

### Quiet diplomacy: the reasons behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe policy

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## **Quiet diplomacy**

### The reasons behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe policy

Martin Adelman

#### *Abstract*

South Africa's policy of quiet diplomacy towards Mugabe has been severely criticised by the West and within South Africa alike. As South Africa is regarded as the key external player in the Zimbabwe crisis, calls for a U-turn in South Africa's Zimbabwe policy are mounting. This paper explores the underlying reasons for South Africa's policy of quiet diplomacy. It argues, in opposition to the general opinion, that quiet diplomacy is neither exceptional nor based on ideological blood chains, but rather follows the tradition and goals of South African foreign policy. Despite failure to bring about a solution to the crisis, quiet diplomacy is portrayed as South Africa's best option, as it minimises the potential risk of a deeper crisis. Thus, external calls on President Mbeki to change his Zimbabwe policy are in vain.

#### *Keywords*

*South Africa, Foreign policy, Foreign policy strategies, Foreign trade, Domestic political conflicts, Agricultural reforms*

## Introduction: the Zimbabwe crisis

Over the last four years, Zimbabwe has become a synonym for bad governance. Shaken by two interwoven crises, Zimbabwe, once the granary and hope of Africa, is rapidly deteriorating: economically, the country is on the brink of starvation; politically, the leadership of President Mugabe has lost its popular support and legitimacy.

Zimbabwe's economic crisis started long before the country became a focus of African politics. All through the 1990s the Zimbabwean economy did not experience sufficient growth, despite a relatively favourable resource base.

Macroeconomic mismanagement and a corrupt clientelistic system precluded economic growth from within. The awakening economic giant South Africa strangled Zimbabwe from the outside. IMF and Worldbank programmes were not able to restart the Zimbabwean economy, but instead increased the debt, leading to further economic decline. In November 1997, the Zimbabwean economy collapsed, with the currency loosing 74% of its value in a single day.<sup>1</sup>

The economic downturn stimulated the rise of a political opposition movement: the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai. The opposition won a first victory over the governing ZANU-PF party when the new constitution, which was intended to extend President Mugabe's powers, was rejected in a referendum in 1999. A defeat of the ruling party in the upcoming parliamentary (2000) and presidential (2002) elections was in sight. As Mugabe's resource base was considerably weakened, he was no longer able to mobilize political support in his neo-patrimonial system of governance. Not prepared to accept defeat, Mugabe gradually turned to undemocratic, illegal and increasingly violent means to preserve power. In the eyes of Western observers, the 2000 and 2002 elections were not free and fair. But as the mere harassment of the opposition was not enough to sustain support, Mugabe drew upon his last resort: the race card. With the help of the "war veterans", he started a land reform program aimed at reallocating land owned by white farmers to black peasants. The attempt to solve the "colonial problem" did not only increase his support from the rural poor, who hoped for economic empowerment, but also from parts of the ruling class, who managed to acquire a substantial number of farms. Undoubtedly, the violent land reform and the breakdown of democracy and of the rule of law exacerbated the economic and political crisis. Today, after four years in limbo, "Great Zimbabwe" lies in ruins.

## Europe's reaction to the crisis: smart sanctions

The way in which a once prospering democracy was ruined within a few years caused an uproar in the Western world. Unlike many other cases, where Western media and politicians turned their backs on just another failed African democracy, the EU, led by Britain, took an active stance on the crisis. The attention Zimbabwe receives can be explained by the strong historical and personal ties between Britain and the former settler colony, as well as by the country's good media coverage from neighbouring South Africa, which serves as an African hub for Western correspondents and news-agencies. In

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1 For a critical evaluation of Zimbabwe's economic policy see: Bond and Manyanya (2003).

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addition, the crisis peaked at a time when the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative and the post 9/11 debate on international terrorism had put failing African states back on the global agenda. As a result of this awareness, Europe could not turn a blind eye to Zimbabwe.

The EU's reaction to the crisis was strongly influenced by the paradigm of good governance. The Cotonou agreement between the EU and the ACP countries proclaims that political and economic governance conditions are prerequisites for development aid and trade privileges.<sup>2</sup> When the crisis in Zimbabwe mounted, the expectations of the European public, together with the need to stick to the rules set in the Cotonou agreement, left the EU hardly any choice: Zimbabwe became the test case for the good governance approach. After the failure of constructive dialogue in terms of Art. 96 of the Cotonou framework, followed by an attempted but abortive election observation mission in 2002, the EU finally applied "smart sanctions": a travel ban and a freeze of overseas assets were imposed on the inner circle of the Mugabe regime.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Zimbabwe's Commonwealth membership was suspended. By breaking ties with Mugabe, the EU has clearly occupied the moral high ground. But as the alleged "dictator" withstands the sanctions of the alleged "racist imperialists", "loud diplomacy" has ended in a deadlock situation. Even worse, Mugabe's anti-colonial agitation skilfully drove a wedge between EU members and damaged EU-SADC and EU-ACP relations (Weiland 2003).

### Criticism of South Africa's quiet diplomacy approach

Despite, and because of, the apparent failure of their own response to the crisis, the Western world increasingly turned their attention to South Africa. As the direct neighbour, regional leader and Zimbabwe's major trading partner, it was strongly felt that South African peer pressure was the key to the crisis. But unlike the Western world, South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki has not applied sanctions against Zimbabwe, but has instead chosen a strategy of quiet diplomacy and constructive engagement (see below).

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<sup>2</sup> The IMF, the Worldbank and the US AGOA initiative have also attached good governance conditions to development aid. In addition to the EU's focus on good governance, some European states, foremost the UK under New Labour, have programmatically shifted from an interest-based approach towards a more ethical, idealistic foreign policy towards the South. Compare: Abrahamsen and Williams (2002).

<sup>3</sup> The EU insists that smart sanctions, unlike economic sanctions, are not directed against the people. However, because the Washington Institutions and the majority of Western countries also withheld development funds and denied Zimbabwe trade privileges, they added to the decline of Zimbabwe's economy and hence to the suffering of the people.

In Europe and South Africa, this approach soon attracted high attention and widespread criticism. On the one hand, international leaders such as George W. Bush and Gerhard Schroeder appreciated (during their visits to South Africa) Mbeki's quiet diplomacy, because it kept open a channel of communication between Mugabe and the outside world. On the other hand, the policy was criticised as being too soft on Mugabe and inconsistent with Mbeki's own democratic ideals (e.g. Taylor 2002). Hussein Salomon's comment in *The Star* (2003) that "he [Mbeki] is not prepared to stand by the principles he is espousing in terms of Nepad and a vision on an African renaissance", is typical in this regard. In addition, an acceptance of the deteriorating situation seemed to be against South Africa's own best interest of installing peace and democracy in the region. As Mbeki's diplomatic efforts failed to bring about a quick solution, quiet diplomacy was finally criticised as fruitless and counter-productive to Western sanctions. With these arguments at hand, politicians, the media and scientific journals called on Mbeki to give up his "passiveness" towards Zimbabwe. Besides paternalistic advice and suggestions for alternative policies, European governments were called upon to massively step up pressure and to play hardball ("Tacheles reden") with Mbeki in order to achieve a change in South Africa's foreign policy. (Deutscher Bundestag 2003, *Ziemen* 2003: 18, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 2004).

As the South African government was unfazed by the criticism, speculations about the reasons behind quiet diplomacy began to circulate. The first cluster of arguments evolved around the line that Mbeki's quiet diplomacy was just a fig-leave for his support of Mugabe – silent diplomacy as silent approval. In a strong version of this argument, the ANC is accused of ideologically supporting Mugabe's undemocratic policies as a future model for South Africa. This criticism falls in line with similar arguments that the ANC's pledge to democracy and good governance is only lip service. In the words of opposition leader Tony Leon (2003): "[T]he ANC is not really interested in reform in Zimbabwe, or in democracy, or in human rights". Statements by Mbeki and some of his ministers in support of the controversial land reform are quoted to back up this argument. But the thesis that Mbeki is just another Mugabe is obviously just political propaganda. Nontobeko Hlela (2002: 137) comments: "The Democratic Party of South Africa, especially, has exploited the Zimbabwe issue for political gain, using this issue to incite South African citizens and to attempt to discredit Mbeki's government by playing on the fears of its white constituents." Mbeki has repeatedly reaffirmed that in South Africa the land issue will be solved within a legal framework, and so far the country shows no signs of going the Zimbabwean way.

A second, weaker version of the support thesis claims that Mbeki is bound to Mugabe by history. Statements by ANC's chief whip Tony Yengeni

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(2001) that “the ANC has historic links with Zanu PF – they fought the same liberation struggle against colonialism and racism” and by the head of the ANC’s international affairs division Mavivi Myokayaka-Manzini (quoted in Mail and Guardian 2001) that “these [ZANU and ZAPU] are our comrades we fought with in the struggle ... Our relations have been sealed in blood”, are seen as evidence for historical ties between the two governments. Tony Leon’s (2003) criticism that, “[t]he ANC’s unswerving loyalty to its fellow liberation government has undermined any claim ... as to the even-handedness of its approach”, plays on the alleged historical bias. While it is true that the ANC has spent more time talking to ZANU-PF than to MDC, the claim of the ANC (Yengeni 2001) that “we speak to all parties in Zimbabwe, including MDC” is also empirically valid. Looking at recent history, it becomes clear that the “blood chains” between the respective governments are rather weak. In fact, both countries are regional rivals, and the personal ties between their leaders are characterised by animosity rather than friendship.

A second strain of arguments concerns the thesis that Mbeki is not ahead of his own policies and misjudges the situation. Paternalistic statements aimed at reminding Mbeki of the seriousness of the problem (and the consequences of the current policy for South Africa) sometimes seem to be based on a perception that Mbeki has not yet realised the magnitude of the problem, an accusation that stands in sharp contrast to the numerous diplomatic initiatives South Africa has taken in the past. More serious are claims that Mbeki misjudges the situation. They carry some weight, as they come from a prominent source: Moeletsi Mbeki, businessman, political analyst and brother of the President (2004):

The ANC knows very little about Zimbabwe [...] you have those dynamics, which our government in South Africa, frankly, has no idea about. They don’t know who Morgan Tsvangirai is. They don’t know who Patrick Chinamasa is. They don’t know who Welshman Ncube is. But they think they know. [...] It is not enough to have an ideology that makes you feel good or that is seen to be the right ideology. That doesn’t solve the problem. You have to have real knowledge of the situation. We don’t know enough about Zanu-PF and [don’t] understand what the land issues, for example, in Zimbabwe are.

The argument that Mbeki does not know what he is doing is often accompanied by references to Mbeki’s controversial HIV/AIDS policies, in order to show that ideology, stubbornness and misinformation, not rationality, govern South African policy-making. But the misinformation thesis is hard to accept

in the light of the lively public debate and the numerous information sources in the country.<sup>4</sup>

None of the arguments explored above can sufficiently explain why South Africa sticks to its Zimbabwe policy despite mounting internal and external criticism. Instead of shedding light on the underlying reasons for the South African approach, the public debate is characterised by exactly what it charges Mbeki with: a lack of factual information and a high level of politicisation. In order to gain a deeper understanding of South Africa's Zimbabwe policy, the article henceforth describes the various shades and turns of South Africa's position and analyses the merits of this approach in the light of the overall framework of South Africa's Foreign Policy.

## The changing face of quiet diplomacy

South Africa's Zimbabwe policy has become known by the catchphrase "quiet diplomacy". The term describes two things: The overall framework is diplomacy, rather than sanctions or military action, while the adjective "quiet" refers to the style of the diplomatic engagement. In opposition to Woodrow Wilson's (1918) doctrine that "diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view", the ANC believes that "diplomacy is always quiet" (Victor Mditshwa quoted in IRIN 2004). Thus it prefers behind-the-scenes negotiations to public statements. The absence of the public potentially increases the chance of finding a diplomatic solution. However, the lack of valid information has not only nurtured speculation about what really happens behind closed doors, but also led to a situation where the focus of attention has moved from the content to the procedure of foreign policy. Thus it was widely overlooked that under the unchanged framework of quiet diplomacy, the aims and the tone of South Africa's Zimbabwe policy have considerably shifted over time.

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4 Besides the government related channels (Department of Foreign Affairs, National Intelligence Agency, Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs, ANC's Department of Foreign Affairs), academic institutions (SAIIA, ISS, AISA, ISS, IGD), numerous NGOs and the media have provided substantial information on the crisis.

## History of the relationship between South Africa and Zimbabwe

South Africa and Zimbabwe are connected by a joint settler-colony history of minority rule and liberation struggle, which still impacts on both countries' politics and economies today. However, the timeframes of liberation differed substantially. South Africa achieved independence already in 1910, but majority rule was only reached in 1994, after decades of Apartheid. In Zimbabwe, the Empire ruled until 1964, and majority rule was achieved in 1980. Thus, although both countries suffer from the same legacy, they only met as equals ten years ago. Previously, Zimbabwe was in the front line of the struggle against Apartheid; it suffered from South Africa's destabilisation policy and responded with political opposition and diplomatic non-recognition of the Apartheid government. But as Zimbabwe was economically dependent on its southern neighbour, it could not cut all ties. It needed South African harbours as well as preferential trade access to the Apartheid state.<sup>5</sup>

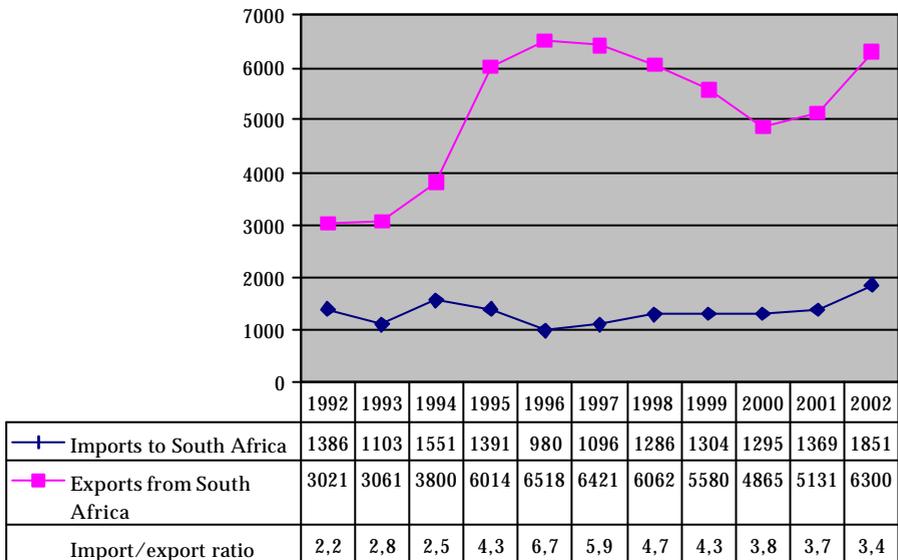
During the South African transition period (1990-94), political relations normalised, peaking in full diplomatic recognition and integration of South Africa into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) after majority rule was achieved. However, despite the end of Apartheid, the former enemy did not become a new friend. Instead, for Zimbabwe, the New South Africa remained the "bully" in the south, a challenger against which Zimbabwe was unable to compete. The new imbalance was most visible in the economic field. Trade between the two countries rapidly increased during the 1990s, but it did so hugely to South Africa's advantage, since its superior industry swiftly pushed into the Zimbabwean market. During the 1990s, the trade balance shifted from roughly 1:2 to almost 1:7 in South Africa's favour (Table 1). While both countries in principle welcomed economic exchange, they were also eager to protect their respective industries. Already in 1992 South Africa decided not to renew the 1964 preferential trade agreement, which translated into a tripling of tariffs for goods from Zimbabwe. Especially the Zimbabwean textile industry was severely hurt. As a response to rapid de-industrialisation, Zimbabwe imposed a 100% tariff in 1999. The looming trade war came to an end with the introduction of a quota system in 1999 and the signing of the regional SADC Free Trade Agreement by South Africa in 2000. The negotiation of the latter was again a reflection of the parties' diverging economic interests. Besides successfully competing on the Zimbabwean market, South Africa also harmed its northern neighbour's economy indirectly: its rapidly rising share in the African and world market was partly at

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5 The colonial transport routes were re-emphasised through South Africa's destabilisation policy against the Beira corridor. A trade agreement existed since 1964 and remained in force on Zimbabwe's request after 1980.

Zimbabwe's expense. Zimbabwe might also have seen a higher inflow of Foreign Direct Investment if South Africa had not emerged as a more lucrative investment destination after 1994.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Zimbabwean economy suffered from a constant brain drain to South Africa. Thus the Zimbabwean economic crisis of the 1990s was to some extent South African-made, though unintentionally so.

Table 1: South African – Zimbabwe Trade (in '000 SA Rand, based on 2000)



Source: Department of Trade and Industry (2004a).

While economic competition strained the bilateral relationship heavily, political differences between Mugabe and Mandela further poisoned the relationship. The leaders of the liberation movements, bound together by the common struggle, are often portrayed as allies in an “old boys’ network”. However, within this network the link between the ANC and ZANU was rather weak, even before 1994. ZANU was traditionally allied with the PAC (and Beijing), while the ANC was supported by SAPU (and Moscow). Unsurpris-

<sup>6</sup> South Africa absorbs about 85% of the regional FDI.

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ingly, the ANC's headquarters in exile, where Thabo Mbeki spent considerable time, was based not in Harare, but in Lusaka.

With the disappearance of the common enemy, relations soured, because the old (Zimbabwe) and the new (South Africa) regional leaders soon found themselves in a struggle for political dominance. Initially, the regional organisation SADC had found a compromise between the two powers by naming Mandela SADC chairman and Mugabe, who was the last chairman of the now defunct Front Line States group, chairman of the newly established SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS). However, just one year later, at the Malawi Summit (1997), both statesmen clashed over the role of the OPDS, and its chairman. Mugabe was unwilling to pass on the chairmanship. He also denied any responsibility to report to the SADC Summit, because he saw the OPDS as an independent organisation. While the first was a clear violation of SADC rules, the latter had not been clarified at the time. Nelson Mandela as SADC chairman demanded the subordination of Mugabe and the OPDS to the SADC structure and even threatened to step down as SADC chairman if Mugabe did not change his course. As no agreement could be reached, South Africa finally declared the OPDS as illegitimate, and it became *de facto* defunct.

But the struggle for SADC leadership had not yet ended: In 1998 Zimbabwe, supported by Angola and Namibia, intervened militarily in the DRC to back the government of embattled Laurent Kabila (and to exploit the country's resources). Mugabe, in his capacity as (illegitimate) OPDS chair, justified the intervention as a SADC action, although no formal Summit decision had been taken. Mandela made it clear that South Africa preferred a negotiated solution to the DRC war and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces. In both cases, the political differences were not kept behind closed doors. Mandela instead publicly criticised Mugabe (and still does so today), a very rare occasion in African politics and an indication of the diplomatic rift between the two countries.

But the conflict between both countries also had a personal component. With the re-appearance of Mandela on the international stage, Mugabe, who was hitherto the most senior regional leader, found himself sidelined overnight. The charming Mandela and the intellectual Mbeki achieved an international status that Mugabe could only dream of. The personal setback was probably harder to take than the economic and political decline of Zimbabwe. Chris Landsberg (2002: 177) concludes that "[b]y the end of Mandela's term in office relations between him and Mugabe were frosty, and there was a virtual "cold war" between Pretoria and Harare". Thus when Mbeki took over the Presidency in 1999, the relationship between both countries was no longer dominated by "blood chains", but rather, as Martin Rupiya (2003: 161) argues, by "brinkmanship and frustration". The tightening of visa controls and the

erection of an electric fence at the common border symbolises the erosion of post-Apartheid bilateral relations.

When Mbeki came to power in 1999, the improvement of the bilateral relations was a key priority of his presidency, which was marked by the idea of an “African Renaissance”. Ever since his inauguration, Mbeki tried to establish a better working relationship with Mugabe.<sup>7</sup> A policy of quiet diplomacy, rather than public criticism, became the new political style. But Mbeki’s quiet diplomacy should not be misunderstood as new friendship or quiet support, but must rather be seen as a constructive engagement strategy with clear aims. Within the unchanged framework of quiet diplomacy, at least three phases with different aims can be distinguished:

### First phase: support for the land reform

In a first phase of the crisis, from 1997 to 2000, South Africa’s Zimbabwe policy was dominated by constructive engagement and support for a solution of the “colonial problem”. The bottom line of South Africa’s position was that the “key to the solution of the problems faced by Zimbabwe is the speedy resolution of the land question” (Yengeni 2001). Mbeki repeatedly called on Great Britain and other donors to contribute funds for a peaceful land reform on the basis of the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement.<sup>8</sup> At a conference in Harare in 1998, donors agreed in principle to pay for a land reform. In spring 2000 Mbeki brokered another land reform package, which was to be funded by the UK, the IMF, Saudi-Arabia and other donors (Baumhögger 2000: 436; Sunday Times 2000). A few months later, the SADC mandated President Thabo Mbeki (and President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi) with a new initiative to approach the UK for a land reform. This time, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UNDP’s Mark Malloch Brown were also involved in the negotiations (van Wyk 2002: 108). But despite successful behind-the-scenes diplomacy, none of the agreements materialized. The program’s lack of transpar-

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<sup>7</sup> Mugabe was a special guest at the inauguration ceremony and Zimbabwe received the honour of being chosen to play South Africa in a friendly soccer game on inauguration day in honour of the new president.

<sup>8</sup> The 1979 Lancaster House Agreement settled the independence of Zimbabwe. Britain agreed to finance a land reform on a willing-buyer willing-seller basis, but payments were stopped in 1988 because Britain did not agree with the way in which land was being redistributed. Mbeki has drawn attention to the UK’s financial responsibility for the land reform on numerous occasions, for example, at the 2000 G77 Summit in Cuba, the State of the Nation Address 04.05.2000, the SADC Summit at Victoria Falls 21.04.2000, and the SADC Summit in Windhoek 06./07.08.2000.

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ency, as well as the ongoing violence and continuing illegal farm seizures undermined all constructive efforts.

As the illegal farm seizures in Zimbabwe prohibited an orderly land reform and set a dangerous example for South Africa,<sup>9</sup> Mbeki began to stress the importance of non-violence and the rule of law. He reaffirmed several times that the South African land reform would proceed only within the constitutional framework, and publicly criticised the violence and the mishandling of the land reform in Zimbabwe: “It is important that the violence in that country must end, that the conflict around the land issue must end, that the upcoming [2000] elections should be free and fair and that the land question must be addressed in a manner which is beneficial to all Zimbabweans, without confrontation, without conflict” (Mbeki quoted in Stiff 2000: 437).<sup>10</sup> But Mbeki – unlike other prominent South Africans – did not openly attack Mugabe. Instead, the diplomatic approach continued with bilateral meetings between heads of state and at ministerial and party level, in addition to multi-lateral meetings. Mbeki’s handshakes with Mugabe and his continuing support for the land reform were harshly criticised in South Africa and abroad, as they were interpreted as approval of Mugabe’s policies. However, the diplomatic efforts were aimed at moderating between the Zimbabwean parties and at positively influencing Mugabe to conduct the land reform in a legal way. In accordance with the constructive engagement policy, South Africa, together with other SADC countries, also spoke out strongly against sanctions on Zimbabwe, because sanctions were not consistent with a non-confrontational diplomatic style and because diplomatic support for Zimbabwe was necessary to keep up the South African influence on Zimbabwe.

Besides diplomatic endorsement, South Africa also started a number of initiatives to prevent the complete breakdown of the Zimbabwean economy. On 14 February 2000, a US \$133 million “rescue package” for Zimbabwe was announced, which allowed Zimbabwe to keep up its electricity and oil supply (IRIN 2000). Part of the money went directly back into the pockets of South African parastatals Eskom and Sasol, which are among Zimbabwe’s major suppliers. Peter Stiff (2000: 414/415) speculates that the loan was subject to certain conditions, such as the withdrawal of Zimbabwean troops from DRC, compliance with IMF conditions, and a change in the leadership of Zimbabwe’s Oil (Noczim) and Electricity (Zesa) companies. Today Zimbabwe is deeply indebted to South Africa, but despite a lack of payment, South African

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9 South Africa’s own land reform program, based on the willing buyer – willing seller principle, proceeds very slowly. Landless South Africans have staged demonstrations, and there have been a few incidences of illegal Zimbabwe-style farm seizures in South Africa.

10 Jo-Ansie van Wyk (2002: 104) counted that, before 2000, Mbeki spoke out against violence in Zimbabwe six times in speeches held elsewhere, in addition to two occasions in Zimbabwe itself.

can parastatals continue their supplies to Zimbabwe to keep the economy of the northern neighbour afloat. In addition to its own financial support, South Africa also tried to convince the IMF to resume aid to Zimbabwe.

Looking back at the first stage of the crisis, it must be concluded that Mbeki had a consistent policy on Zimbabwe. In order to achieve a peaceful land reform and to avoid a deepening of the crisis, South Africa offered to moderate between the Zimbabwean parties, as well as between the Zimbabwean government and donors. In addition, Mbeki threw Mugabe several economic and diplomatic lifelines. But despite these efforts, the situation deteriorated further in 2000, because Mugabe did not keep his promise to ensure non-violence and a law-based land reform in return for South African support. If Mbeki is to be criticized for mismanaging the crisis, it must be for not initially realizing that not land, but Mugabe's declining power was the real reason for the crisis, as Tendai Dembetshe wrote in 2002 (quoted in Hussein 2002: 152):

“Right from the onset South Africa's reaction to the farm invasions and political violence was fatally flawed because it swallowed the line that land was the root of the crisis. President Mbeki genuinely believed that if he could persuade the British to fund the land programme, the crisis would end ... But the problem was that Mugabe was unwilling to meet the conditions set by the British and other donors because they threatened his political agenda.”

## Second phase: Criticism of violence and regional diplomacy

When Mbeki realized that the most pressing problem was the breakdown of the rule of law, he changed his stance. In a BBC interview on 5 August 2000 he admitted his mistake and announced a tougher line on Mugabe (Osmanovic 2001: 423). Just a week later the new policy of crisis containment through amplified regional diplomacy became imminent. The SADC put Zimbabwe on the agenda and mandated a task force of six states (Namibia, Malawi, Angola, South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique) to deal with the problem. The task force travelled to Harare on 10-12 September, where they demanded from Mugabe an end to the farm seizures. They also met opposition leader Tsvangirai and civil society groups. The SADC Summit in Blantyre (12-14.08.2001) also discussed the Zimbabwe issue and, according to Mbeki (2001a), agreed unanimously that “Zimbabwe ... must remain a democracy in all respects, including the observance of the rule of law, as well as ensuring the independence of such institutions as the judiciary and the press.” At the

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extra-ordinary summit in Blantyre (14.01.2002), the SADC reiterated its demand for democracy in Zimbabwe. In a diplomatic formulation (“Summit welcomes the following actions to be undertaken by Zimbabwe”) SADC demanded

- “full respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion, association and peaceful assembly for all individuals;
- the commitment to investigate fully and impartially all cases of alleged political violence in 2001, and action to do so ;
- a Zimbabwean Electoral Supervisory Commission which is adequately resourced and able to operate independently, the accreditation and registration of national independent monitors in good time for the elections;
- a timely invitation to, and accreditation of, a wide range of international election observers; commitment to freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Constitution of Zimbabwe;
- reaffirmation by Zimbabwe of its practice of allowing national and international journalists to cover important national events, including elections, on the basis of its laws and regulations;
- commitment by the government of Zimbabwe to the independence of the judiciary and to the rule of law; and
- the transfer by the Government of Zimbabwe of occupiers of non-designated farms to legally acquired land.”<sup>11</sup>

Parallel to the SADC initiative, the Commonwealth agreed in Abudja (06.09.2001) on (the old formula of) a UK-financed land reform in return for an end to farm violence. Compared to the year before, the focus had changed. At the SADC Victoria Falls Summit (21.04. 2000), the solidarity with Mugabe and the support for the land reform were stronger than the concerns over the mishandling of the reform. Now, Mugabe was still diplomatically backed – the sanctions policy of the West might have contributed to the African solidarity – however, the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe had taken precedence over the “colonial issue”. Especially Botswana and South Africa, which were most severely affected by the crisis and which see themselves as the custodians of democratic values in the region, pressed Mugabe to put his house in order. But again the bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts failed, because Mugabe did not live up to his promise to end violence in Zimbabwe. As the showdown of the upcoming presidential election left no room for compromises, quiet diplomacy was continued in the hope that “the after-

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11 The SADC issues two communiqués, a lengthy internal communiqué and a shorter one for the public. Public communiqués are normally very uncritical and unspecific. The critical remarks in the public communiqué on Zimbabwe were therefore remarkable. Besides the points listed above, the SADC also expressed “serious concern” over a statement by the Zimbabwean military on the elections.

math [of the elections] would provide space for dialogue and democratic reform” (Buthelezi 2002).

However, the presidential elections (09.-11.03.2002) did not bring about a solution, but rather reinforced the political deadlock. Mugabe was the official winner, but a strong opposition claimed – justifiably - that the election was neither free nor fair. Zimbabwe was on the brink of civil war. South Africa’s answer to this situation was again containment and diplomacy: Mugabe was recognized as elected President, and a diplomatic initiative was started (together with Nigeria) to broker a government of national unity in Zimbabwe. South Africa managed to bring both parties, represented by Ncube (MDC) and Chinamasa (ZANU-PF), to the negotiation table; however the talks soon broke down, as both parties were unwilling to compromise. Mbeki’s diplomatic approach had once again suffered a severe setback.

### Third phase: search for a post-Mugabe government of national unity

Nevertheless, even after the breakdown of the talks, South Africa stuck to its policy of quiet diplomacy. In order to break the deadlock in Zimbabwe, a two-pronged policy was now put in place: Mediation between the parties in order to bring them back to the negotiation table, and work towards a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. Both parties in Zimbabwe attached conditions to further negotiations: ZANU-PF demanded that the election result, and hence the legitimacy of Mugabe’s presidency, be acknowledged; the MDC insisted on new elections and on the withdrawal of treason charges against Tsvangirai. Since neither party was prepared to fulfil the other’s conditions, formal talks have so far not been resumed. However, there are rumours about ongoing informal talks, which were nurtured by the South African government on the occasion of the visits of US President Bush and German Chancellor Schroeder to South Africa (Africa Confidential 2003). The immediate denial of ongoing talks by Mugabe and Tsvangirai is no surprise, as they can hardly admit to ongoing talks while officially challenging each other in court. As quiet diplomacy is confidential by nature, it remains unclear at what stage the “talks about talks” are. Mbeki has set both parties a deadline to resume formal negotiations by June 2004.

While South Africa and the SADC keep defending the Zimbabwe government in international fora such as the UN, Commonwealth or ACP against Western sanctions, often with strong anti-colonial rhetoric, internally Mugabe seems to have lost the support of fellow leaders and is perceived by the majority as being part of the problem. Despite a previous agreement to the contrary, Mugabe was denied the SADC Vice-Chairmanship at the Luanda

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Summit (2.-3.10.2002) – a position which would have automatically propelled him to the SADC leadership a year later. Even though Mbeki repeatedly stated that he would not actively intervene in Zimbabwe's internal affairs, as "the people of Zimbabwe must decide their own future", he still facilitated behind-the-scenes talks for a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. In December 2002, Emmerson Mnagagwa, one of Mugabe's possible successors, was invited to the ANC party congress in Stellenbosch. In January 2003, negotiations for a Mugabe exit scheme, brokered by the retired Colonel Lionel Dyck, with the support of South Africa and the UK, apparently reached an advanced stage. According to the plan, Mugabe would have been granted immunity or offered asylum in Malaysia, where he was vacationing at the time. Simultaneously, a government of national unity was to be established, and the UK would have financed a legal land reform. However, due to infighting in ZANU-PF, the plan was leaked to the press before completion, and the potential successor Mnagagwa was considerably damaged (Africa Confidential 2003, Möllers 2003a). Despite this failure, Mbeki kept working behind the scenes towards a transitional government in Zimbabwe. Diplomatic activity continued in spring 2003 with a visit by the Troika Mbeki - Obasonjo - Muluzi (5 May), where Mugabe's exit was allegedly again discussed (Möllers 2003b). A further initiative was a visit by the SADC foreign ministers task force to Harare. In May, US special adviser on Africa Walter Kansteiner declared that South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique had agreed that Mugabe needed to be replaced (Cape Argus 2002). In June 2003, Mozambican President Chissano (quoted in Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique 2003) confirmed in Washington that quiet diplomacy was "near to a solution", claiming that the problem had been "almost solved." Quoting unnamed diplomatic sources, Africa Confidential (2003) reported that Mbeki had informed Bush at their July meeting of Mugabe's promise (allegedly made to Mbeki) to step down at the ZANU-PF party congress in December 2003. In the course of that year, Mugabe himself repeatedly hinted at retirement. However, he neither stepped down at the party congress, nor at his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday soon afterwards, but instead declared his intention of completing his presidential term. The diplomatic approach had failed once again.

### Quiet Diplomacy as an expression of South Africa's foreign policy strategy

The history of South Africa's Zimbabwe policy has so far been a history of failure and broken promises. The unsatisfactory results of quiet diplomacy have evoked criticism from two sides. Idealists claim that quiet diplomacy is inconsistent with the high moral principles underlying South Africa's foreign

policy; realists criticise that South Africa does not use its hegemonic position to protect its interests by cleaning up its backyard. The criticism of quiet diplomacy is, after all, an expression of diverging opinions of what South Africa's foreign policy interests really are, and how these interests may best be achieved. I will henceforth argue that quiet diplomacy is not an exception, but rather a fitting expression of the complex South African foreign policy framework. As it is Mbeki's perceived best option, the unwavering support for quiet diplomacy, in spite of all disappointments, should come as no surprise.

South Africa's foreign policy after 1994 is ultimately grounded in the country's history. The legacy of Apartheid and peaceful transition gave Mandela the mandate to reconcile Apartheid victims and perpetrators within the country, to reconcile the country with its neighbours and the rest of the world, and finally to take the action further and strive for reconciliation in other conflicts throughout the world. The foreign policy originating from this task was by no means consistent, but bounced between self-interest and universal idealism, African solidarity and partnership with the West. The Mandela period began with the idealist proclamation that "human rights will be the light that guides our foreign affairs", and with a commitment to the African continent: "South Africa cannot escape its African destiny" (Mandela 1993: 88, 89). The policy materialised in solidarity with former ANC supporters, even if this was to the dislike of the West, and in outspoken public criticism of deviant behaviour by fellow leaders. But the pitfalls of an ethical foreign policy were soon experienced in the case of Nigeria, as the ANC's Pallo Jordan (2001) reviews:

When, on the eve of a Commonwealth Summit, Sani Abacha ordered the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, then President Mandela moved swiftly to break off relations and called for tough measures against the Nigerian military junta. While Britain, France, the USA, Germany and others verbally applauded his actions, not one of these countries followed South Africa's example. British oil multinationals continued business as usual; the USA kept up a vigorous dialogue with Abacha while the US corporations expanded business contacts; France sought to exploit the tension between London and Abudja to its own advantage. South Africa held the moral high ground, but in isolation.

This failure of the idealistic 1995 Nigeria policy, which is often invoked by the ANC in the context of Zimbabwe, led to a more careful and more realistic foreign policy. The 1998 policy review under Department of Foreign Affairs director-general Jackie Selebi reflected this turn by naming wealth creation and security as the national foreign policy interests (Vickers 2000: 91). In ac-

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cordance with the national economic interest, Europe was placed higher on the agenda than Africa.<sup>12</sup> But African solidarity was not surrendered: Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance, which later translated into the NAI/Nepad initiative, masterly blended the need for further integration of (South) Africa into the global economy with a call for African solidarity to fight "global apartheid" and to work towards a more equitable world. The double approach of a foreign policy based on two legs, one in Africa and one in the West, raises diverging expectations and places South African foreign policy on shaky ground. South Africa's unique position of simultaneously being the Western foothold in Africa and Africa's foothold in the West, makes it a key player in the international arena. But as the country is too weak to enforce its will on either of the two sides,<sup>13</sup> it tries to satisfy both, in order to maintain its unique position between the two worlds, which is essential to its national interest. South Africa has, in fact, little room for foreign policy manoeuvres. The foreign policy arising from this dilemma is ultimately based on pragmatism and diplomacy. Instead of throwing its political, economical and military weight on one side, South Africa leads multilateral diplomatic initiatives (e.g. Nepad, HIPC, G20, Ottawa Convention) and offers its services as honest broker to conflicting parties (e.g. DRC, Burundi, East Timor) to induce them to follow the South African example of peaceful conflict resolution. The Economist (2003) once called this the Mbeki Doctrine:

SA cannot impose its will on others, but it can help to deal with instability in African countries by offering its resources and its leadership to bring rival groups together, and to keep things calm until an election is safely held.

South Africa's quiet diplomacy must be seen in line with the historical belief in the supremacy of negotiated conflict solutions and a balanced diplomacy serving the long-term national interest. It is a deeply realist policy.

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12 The FTA with the EU clearly gained preference over the SACU and SADC-FTA negotiations.

13 The inability of South Africa to pressurize Western powers is almost self-evident. Within Africa, South Africa is often portrayed as the dominant regional power because of its military and economic dominance. Schoeman and Alden (2003) argue that South Africa is in fact not in a hegemonic position, because it is not ideologically accepted as such. Moeletsi Mbeki (2003) argues that South Africa's inability to act forcefully on African issues is based on the government's misconception of South Africa as a weak, poor country, which needs the help of the West and the solidarity of other weak (African) countries. He criticises this view and advocates a more self-confident policy based on the core (economic) interests of the country.

## Quiet Diplomacy: an expression of realistic South African foreign policy goals

South Africa has abandoned its idealistic foreign policy framework for one based on the perceived national interest. In the light of the ongoing violation of democratic ideals in that country, the lack of an ethical stance on Zimbabwe has been severely criticised. But disapproval of quiet diplomacy comes also from the realist camp, which sees South Africa's national interest at threat, especially in the areas of welfare, security and African political leadership. In what follows I argue that the Zimbabwe crisis indeed challenges South Africa, but that in the light of this challenge, quiet diplomacy is still South Africa's perceived best option.

### The economic challenge

The Zimbabwe crisis has an immediate impact on bilateral economic activities. The overall business climate in Zimbabwe is harmful to South African companies, the economic slump decreases government and consumer spending on South African products and services, and the shortage of hard currency in Zimbabwe leaves South African companies with outstanding bills. Indirectly, South Africa is affected through a loss of international confidence in the stability of the region, which can easily translate into a weaker currency (resulting in higher inflation and higher interest rates), a decrease in Foreign Direct Investment, and a decline in international tourism arrivals. The accumulated economic costs to South Africa is difficult to estimate. According to a report by the Zimbabwe Research Initiative (2003), outstanding payment amounted to 465 million Rand in 2002 (among others 80 m owed to Eskom, 60 m due to Telkom, 75 m for the Reserve Bank). In total, the report puts the estimated economic costs to South Africa at Rand 15 billion or 1.3% of GDP.<sup>14</sup>

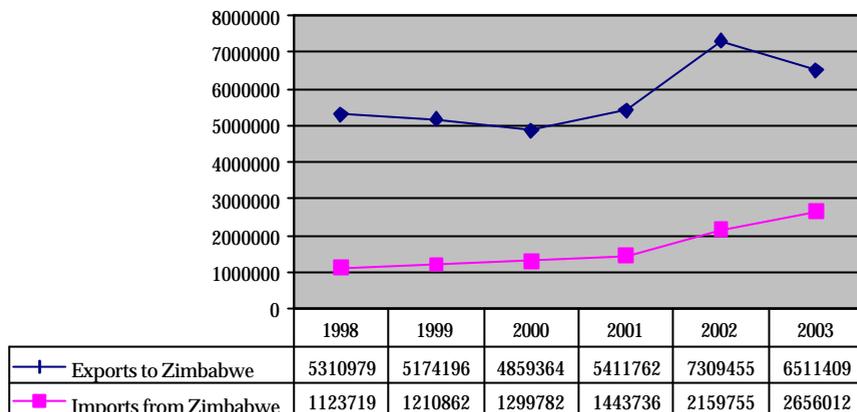
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14 Other sources name considerably higher numbers. The Daily News (2003) says South African companies are owed Rand 140,5 billion. The International Crisis Group (2002: 9) estimates the loss to the regional FDI at US \$ 36 billion. Both figures seem to be highly over-estimated, considering that the total export of South Africa to Zimbabwe accounts for only about Rand 5-7 billion per year, and total FDI to SADC was never higher than US \$ 5.3 billion per year.

The report of the Zimbabwe Research Initiative (also known as the Schussler report) claims to be based on conservative estimates. However, some of the figures may be doubted. In the area of trade, for example, the report calculates South Africa's losses from a relative decline of Zimbabwe as an export destination (1995 basis). But whereas trade with Zimbabwe stagnated at a high level from as early as 1995, trade with the rest of the world has shown a

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Table 2: South African-Zimbabwe trade during the crisis (in SA Rand)



Source: Department of Trade and Industry 2004b.  
[www.dti.gov.co.za/econdb/raportt/162Summary\\$.html](http://www.dti.gov.co.za/econdb/raportt/162Summary$.html)

While the crisis undoubtedly impacts negatively on the South African economy, the policy of quiet diplomacy also offers opportunities. Trade figures suggest that while some sectors suffer from the crisis, others directly profit from the crisis as their products substitute Zimbabwean products on the local and to a lesser extent also on the world market (Table 2). As the Zimbabwe trade still generates six billion Rand in trade revenues, the main economic interest of South Africa is to prevent a complete collapse of Zimbabwe. Pallo Jordan (2001) summarises: “The simple facts of the matter are that should the economy of Zimbabwe fall to pieces South Africa’s main trading partner on the African continent would go down the tubes.” In addition to the direct losses, a breakdown of Zimbabwe would adversely affect South Africa’s trade with the rest of the continent, which is rapidly growing. The geographical fact that Beitbridge is South Africa’s gateway to the continent cannot be ignored by politics.

Apart from the immediate concern of upholding the current business partnership with Zimbabwe, quiet diplomacy paves the way for further profits in the future. Once the crisis is over, South Africa will have lost its main economic competitor in the region. The economic penetration of Zimbabwe

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tremendous increase since then. This suggests that the rapid decline in Zimbabwe’s relative market share was probably not exclusively due to the country’s internal crisis. Tourism arrivals and the Rand have also been on the rise again over the past two years. Thus, looking at current data, the report probably paints too bleak a picture.

by South African business had started long before the crisis, but it will accelerate once the crisis is over. The indebtedness of Zimbabwean companies to South African counterparts, and the need for investment after the crisis, will leave Zimbabwe no option but to sell their economy southwards. A protocol on investment protection is currently being negotiated. Wilfred Mhanda (2002: 157) of the Zimbabwe Liberators Platform concludes: "One cannot help but conclude that it is in South Africa's economic interests to allow Mugabe to continue on his self-destructive path." And Dale McKinley (2003) sees sub-imperialistic interests of the "emerging black and traditional (white) bourgeoisie" as the driving force behind quiet diplomacy. Thus, despite Mbeki's continuing pledge that "we will never treat Zimbabwe as the tenth province of South Africa" (Mbeki 2003), economically this will be the long-term effect of the non-intervention policy.

### The security challenge

In the field of security, the major threat of the Zimbabwe crisis currently stems from the influx of refugees. An estimated 25 000 to 30 000 cross the Limpopo every month (Sunday Times 2003). The illegal immigrants are not only a threat to the upper class, who fear for their lives and jewels, but even more so to the poor majority. As cheap labourers in the informal market, the Zimbabwean competitors pose a threat in the daily fight for survival. The constant battle of police and border forces against illegal immigration is probably the most directly felt effect of the crisis. But while the problem is already serious, it could become much worse once the authoritarian state turns into a failing state. As a direct neighbour, South Africa fears nothing more than the outbreak of an open civil war on its northern border.. Compared to the costs of a complete collapse of Zimbabwe, with the chance of mass emigration of refugees and an eventual need for military intervention, the current security problems seem to be rather controllable. The prime goal of South Africa's Zimbabwe policy is therefore to avoid a further worsening of the situation. Mediation not escalation is the concrete outflow of this approach.

### The leadership challenge

The third and probably most controversial argument that is brought forward against quiet diplomacy, is the alleged threat it poses to South Africa's international status and its ambition for regional and continental leadership, and

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especially its presumed effects on the flagship projects of SADC, AU, and Nepad. At this point realists, who advocate a proactive enforcement of South Africa's position on the continent from an interest-based point of view, meet with idealists, who advocate interference from a human-rights standpoint. Admittedly, SADC and Nepad - as organisations or projects based on democratic principles and on the rule of law - have lost credibility for allegedly failing the Zimbabwe litmus test. President Mbeki, the advocate of an African Renaissance, has been challenged for being a weak leader and for not standing firm on his democratic principles. In some cases (such as the SADC peace-keeping training centre in Harare) regional projects even had to close down because of the crisis.<sup>15</sup> Besides the direct consequences, the crisis has also reinforced old rifts within SADC and the Commonwealth. Especially the latter faced a fundamental crisis over the Zimbabwe issue, which became most visible in the diplomatic confrontation surrounding the Abuja Summit in 2003.

Undoubtedly, Mbeki had to pay a diplomatic price for his deviant behaviour in the West and at home. But at the end of the day, neither his re-election as president (the ANC won the 2004 election with an unprecedented 69,7 %) nor his AU/Nepad project was damaged beyond repair. However, if Mbeki had joined the Western train of bullying Mugabe out of office, his Renaissance dreams might have found an abrupt ending. South Africa is often portrayed as the unchallenged regional and continental leader, because of its political and military dominance. According to Schoeman and Alden (2003: 16/17), this is in fact a misconception, because even after 10 years of majority rule, South Africa is not regarded as an equal by fellow African countries and their leaders:

[R]eal power comes not so much from tangible resources, as from the fact that the hegemon's ideology is acceptable and unquestioned and forms a "consensual order" that determines behaviour in its sphere of influence. ... Unless the "hegemon" is accepted as such ... it is doubtful that its strategies and tactics of achieving its goals will be successful.

This lack of regional acceptance does not only explain the failure of Mbeki's quiet diplomacy – Mugabe's constant ignorance of Mbeki's advice –, but the Zimbabwe crisis also reinforces the urge to work towards greater acceptance and political influence in the region. Because South Africa is, due to its dominant position and good relations with the West, widely perceived as "the

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15 The SADC peace-keeping training centre was mainly funded by Denmark. After the suspension of development aid, the centre had to close down, even though it was mainly a regional institution.

colonizer from the South" or "the lackey of the West", the policy towards the continent must be handled with care, as John Stremlau (2003) argues:

If South Africa wants to lead a voluntary regional order conducive to its own best interests, demonstrating self-restraint in the use of superior power will be necessary to reassure weaker states that they will be neither dominated nor ignored. Signs of self-restraint become critical to developing a durable and mutually acceptable regional order.... Independent action against Zimbabwe would have been seen by others as a ... threat.

If regional hegemony was an end in itself, South Africa could have easily surrendered other aims and objectives in the region to take a tougher stance on Zimbabwe. However, during the Zimbabwe crisis, major regional watershed decisions were being taken, on which South Africa could not compromise. In Angola and the DRC, peace processes were being negotiated. Especially in the case of the DRC, Zimbabwe's agreement to withdraw its forces was of key importance. An end to the civil war in both countries is not only a political success for South Africa, but even more a chance for the South African economy, which stands to benefit greatly from a peace agreement. In the field of regional integration, the member states have eventually agreed to a major SADC reform after years of stalemate, and Zimbabwe was persuaded to give up its blockage of the SADC security organ. On the continental level, AU and NEPAD were successfully introduced. The framing of Mbeki's flagship programs were especially challenged by Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, whose ambitions to be the leader of the continent are by no means limited to northern Africa, but extend all the way down to the Limpopo. In the ageing Mugabe he found a willing ally for his vision of an anti-Western, authoritarian Africa - right on the doorstep of his continental rival, Thabo Mbeki. He not only provided US \$1 million for Mugabe's 2002 election campaign, but also forged a US \$ 360 million oil deal with the embattled Mugabe regime.<sup>16</sup> South Africa's economic and diplomatic assistance to Mugabe must also be understood as an effort to contain Gaddafi's influence and to secure regional and continental support for South Africa's position. While Mbeki has won the first round of getting his Renaissance project started, he still needs diplomatic backing from the rest of the continent to take his efforts further. The AU's peer review mechanism is in its starting phase, the battle of which African country will host the AU's parliament and the 2010 soccer world cup is on, and within the UN and WTO, South Africa needs the unanimous support of

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16 According to Morais and Naidu (2003), Libya received land and shares in several Zimbabwean companies in return.

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fellow African countries to back up its position as leader of the global South. Contradictory as it might seem at first glance, Mbeki appears to be convinced that in order to achieve his long-term regional, continental and global goals of an African Renaissance, he has to forge a provisional compromise with the devil in his backyard.

## Conclusion

Zimbabwe's self-destructive turn from democracy to dictatorship and chaos poses a major challenge to South Africa. This article has shown that, despite its lack of success in bringing a solution to the crisis, South Africa's policy of quiet diplomacy is by no means irrational. It is not only in line with the country's overall foreign policy, but it is furthermore perceived by the South African government as the policy option that best reflects the national interest. South Africa could well follow the European example of diplomatic confrontation and smart sanctions. A policy based on democratic principles would win Mbeki friends at home and abroad. However, by breaking ties with Mugabe, South Africa would not only surrender its position as a mediator between the parties, but it would also ultimately lose its further influence on the crisis. The failure of the EU's "loud diplomacy" provides a negative example of a major power restricting its freedom to act by occupying the moral high ground and painting itself into a corner. In addition, the shockwaves that such a policy change would send around the African continent might do South Africa's leadership ambitions more harm than good. Even more controversial than a tough diplomatic stance is the option of economic sanctions or a military intervention. Looking at the power relations, it is clear that South Africa could drive Mugabe to the edge within weeks. But while an externally stimulated escalation brings the chance of rapid solution, it could as well bring the smouldering conflict to an explosion. Judging by Mugabe's behaviour over the past few years, it is by no means guaranteed that he would surrender to South African pressure. It is equally possible that he would fight to the bitter end.

As Europe is hardly affected by the consequences of the crisis, it can well afford to follow an idealistic foreign policy of breaking ties with a failed democracy. South Africa does not have that option. The ANC's Zimbabwe expert Victor Mditshwa (quoted in IRIN 2004) argues that, „[a]mong the SADC countries, we are the closest neighbour – anything that happens to Zimbabwe affects us“. Therefore South Africa has decided to keep the Zimbabwe conflict boiling on a low flame, rather than provoking an explosion with uncertain consequences. The South African position has not prevented the collapse of Zimbabwe. However, through the strategy of a slow and "con-

trolled” collapse, the human and economic costs of the crisis have so far largely been kept within the borders of Zimbabwe. The prolonging of Zimbabwe’s suffering as a result of South Africa’s risk minimisation strategy may be justly contested as unethical and irresponsible towards the people of Zimbabwe. However, looking at other cases of state crisis in Africa, where a rapid regime collapse led to destabilisation far beyond the borders of the afflicted country, the current South African policy may well be the most rational option.

Considering what is at stake for South Africa in Zimbabwe, a departure from quiet diplomacy seems unlikely in the near future. Judging from recent history, Mbeki will only embark on such a far-reaching and risky policy change, once the situation in Zimbabwe becomes unbearable for South Africa. The ANC has made it clear that external powers will play no role in this decision: “There is no way we are going to change our approach because we believe it is the correct one ... We won’t be dictated to because we know what we are doing and we have always known what we are doing” (Myokayaka-Manzini quoted in Mail and Guardian 2001). European politicians would therefore be well advised to accept the South African standpoint instead of trying to change what they cannot change. Otherwise the South African - European relations could be the next victim of the Zimbabwe crisis.

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### ***Zusammenfassung***

Die südafrikanische Politik der stillen Diplomatie gegenüber Mugabe stößt in Südafrika und im Westen gleichermaßen auf heftige Kritik. Da Südafrika bei der Lösung des Simbabwekonflikts allgemein eine Schlüsselrolle zugeschrieben wird, mehren sich die Stimmen, die eine Kehrtwende in Mbekis Simbabwepolitik fordern. Der Artikel untersucht die Gründe für die südafrikanische Politik der stillen Diplomatie. Er widerspricht dabei der landläufigen Meinung, dass die stille Diplomatie auf alte ideologische Verbundenheit zurückführend ist. Statt einer Ausnahmeerscheinung wird sie vielmehr als der Tradition und den allgemeinen Zielen der südafrikanischen Außenpolitik entsprechend dargestellt. Obwohl die stille Diplomatie die Krise bislang nicht zu lösen vermochte, wird sie dennoch als die für Südafrika beste Option angesehen, da sie das potentielle Risiko einer noch tieferen Krise vermindert. Angesichts dieser Sichtweise müssen externe Aufforderungen an Mbeki, seine Politik zu ändern, ungehört verhallen.

### ***Schlüsselwörter***

*Südafrikanische Republik, Außenpolitik, Außenpolitische Strategie, Mbeki, Thabo, Außenhandel, Simbabwe, Innenpolitischer Konflikt, Agrarreform*

**Résumé**

La politique sud-africaine de la diplomatie discrète envers Mugabe fait l'objet d'une critique virulente en Afrique du Sud comme à l'Ouest. Etant donné qu'il est attribué à l'Afrique du Sud un rôle clé dans la résolution du conflit zimbabwéen, les voix qui exigent un changement radical de la politique zimbabwéenne de Mbeki se multiplient. L'article recherche les raisons de la diplomatie discrète menée par l'Afrique du Sud et se met en porte-à-faux de l'opinion courante selon laquelle la diplomatie discrète résulterait des anciens liens idéologiques et revêtirait un caractère exceptionnel. Il est montré qu'elle relève plutôt de la tradition et des objectifs généraux de la politique étrangère sud-africaine. Bien qu'elle n'ait jusqu'à présent pas apporté de solution à la crise, la politique discrète est considérée comme la meilleure option pour l'Afrique du Sud puisqu'elle minimise les risques d'une crise encore plus profonde. Ainsi, tous les appels de l'extérieur demandant à Mbeki de changer sa politique sont vains.

**Mots clés**

*Afrique du Sud, politique étrangère, stratégie en politique étrangère, commerce étrangère, conflit de politique intérieure, réforme agraire*

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