in capturing the political dynamics in the SADC region. For the UK government, addressing its loss of influence in the region should have taken greater precedence than a narrow policy narrative focused on removing one individual from power. The radicalisation of the discourse on Zimbabwe thus influenced South Africa's approach. McKinley (2006:87) concludes that Mugabe successfully 'enjoined the dual discourse of race and nationalism as a means of forging ... nationalist solidarity predominantly defined by considerations of an internationalised racial differentiation'. South Africa was a willing partner in this solidarity at the regional, continental and global levels. Raftopoulos (2004) further notes that Mugabe's definition of the Zimbabwean crisis in the lexicon of race and liberation history ensured that his message resonated in other struggles by blacks, regionally and internationally. To some extent, this provides a ready-made explanation for South Africa's cautious approach in engaging the Mugabe government on alleged human rights abuses and incidences of political repression. This view has the effect of insinuating that South Africa approved of Mugabe's policies, and further presupposes that racial and political solidarity primarily informed South Africa's mediation approach in Zimbabwe.

Mbeki's consolidation of his authority and position as lead mediator among Western countries may be traced to a meeting held in Pretoria with then US President George W. Bush. After that meeting, Bush, in relation to the Zimbabwe situation, remarked: 'It is a very sad situation that has taken place in that country. President Mbeki is working with the issue. We share the same outcome... President Mbeki is the point man. He is in touch with the issues' (Burbidge et al. 2008). For Bush to call Mbeki the 'point man' on Zimbabwe, given the tense atmosphere that existed before the meeting, was not only unexpected but was a clear example of how Mbeki, as the SADC facilitator, managed to close ranks on the Zimbabwe issue and stand firm. Perhaps Zuma's view that 'Mbeki had a style which almost hypnotised people' gives insight into what might have transpired in that meeting (Harvey 2012:137). Henceforth, it was clear that Mbeki and the SADC agenda defined and determined the course of the inter-party negotiations that led to the GPA. The GPA and the inclusive government thus marked a triumph for Mbeki's much-criticised 'quiet diplomacy' and, more significantly, SADC and the AU's peaceful conflict management and resolution approach.

Mbeki's strategy in dealing with the conflict was also embedded in the 'African solutions to Africa's problems' mantra, which falls within the context of the broader African Renaissance project that gained momentum in the 1990s. This project saw Mbeki establishing the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute which emphasised and promoted his mantra.¹³ According to Derso (2012), Africa's quest for self-determination and leadership in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict on the continent takes shape in two dimensions. First is the issue of control of the entire analysis, including defining and understanding the security challenges facing the continent. This dimension inherently recognises the space for indigenous frameworks and approaches to Africa's conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Second is the dimension that African leadership is better positioned to formulate and implement solutions to the affected areas. It is also an approach that avoids haste and short-term solutions, akin to the megaphone diplomacy preferred by developed countries in complex conflicts. The role of South Africa in attempting to manage and resolve the Zimbabwean standoff should be understood within the context of the 1976

13 See Thabo Mbeki Foundation <<http://www.thabombekifoundation.org.za>>.

Organisation of African Unity decision that places regional organisations at the centre of conflict management and resolution in member states.

South Africa's mediation under Mbeki stressed dialogue and non-intervention in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. This approach was often pejoratively labelled 'quiet diplomacy', attracting rebukes from both Western countries, which preferred tougher action against Mugabe and ZANU-PF, and the local opposition – especially the MDC-T – and civil society groups, which discredited the approach and expressed frustration, accusing Mbeki of siding with the incumbent and his party.

Zuma's failed assertive posture

Zuma, as head of South Africa's mediation team, came in the footsteps of Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' and with the MDC-T expecting Mbeki's successor to be tough with ZANU-PF to ensure that the country moved towards fair and credible elections. Zuma's task was to facilitate the drawing up and implementation of an election roadmap, as required by the GPA to ensure the implementation of key reforms which would pave the way for elections. At the height of his facilitation efforts, Zuma was applauded for his approach. During a visit to South Africa in June 2013, US President Barack Obama praised Zuma's efforts for having presented 'an opportunity... to move into a new phase where perhaps Zimbabwe can finally achieve all its promises'. In general, Zuma was viewed as less sympathetic to Mugabe and ZANU-PF (Kaarhus, et al. 2013).

An examination of SADC summit and Troika resolutions since Zuma took over the mediation in 2009 indicates that the regional body consistently demanded the full implementation of reforms before elections could be held:

- At the first summit in Kinshasa, DRC in 2009, Zimbabwe's leaders were urged to fully implement the GPA.
- At the summit held in Livingstone, Zambia in March 2011, SADC resolved to appoint additional officials to work on the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) to monitor, evaluate and implement the GPA. SADC also decided to assist Zimbabwe to formulate guidelines to support the country to hold

peaceful, free and fair elections, in line with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

- At the summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 2012, SADC resolved to assist JOMIC and urged the Troika to be focused on the implementation of the GPA.
- At its December 2012 summit held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the regional grouping expressed its displeasure with delays in implementing the GPA (Moyo 2013 and Mugabe 2013).
- At the summit held in Maputo, Mozambique in June 2013 SADC endorsed Zuma's call for more reforms before elections and recommended that the political parties petition the court for 'more time beyond the 31 July 2013 deadline for holding the harmonised elections'. This was the same position that was pushed by the two MDCs (Sibanda and Mushava 2013).

There is no doubt that SADC was consistent in demanding the implementation of the reforms. However, the facilitation team failed to convince Mugabe and ZANU-PF to delay the polls to facilitate the full implementation of the reforms necessary for the holding of credible elections. Although Zuma's facilitation team was very assertive¹⁴ on the need for parties to adhere to the roadmap, Mugabe proceeded to set a date for elections, disregarding the SADC roadmap and Zuma's opinion.

ZANU-PF was largely blamed for the failure of the reform process¹⁵ as Mugabe unilaterally proclaimed 31 July 2013 as the election date, following a constitutional court ruling on the matter. The court had ordered on 31 May 2013 that elections be held by 31 July 2013.

14 Sibanda and Mushava (2013) note that Zuma's international relations advisor, Lindiwe Zulu, explained 'As the facilitator put it at the summit, we want the comfort of having a clear roadmap to the elections, with timelines agreed upon by the parties themselves. The ultimate goal is to have credible elections. We want to avoid the 2008 scenario'. These comments were made ahead of the SADC Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Maputo, Mozambique, which sought to discuss Mugabe's unilateral fixing of the date of the 31 July 2013 harmonised election.

15 See International Crisis Group (2013a and 2011).

The 2013 harmonised election, which Mugabe and ZANU-PF won,¹⁶ was marred by irregularities. The Government of Botswana's observer team report noted that the elections were free and peaceful, but not free and fair – the *sine qua non* for credible elections (Sokwanele 2013). The report further observed that the voters' roll was released only in hard copy and a mere two days before the election. Other challenges included the reported irregular exclusion and inclusion of people on the voters' roll and allegations that large numbers of people were denied the right to vote. The general conclusion of the observer mission was that the elections were not in conformity with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. Paradoxically, Zuma was the first to congratulate Mugabe and ZANU-PF and urge the opposition to accept the outcome. The South African government proceeded to end its mediation role in Zimbabwe unilaterally on 20 August 2013 (Mugabe 2013). This put Zuma at cross-purpose with the opposition, particularly the MDC-T, which did not accept the results.

Since attaining its independence, South Africa has exuded the potential and ambition to be the leading voice, not only in SADC, but also in Africa. However, doubts have been expressed over the country's credibility as an effective leader, given its perceived failure to lead Zimbabwe to a credible election. Following the announcement of the election results, Zuma's international relations advisor, Lindiwe Zulu, reported that South Africa's mediation role had come to an end. This was despite allegations that Mugabe and ZANU-PF had masterminded electoral irregularities that helped them to win. Zulu explained: 'If you read the GPA, the role of the facilitator started where it started until elections. We don't have anything to do. It's now with SADC. President Zuma did everything he was supposed to do and did exactly what the GPA said' (Sokwanele 2013). Zulu's statement suggests that the way forward on Zimbabwe was thereafter the responsibility of SADC as a bloc and not South Africa as the facilitator. Zulu's sentiments further suggest that South Africa's mediation role was successful. Yet, if it is considered that the mandate of the facilitator was to mediate towards the achievement of an environment conducive for free and fair elections, this is far from the truth. Holding a free and fair election

16 The results announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission indicate that Mugabe won at least 60% of the total votes cast in the presidential election, followed by Tsvangirai, who garnered just above 33%. In the elected 210 parliamentary seats, ZANU-PF won more than two-thirds (Reuters 2013).

could not happen as the mediator failed to successfully persuade the parties to the GPA, especially ZANU-PF, which maintained control of the security apparatus, the media and the electoral process, to implement SADC's resolutions in line with the election roadmap. Zuma's failure to extract meaningful reforms from Mugabe and ZANU-PF can be explained through reference to a number of considerations.

First, Zuma's approach was a direct response to Mugabe's brinkmanship. ZANU-PF deliberately disregarded diplomatic protocol to undermine South Africa's facilitation efforts. Zimbabwe's former minister of media, information and publicity, Professor Jonathan Moyo, attacked the facilitation process and labelled Zuma 'erratic', adding 'The problem with Zuma now is that his disconcerting behaviour has become a huge liability, not only to South Africa, but to the rest of the continent.' Moyo further denounced Zuma and SADC as being puppets of Western states, mainly the UK and US, which he accused of 'hostile manipulation' (Media Institute of Southern Africa 2011). Zulu received similar condemnation. On 5 July 2013, at the occasion of the launch of Mugabe's election campaign in Harare, Mugabe described her as 'stupid and idiotic' and a 'street woman'. Mugabe added that 'SADC has no power. Let it be known that we are in SADC voluntarily. If SADC decides to do stupid things, we can pull out. For now we have a SADC that has good sense. Although from some quarters there was a stupid, idiotic woman saying elections cannot be held by 31 July. Did such person ever think as an independent country we would take such utterances which were stupid and idiotic?' (Sibanda and Mushava 2013). These statements were in response not only to Zulu's insistence on reforms before elections could be held, but also an indirect attack on Zuma's stance against Mugabe and ZANU-PF. South Africa could have exerted pressure on Mugabe to conform, but Zuma's team took on considerable responsibility to keep SADC intact. When Zuma's facilitation team pressed for reforms, Mugabe threatened to pull Zimbabwe out of SADC, because of the regional body's 'interference'. Zuma accurately recalled that Mugabe was not in the habit of issuing empty threats to his perceived political critics, in light of the precedence he set in 2003 when he withdrew Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth in response to criticism and censure of his policies from the 'white Commonwealth'. Probably, Zuma was wary of pushing Mugabe out of SADC, which had the potential to weaken or divide the regional bloc; this happened to the Commonwealth

following Zimbabwe's withdrawal in 2003. Mugabe's brinkmanship strategy paid off, as the facilitation team backtracked on its attempts to extract concessions from ZANU-PF, and South Africa accepted both the 31 July election date and the outcome of the vote.

The success of the facilitation process was also affected by the MDC's lack of coherent tactics and strategic leadership. In this regard, the outcome of the process demonstrates how, despite the efforts of SADC and Zuma to steer the ship in the direction of political and electoral reform, Mugabe and ZANU-PF still managed to realise their strategic objective – regaining political ground lost to the MDC parties during the 2008 elections, and the consolidation of power.

Second, South Africa's facilitation team realised that its efforts were failing, because Mugabe and his party were not prepared to compromise. Negotiations on the reforms were further undermined by extreme positions taken by ZANU-PF and its insistence that sanctions against its officials be lifted before any reforms could take place, all this while knowing very well that the issue was well out of Zuma's hands. The MDC-T's early mistakes and missteps gave impetus to ZANU-PF's strategy of branding the MDC-T's politics as primarily championing Western imperialism in SADC (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011). Thus, the MDC-T's strategy of befriending the West instead of neighbouring countries emboldened ZANU-PF's extreme conviction, which partly affected the assertiveness of Zuma's team.

Third, Zuma's personal considerations also came into play. He did not want to alienate ZANU-PF, given the possibility that the experienced party was unlikely to lose power to the feeble opposition. This came against the background of surveys conducted by Afrobarometer and Freedom House which concluded that ZANU-PF enjoyed increasing popular support, while support for the MDC was in decline. This was particularly important in that South Africa was also preparing for elections in 2014. A hostile ZANU-PF could potentially spoil Zuma's re-election bid. ZANU-PF had the potential to provide ideological inspiration to the newly founded, but explicitly anti-Zuma political party, Economic Freedom Fighters, led by former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema – who at one point claimed that Zuma hated Mugabe (Kaarhus et al. 2013). Zuma could not afford to dismiss this possibility, given that Malema publicly admitted to having been inspired

by Mugabe, and also that he was on record calling for South Africa to emulate Zimbabwe's land reform programme. Despite genuine concern for reform in Zimbabwe before elections could be held, the impending vote may have forced Zuma to prioritise his interests in light of the political realities he was faced with. For Zuma, it appeared that the democratic project in Zimbabwe was a second-tier interest, surpassed by concerns for his own political future.

A closer examination of Mbeki and Zuma's approaches points to the conclusion that there was no significant difference to how the two approached the inter-party negotiations. However, there were some differences in emphasis, with the former locating the land question at the centre of the political conflict, and the latter focusing on addressing the roots of the governance problem in Zimbabwe and foregrounding the need for political and electoral reforms.

Lessons learnt

The inter-party negotiations facilitated by both Mbeki and Zuma were purely a political process with strong features of realism, as highlighted by the power politics of various nations and the actions of Zimbabwe's three main political parties. ZANU-PF had the energy to sustain the fight against the proponents of regime change, targeting its main competitor, the MDC-T, and the UK and US governments internationally. In that sense, the Zimbabwean conflict presented a complex situation for a successful mediation process. Zondi (2012) notes that South Africa led both SADC and the AU in pushing for a diplomatic approach to the Zimbabwean crisis, fearing that a robust interventionist approach could have hardened the positions of the conflicting parties. The parties managed to agree on the GPA, because Mbeki's approach allowed both sides to suggest legitimate agenda issues. The negotiations were also held in secret locations and were overseen by the facilitator or facilitation team. The practical reality was that as the conflict escalated, there was urgency both at the domestic and regional levels to speedily normalise the situation in Zimbabwe. As such, the political parties, driven by their own power ambitions, seized the opportunity to take advantage of the situation to form an inclusive government.

Although SADC and South Africa's facilitation was widely criticised by Western countries for not being tough in its dealings with Mugabe and his party, the commitment of the region to finding a sustainable solution to the Zimbabwean crisis cannot be questioned. What is often criticised is the approach, or perhaps SADC's perceived failure to be relevant in light of prevailing views and aspirations.

South Africa's facilitation approach in Zimbabwe offers a number of valuable lessons:

- Third party intervention is not only motivated by the desire to resolve conflict; it also involves a substantial measure of self-interest, which may include regional security concerns. South Africa's mediation style was heavily informed by the national and personal interests of the mediators. However, it is important for the mediator to nurture a perception of impartiality towards the cause of the parties to the conflict to enhance the success of the mediation.
- The use of appropriate tools at the correct intervals enhances the achievement of set goals. South Africa's mediation in Zimbabwe came at a time when the conflict was escalating, but the facilitators managed to employ preventive diplomacy and crisis management strategies, among them the establishment of direct communication links between the parties to the conflict, which partly contributed to the de-escalation of the conflict as a result of direct engagement by the parties.
- South Africa's approach also suggests that complicated problems have no quick-fix solutions; hence mediation cannot be a short-term commitment. South Africa's formal facilitation started after 27 March 2007 and stretched a little after the 31 July 2013 harmonised elections. South Africa's approach further demonstrates the importance of coordination among key stakeholders in resolving a conflict that attracts diverse local, regional and international interests. The partnership between South Africa, SADC, the AU and the UN bestowed some sense of responsibility on the negotiating parties to respect the mediation process, even where no party to the standoff was obliged to declare commitment to accept the mediator's ideas and recommendations.

- The mediation process in Zimbabwe further demonstrated that inter-party political negotiations that bring together parties with different ideologies are characterised by profound mistrust, which often generates tension during the process. A successful mediation process under such circumstances would require rigorous initiatives by a high-calibre facilitator, who can convince conflicting parties to close ranks and agree to collaborate. Such was the experience of Mbeki in facilitating the GPA that paved the way for the formation of the coalition government, which saw arch enemies working together. In so doing, the conflict in Zimbabwe de-escalated and was temporarily resolved.
- The failure of Zuma's mediation to lead Zimbabwe to a credible 2013 election renders credence to the observation that an inclusive government is not a sustainable conflict transformation mechanism, as the one in Zimbabwe failed to address the political and electoral reforms that formed the root cause of the governance problems in the country. It is important to note that while mediation can succeed in cursorily addressing conflict through a coalition government, it has limited ability to enforce the implementation of the agreement made by the parties to a conflict. The success of a mediation effort is therefore underwritten by the willingness of the parties to the conflict, first, to accommodate each other's demands, and second, to embrace the mediator's suggestions. The extreme positions adopted by the Zimbabwean parties in their negotiations over the election roadmap undermined the success of South Africa's mediation.

Recommendation

South Africa was faced with an array of actors and challenges in its efforts in Zimbabwe. The number of interested parties generated diverse perspectives, which created a variety of challenges for the mediators in their attempts to address all the concerns raised to the satisfaction of all the actors. It also made it difficult for the mediators to encourage decision-making by consensus as the process occurred in an environment of intense mistrust, hostility and volatility, which burdened the mediating country. It is therefore recommended that

SADC establishes a mediation unit housed under a broader conflict prevention, resolution and management structure. This structure would provide necessary expertise for future mediation processes, including planning, intelligence-gathering on the changing circumstances of the conflict, coordinating multi-track diplomatic initiatives and tactical and strategic guidance on the overall processes.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the often-criticised ‘quiet diplomacy’ by Mbeki was not that quiet. Rather, the fundamental problem was that Mbeki’s views, as representing the majority opinion in SADC and the AU, were not in sync with what pro-Western media and Western countries wanted to hear – the public condemnation of the Mugabe regime. Mbeki’s sustained strategy of locating the conflict within the framework of the pan-African ideology, which was also in sync with his African Renaissance project, defined the approach towards the GPA. Equally, Zuma’s approach, though forceful, was informed by the same key considerations that guided his predecessor. It should be understood that South Africa’s mediation and conflict resolution approach was partly shaped by Zimbabwe and South Africa’s historical contexts, as well as pragmatism and consideration for national and personal interests. The historical explanation on why new parties like the MDC formations (compared to ZANU-PF) struggled to establish links with the majority of governments in the region, and also failed to influence the process meaningfully in its favour, is that SADC is still dominated by ‘brother presidents and sister movements’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011:3).

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