

## **Diplomacy, Regime Change Agenda and the Survival of Zimbabwe in the New Millennium**

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**Abstract :** *The Zimbabwean government at the turn of the 2000 New Millennium received widespread ostracization by some sections of the international community particularly the West. As a fairly small state and weak vis-à-vis its erstwhile adversaries who are powerful, the clear expectation based on conventional wisdom is that the regime would collapse instantly. For Zimbabwe the course of events did not turn as expected. On the contrary, emerging has been the ability of Zimbabwe to influence the international community not only those in the developing world but also the Western world itself for support largely through diplomatic efforts. The regime has stood the test of time and has not altered its behavior in the international system; its objectives have remained the same confronting its adversaries. The paper therefore, seeks to analyze the ways through which the regime has been able to use diplomacy as a tool in international relations to achieve its objective in the face of a heavy onslaught by the powerful section of the international community. In essence, the paper will largely provide the basis through which weak states in the developing world can successfully use diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy objectives in the face of the powerful global actors.*

**Keywords :** Diplomacy, Regime Change, Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

Under the overall vague, but altogether ostensibly noble banner of global governance, the nationalist-military alliance that made the Zimbabwe government came under fire at the turn of the millennium. It was accused of neglecting international norms and standards adopted by the governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Issues of governance will remain contestable terrain due to a variety of arguments, but it is sufficient to say what the international community (to the extent it can be called so) saw as a gross governance deficit in Harare. This was epitomized by the 2000 land ‘invasions’ and political intolerance, the Zimbabwean government instead saw as an unwarranted meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. What followed then was a spirited attempt by the UK government alongside the USA to internationalize this row, successfully roping in other powerful countries to expose the Mugabe administration. In particular, Mugabe administration was seen as a terrible government that had to, at most, leave office, or at least create an enabling political field that was hoped would enable an emerging, broad based and undoubtedly opportunistic but popular opposition political party to dislodge it. Sanctions, trade embargoes, sabotage, international isolation, denigration, funding of opposition groups and institutions as well as threats are all aspects of the onslaught visited upon a Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) led Zimbabwe since 2000. Due to this state of affairs, *inter alia*, Zimbabwe entered the new millennium on a bad footing to experience what turned out to be a probably unprecedented painful economic and political decade for a country not at war. 10 years later, the Mugabe administration is still in power, and actually playing senior in the brazenly unbalanced so called inclusive government. We attempt to discuss here how diplomacy confronted regime change agenda with the result that the latter was defeated.

## The Concept of Regime Change and Diplomacy

In its basic and popular form, regime change can best be understood simply as the replacement of a regime by another, and in political circles, it connotes the change of a system by another. Regime change may be a result of internal and external dynamics and has been a reality in many states where incumbents were forced to vacate political office. Suffice to say, it is a very controversial term that has led many skeptics to argue that when it is promoted as a result of external dynamics or pressures like sanctions, military intervention, diplomatic maneuver or sponsored insurrection, it is a direct affront to the ostensibly salient principle of national sovereignty and self-determination. This has thrown the regime change agenda into a total disarray and it is battling a continuous legitimacy crisis.

In essence, this term entails the overhauling of a whole system, be it political, social or economic. It is therefore not a monopoly of the political domain,

although it is inescapable to footnote that the term is more in use in the turbulent world of international affairs that is largely political in nature. In addition, the term 'regime change' can also be used in a more general sense, particularly in academic work, to refer to a change in political institutions or laws that affect the nature of the system as a whole. Regime change, especially as it regards the replacement of political incumbents by the next is desirable in the sense that it is often defended as a pursuit of natural justice and the preservation of the power of the governed who will need outside assistance to make this reality. This is exactly what has played out in Zimbabwe ever since the turn of the millennium.

Meanwhile, it is well to note that the term 'regime' has in general layman understanding, somehow been synonymous with 'bad' or maligned political administrations which are often accused of various shortcomings. This include, but certainly not limited to corruption, grotesque human rights abuses, political intolerance, economic mismanagement, terrorism, aiding offshore conflicts and military juntas. It is for this reason that it is far much expected to hear of the Suharto regime, the Saddam Hussein Regime, the Mobutu regime, the Moi regime, the Ahmadinejad regime, the Castro regime and indeed, the Mugabe regime. In contrast, you hardly hear of say, Mandela regime, Masire regime, Sirleaf regime or Zuma regime. Therefore, whilst all must pass as regimes, the latter group is rather referred by some politicians and likeminded media with more colorful prefixes, like administrations or simply government. It is not the intention of the authors to belabor on this characteristic but only to helpfully note that this has not only given regime change to controversy, but to spirited efforts to defeat it. In Zimbabwe, it was fought with various approaches, including diplomacy, which forms the basis of this paper.

For Young, regimes "are more specialized arrangements that pertain to well-defined activities, resources, or geographical areas and often involve only some subset of the members of international society"<sup>1</sup>. Yet, regime change can also have the support of the locals after all. To the extent that ruling governments largely monopolize the use of force inside the state, it follows that unpopular regimes will mobilize all their might to keep power. The loss of legitimacy by the regime induces the dissatisfied group to struggle against it.<sup>2</sup> In many instances, citizens have been denied the chance to change governments in constitutional and electoral democracies through the ballot due to bottlenecks associated with less free and unfair elections, of which outright and systematic rigging, violence and logistical technicalities are the leading ones. To that end, the concerned international community and more specifically countries from the Western Europe and North America have seen it as their international duty to come to the aid of such citizens to realize their democratic will. Whereas in most cases this has actually been an alibi for the pursuit of foreign policy goals by the intervening countries, it is not untrue that the otherwise secondary goal of assisting the suppressed citizens has this way not been realized.

One of the interesting questions that still remain contentious as regards the regime change agenda in Zimbabwe for post 2000 is that if ever it has been achieved,

who would then be the greatest beneficiary, in the short, to medium and long term. The economic crisis that bedeviled the country after 2000 owing to identifiably three events namely, the deployment of Zimbabwe's armed forces to aid the besieged Laurent Kabila government in 1997, the land reform program (elsewhere called land 'invasions') beginning in 2000 and in general the devastating effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme implemented in the early 1990s all undoubtedly conspired to indeed arouse tensions among the restless, disillusioned and impatient masses who began to seek a political avenue to voice their concerns immediately. To that end, the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 is viewed by the neo-liberal minded as the fruition of a coalescence of grievances among the disparate but equally affected masses of Zimbabwe. For radical Africanists, it is seen as the establishment of a Western puppet party that sought to get into power and maintain the status quo in as far as ownership of resources is concerned. At the same time, others regard both explanations as true. The latter view gained credence as a result of revelations that the MDC party, apart from also comprising the estranged White (now former) commercial farmers, it also received a significant part of this funding from Britain, the former colonial power.

Yet, states, no matter how small or economically inferior they are, are rational actors in the international system and are fully aware of anarchic international environment they exist in. States also understand and can discern the power dynamics in international politics, but more importantly, the loopholes thereof. 'Small' states have to be especially creative, forge alliances and play one power against the other, as they try to survive big power regime change machinations which more often are not influenced by the powers' selfish long term interests than purportedly the affected citizenry. The international political arena is therefore quite difficult especially in a world dominated by unilateralism and an abuse of international bodies and sometimes, a complete disregard of them. Against this background, states have at their disposal various tools of statecraft in international intercourse, and among them, is diplomacy. This is true for the small and militarily inferior states which cannot match even a quarter of the might of big powers. States that would obviously have no chance in an outright war can however with good tact, dexterity and skill achieve their objectives via diplomacy.

According to Eric Brahm, diplomacy comes in variety to include; Diplomacy, Para Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, Economic Diplomacy, Gunboat Diplomacy, Ping Pong Diplomacy, Preventive Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Shuttle Diplomacy and Transformational Diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> It follows that definitions that have been proffered by various scholars have therefore largely differed due to the numerous types of diplomacy. However, as it relates to international relations, and thus relevant to this paper, diplomacy is defined as, "the process of communication between international actors, used chiefly by the involved parties to represent and craft themselves, often in an effort to resolve or avoid conflict and ameliorate discord"<sup>4</sup>.

In this paper, we highlight how Zimbabwe government has almost nearly rewritten the conventional diplomacy script because of creativity, sheer bravery and sustaining a seemingly outdated pan-African argument, simultaneously attacking the Western regime change agenda, all the way to political survival.

### **Diplomacy as a Survival Strategy**

Depending on which actors a state allies with in international politics and mainly depending on whose interests they serve or wish to protect or upset during any political period, states enjoy different diplomatic relations with each other over time and space. For Zimbabwe, the environment for the regime in Harare that has apparently been in power for 30 years and with a single party leader at the helm, turned sour in 2000. Not only did Zimbabwe lose the companionship of the traditional economic partners like Britain and the US; the two actually internationalized a bilateral dispute to render the ZANU PF government rogue, irresponsible and retrogressive in the eyes of the international community. What followed were a series of sanctions, restrictions and various measures put in place by the powerful countries to arguably suffocate the regime and make it possible to fall, *ceteris paribus*. It was expected to fall. However, 10 years on, the ZANU PF is still in power, and although 'sharing' power with the MDC, it is a case of its cup is half full than half empty given the relentless nature in which the regime change agenda was diplomatically, economically and politically pursued.

We summarized the hostile environment in which the Zimbabwe government found itself in post 2000, but despite the European and American consensus on punitive measures against Zimbabwe, these powerful countries never succeeded in roping the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and or South African Development Community (SADC) to do the same. When ZANU PF was sanctioned the wholesale, chaotic countrywide occupations of then white owned commercial farmers largely of, but not limited to, the British descent, it upset the Labor government for more reasons than one. It is not necessary to discuss those here. The rise of the MDC in the same period though partly due to the already biting economic situation has come to be seen as part of the same regime change agenda. This was attributable to issues to do with its funding, its policy framework and indeed membership. Many Zimbabweans at least hoped that this spat with Britain would remain a government to government row. It didn't take long to realize that 'people' would actually be at the center of the diplomatic spat with the consequence of disastrous political, but especially economic consequences.

In 2003, as a follow up to the inaugural one held in Egypt under the aegis of the then Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Africa-EU Summit was scheduled in Lisbon, Portugal. Meanwhile, the UK government had already imposed sanctions on the Zimbabwe government which also included a travel ban and the European bloc

followed suit. Up to this day, many ZANU PF officials are barred from travelling to European countries unless on special occasions like the current EU-Zimbabwe dialogue official meetings. The summit had failed to take off in 2001 after Britain and its allies adopted a stance that they would not attend if His Excellency Robert Mugabe was invited. Mugabe was however able to mobilize Southern African and generally AU support, and the AU block announced that it would not attend if Mugabe was not present. A key player in all this was Thabo Mbeki, the then South African President who maintained that Zimbabwe must be represented at all levels at the Summit. Angola and Mozambique in 2003 pressed Portugal to have travel ban lifted and enable Zimbabwe to attend the European Summit in Lisbon.<sup>5</sup> Portugal maintained its support for Zimbabwe's attendance and the list of European countries behind the Portuguese grew especially as they saw economic ties with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries more important than the alleged human rights violations in Zimbabwe. Britain, therefore, came under pressure from Zimbabwe to sustain the argument that it had not abused Article 96 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe) before Zimbabwe was given any opportunity to respond. Under Article 8 of the same agreement, effective dialogue should have taken place first. With Africa on his side that every member should be treated the same, the Summit failed to take place. However, in 2007, Portugal insisted that Mugabe would have to attend, Jose Socrates, the Portuguese prime minister arguing,

*We defined a summit with Africa as a priority for our [EU] presidency. We want to leave our mark on European foreign policy.*<sup>6</sup>

The EU travel ban on the Zimbabwe leadership was meant essentially to prevent them from accessing European capitals in a way that they are isolated so that they would miss out on the economic benefits that potentially would bring. In this way, the travel ban would let the leadership become redundant and face domestic pressure for them to leave office. As part of a regime change agenda, it would surely contribute to the eventual downfall of the government in Harare. The EU, however, maintained that it only had imposed a 'travel ban' "as a result of the breakdown of the rule of law and human rights abuses".<sup>7</sup>

Though the Zimbabwe government would counter this with nationalistic, leftist vitriol at every given opportunity as neo-colonial machinations bent on effecting regime change so as to install a pliant and quisling order in Harare that would guarantee a return to the Whites, of the precious resource that is land. The ZANU PF would also inundate both the local and international community that it was not a failed regime, but that the sanctions imposed against Zimbabwe by the EU were accelerating the economic crisis and had brought about the untold suffering for the population. Britain was presented as attempting a re-colonization of Zimbabwe. This mantra found some takers on the diplomatic stage.

France invited Mugabe to the francophone Africa summit in March 2003 despite the existence of an umbrella EU travel ban on Mugabe and his inner circle.

This increasingly recorded the failure of multilateral diplomacy and British policy against Zimbabwe. At the time, the then French President Jacques Chirac broke ranks with the British instigated travel and insisted that it served no purpose to have a policy of silence, boycott and embargo. This was to infuriate the Prime Minister Tony Blair who was displeased to see in disbelief his French counterpart make a mockery of EU attempts to forge a common foreign policy on Zimbabwe. The French Minister for Cooperation Pierre-André Wiltzer insisted,

*When you have things to say, you should say them to each other face to face. That's the reason why we wanted Mr. Mugabe to be invited.*<sup>8</sup>

African voices added and actually raised the stakes for Mugabe who was facing a legitimacy crisis due to a disputed election where he had been rightly accused of outright rigging. Then, the Namibian President, Sam Nujoma put paid to any legitimacy concerns, when backing the French decision,

*I believe France took a right decision to invite President Mugabe. This is a France-Africa Summit in which all African heads of state should participate to promote dialogue and to strengthen economic partnership. Misunderstanding or disagreement between Zimbabwe and Britain does not benefit either country. I therefore believe that it is high time that the differences between the two countries are amicably resolved.*<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, he dismissed claims that Mugabe was an illegitimate Head of State, that as far as he was concerned, Mr. Mugabe's regime did have democratic legitimacy, despite allegations of vote rigging at the last elections and that he had no information of political abuse or torture or oppression in Zimbabwe. Gradually, the Zimbabwe government was gaining on the diplomatic stage and Mugabe's attendance of the Summit can be seen as another victory and by the same token, the regime change gospel would suffer a serious setback.

The diplomatic war necessitated by the declared regime change agenda has also shown or reminded observers that international politics is also bigger than the US and Britain or the West in general. Zimbabwe has instead identified other big, influential powers that it can align with so as to avoid disastrous isolation. The other factor, therefore, that has contributed to the success of Zimbabwean diplomacy has been the timely emergence of more centers of power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Russia has emerged to check Europe's dominance. Notable has been the Asian giants particularly South Korea, India and China which have been practically and moving rapidly into Africa with relative easiness at the expense of the most European nations. So, when it became clear that ties with Europe were irretrievably breaking down, Mugabe announced that Zimbabwe would henceforth 'Look East' to not only carve new markets, but also seek alternative diplomatic ties.

When the Anglo-Saxon therefore took the fight up to the UN, by far the most representative and global institution available, it became a great possibility that the Zimbabwe government would be finally shaken, but she had already played her diplomatic cards well. Owing to the aforementioned alliance with alternative global players, aside from timid and scattered statements here and there, Mugabe has survived any UN censure ever since this tumultuous decade began. For example, in 2008, Russia and China vetoed proposed sanctions on Zimbabwe's leaders, rejecting US efforts to step up punitive measures against President Robert Mugabe's authoritarian regime after a widely discredited presidential election of June 27. It was the then UN Security Council member South Africa, which led the opposition to the resolution to punish the Zimbabwean leadership itself with the evidence that the diplomatic effort by Harare was indeed well orchestrated from the 'local' to the 'international'. It was not surprising that the Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin defended this action as if he was reading from Robert Mugabe's notes. He argued that

*... sanctions would have taken the UN beyond its mandate by having it interfere in a country's domestic political disputes and 'artificially elevating them to the level of a threat' to international peace and security.<sup>10</sup>*

The Chinese were equally ruthless, providing more cover for Mugabe's often repeated argument that the 'problems' in Zimbabwe were solvable by the Zimbabweans alone and that interference was tantamount to an unacceptable usurpation of a member's sovereignty. The Chinese Ambassador Wang Guangya, whose nation is one of Zimbabwe's major trading partners, also expressed fears of nation-tinkering and said that Zimbabwe should be left to conduct its own talks on how to resolve its political crisis. He argued that the situation in Zimbabwe was purely a domestic affair and that China would not interfere in domestic affairs."<sup>11</sup> The US and Britain were surprised by this move, but it is clear that China's close ties with Zimbabwe, which has actually resulted in increased trade and economic cooperation between the two, influenced and continues to influence China's favorable treatment for Zimbabwe in high politics.

Misjudgment often happens in foreign policy making as a result of miscalculation of nation states' interests and that is what Britain under Blair did and the consequences were to be witnessed later. The assumption that all countries in the world would back any British or American policy towards Zimbabwe was too far-fetched. It is clear that countries will act in their self-interest and not follow blindly to the whims of another. The Chinese government and Russians, for example, are investing heavily in Africa, including Zimbabwe and it would have helped, had the Western alliance done their homework before tabling a sanctions resolution at the UN Security Council of which the two are permanent members with veto powers. Indeed, the West was 'surprised' because a few days before the Security Council meeting, the US thought the Russians were on their side. The US diplomat was the most surprised after the resolution collapsed,



*The u-turn in the Russian position is particularly surprising and disturbing. Only a few days ago, the Russian Federation was supportive of a G-8 statement which said, and I quote, 'We express grave concern about the situation in Zimbabwe.'<sup>12</sup>*

The environment for Zimbabwe was even further made difficult, when its diplomacy so far successful in Europe was to be tested at home in the very SADC playground. It cowed regional members into supporting its diplomatic war against the big powers. This brings us to the regional diplomacy that the Zimbabwe government has adopted to stave off the spirited regime change agenda. There are several countries that have been vocal against the Mugabe regime, citing the very reasons that the 'international community' have raised. Countries which come to mind immediately are the neighboring Botswana especially during the tenure of the current President Khama, Zambia under Levy Mwanawasa, Kenya and Wade of Senegal. To that end, the AU and SADC have thus not only threatened to boycott international summits when Mugabe is not invited, but has also had to face the converse music when some African countries have refused to attend its summits if Mugabe was to attend too. Zimbabwe has long accused Botswana of being a proxy of US interests in Southern Africa. Botswana threatened to boycott the 16 August 2008 AU Summit in Cairo, Egypt if Mugabe attended. The same threat came from the then Zambian President, Levy Mwanawasa who criticized the Zimbabwean leadership for oppressing its people. Botswana had already, before this threat, come outright and slammed the President Mugabe urging its neighbors not to recognize him as a leader and also called for his suspension from the SADC and AU. Botswana's call for suspension was as a result of widely condemned one-sided sham of a run-off election that Zimbabwean voters encountered after opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai had withdrawn from the contest.

One factor which the authors identify as working against Britain and her allies and overall EU policy has been the colonial master mentality and the total belief in myths they regarded as reality in contrast to those that approach the matter with a greater degree of openness and rationality. They should have separated what exists on the ground and what they tell the world which they want people to believe. In essence, the EU mismanaged the handling of Zimbabwean affair with the consequence that they ended up playing into the government's hands to the extent we argue that it actually served to aid Mugabe's diplomacy. Bolstered already by the UK's renegeing on the Lancaster House agreement as boldly stated in Claire Short's infamous letter to Kumbirai Kangai, the then Zimbabwe Agriculture Minister to the effect that the Labor government had no special responsibility to fund land reform in Zimbabwe, Harare used this in its domestic and international diplomacy to full advantage. Zimbabwe is an agro-based economy and land represents the embodiment of Zimbabwean hood as it was a key grievance ever since the first Whites arrived in 1890. It is an economic resource essentially but has a lot of political connotations such that when Britain got ambiguous with it, Zimbabwe government managed to

score important political points. The redistribution of land to landless Blacks without corresponding compensation for former white landowners insulted the capitalist class to the marrow, but the sanctity of resource ownership by a developing country facing a backlash from its landless peasants made it very difficult for the international community to agree that the land reform was unjustified.

In analyzing the hostile or difficult environment, it is very difficult to look at it outside the sanctions regime that was introduced as soon as the fall out began. The sanctions have definitely influenced Zimbabwean foreign policy and diplomacy to the extent that it has also led to an emphasis on an essentially different new international political and economic relationship with countries not only opposed to the West, but also rivals in economic, political, cultural and military terms. China, Iran, North Korea, Russia and other countries made Zimbabwe's refocus possible and its diplomacy workable. Zimbabwe declared a 'Look East Policy' in 2003. The coming of Barrack Obama in 2008 saw the continuation of Bush's bully politics and the Zimbabwe Democratic Economic Recovery Act of 2001, the bedrock upon which US policy on Zimbabwe is founded. It contains punitive measures against the Zimbabwe government, and as the ZANU PF would argue to the Zimbabwean people. Mr. Obama did not take long to meet with his top Africa advisers, and the central idea they focused on was taking the issue of Zimbabwe before the UN Security Council, but for the first time to combine such a move with an intense diplomatic effort to persuade Russia and China not to block the initiative. But, Mugabe made economic ties with these key UN Security Council members, showing that behind the scenes he really worked in his favor. China's aid and investments are attractive to the Africans precisely because they come with no conditionality related to governance, fiscal probity, or the other concerns of the Western donors. Mugabe was to take full advantage of this and the US has yet to enjoy the Chinese or Russian support on any resolution against Zimbabwe. The Chinese have invested heavily in Zimbabwe and the relationship is apparent in the mining (especially, platinum and gold), energy, aircraft, military, tourism, agriculture, construction, transport, information technology and high technology, wildlife resources among others. As early as 2004, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung had already noted that

*The 'Look East Policy' of the Zimbabwean government is both politically motivated and responds to economic necessities in the absence of donor support from the West.<sup>13</sup>*

Realists contend that the nature of anarchy in the international system causes states to be primarily concerned about relative gains, i.e. their position vis-à-vis other states in the system. With China fast becoming one of Africa's biggest investors, donors and political allies, Zimbabwe has not been left out of quoting China in the name of its interests. China has been quite active in African countries helping build the continent's biggest dam in Ethiopia. It has launched Nigeria's first satellite into orbit. It has lent Angola \$2 billion in exchange for oil. It is farming shrimp in Mozambique,

installing phone systems in Kenya, building roads in Zambia and securing rights to Africa's timber, oil and mineral resources. All told, Chinese investment on the long-neglected continent has mushroomed from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$18 billion in 2003, and China has become Africa's third-largest trading partner, behind the US and Britain.<sup>14</sup>

Divisions that emerged in the EU led Zimbabwe to exploit them to its full advantage. Success of any policy depends on cooperation efforts and determination of the imposers. However the EU, as a body in the eyes of the entire international community and concerned states and actors, is only an institution for the member states, and Zimbabwe is not such a member. In essence, multilateral institutions are a guide in the face of anarchical world in which each state represents its own interest.

Despite the ostracization of the Zimbabwe government, it is generally agreed among the developing world that there is something right about his rhetoric. There is a general, but hardly publicized consensus that the current system, in which the global order is organized, is detriment to the long term interests of developing countries. Mugabe has perfected his diplomacy in the region, and the entire Third World or the South in general. The Mugabe regime therefore deployed this mantra laced with nationalist rhetoric and that message was sent clear to the developing countries that what Zimbabwe was experiencing was an orchestrated campaign for resources and he managed to make them fear that they will be the next. The unfortunate part is that Zimbabwe is acting in the forefront and it ought to bear all the consequences, while its success brings policy options for some developing countries. This sacrifice on the altar of expedient diplomacy has affected the economy and by extension, ordinary Zimbabweans. However, and for the purposes of this argument, it has kept the government in power as this managed to rope in the majority of other Africans, Third World and big power countries to Mugabe's side and shield him from a biting legitimacy crisis that has refused to go away ever since the then nine month old Movement for Democratic Change, contested its first general elections in 2000. This is a significant statistics as it assists us understand why the MDC would find it very difficult to gain broad based support in the SADC or the AU save for the scattered backing of Botswana, Zambia and Senegal. When the ZANU PF also turned the tables on the MDC accusing it of having called for the imposition of the disastrous sanctions successfully, it managed to sway significant, though not all, local and international attention from its own shortcomings like corruption, mal-governance, nepotism and general economic mismanagement.

At the height of Zimbabwe's political turmoil, the only country with the power to change the course of Zimbabwe's history was South Africa. The US turned its diplomacy to South Africa and the Ambassador to South Africa Jenday Frazer courted them with sweet-talk;

*There is clearly a crisis in Zimbabwe and everyone needs to state that fact. The economy is in a free fall. There is a continuing repressive environment. There needs to be a return to democracy.... It [South Africa] has the most leverage probably of any other country in the sub-region and should therefore take a leadership role.<sup>15</sup>*

South Africa was, however, constantly reminded that it was a liberation war government and had its own 'time bomb' as regards an unsolved skewed land ownership pattern reminiscent of Zimbabwe, in pre 2000. Together with behind the scenes diplomacy with South Africa, it is critical to note that South Africa remains a critical trading partner with Zimbabwe and it would not, and will never, contribute in any endeavors that seek to undermine the latter's economy because that would have rippled effects too. This is true as long as the African National Congress is in power. Further, South Africa will likely have to be prepared with an influx of 'economic refugees' from its northern neighbor in the event of a crisis. President Thabo Mbeki was then targeted as capable of bringing pressure to bear on President Robert Mugabe. Despite this wealth of opportunity, Mbeki chose 'silent diplomacy' as his blueprint for engagement with Mugabe.<sup>16</sup> This was to infuriate the West who had hoped the 'African Renaissance' man would adopt the Mandela line and whip Mugabe into line. In fact, Mbeki was to pour water on such Western hopes when he came to the rescue of the stuttering, in fact near collapsing, Zimbabwe economy reeling under serious bankruptcy with a US\$500,000.00 loan package. It became clear that Mugabe was getting his diplomacy at home, regionally and internationally quite right.

Articulation of policy by the imposers particularly the EU with their grandstanding that they stand for democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance has also been challenged head on. In essence, what is clear is that this has backfired on the EU and the American 'coalition of the willing' as the Harare government turned the tables on them to argue that these ethos were actually under attack from the countries preaching them. Further, Zimbabwe under sanctions wrecked havoc on people and the general populace against a backdrop of the elites-ruling/business recording upsurge of business and wealth accumulation. The ZANU PF regime knows that if the cake is reduced in size only those who wield power will, and must benefit to keep the power arithmetic right. So, as long as the structures that sustain the party and government power were kept happy, the regime change agenda's chances of succeeding were decreased at an increasing rate. The economics of sanctions induced regime change is such that a poor and angry general populace would protest and change the regime. This was a poorly thought out strategy as this must work concurrently with the power structures. It is therefore true that though the strategy would work elsewhere else, in Zimbabwe it would not so much help the general populace but the much more favored elites that can then carry out their task with relative easiness. Thus, instead of bringing down the regime, the sanctions have hit hard the ordinary man and concurrently strengthened the nationalist military alliance that is ZANU PF.

Zimbabwe has brought success to the developing countries in their interaction with the West. Brown, the then British Prime minister, has agreed to set aside funds in Uganda for land reform and compensation of war veterans who fought alongside the British.

### **Concluding Remarks and the Future of Diplomacy in Zimbabwe**

Predicting the future of diplomacy in Zimbabwe is assisted by the 30 year experience of independence, but also more recently, the 10 year experience under study. The best of the diplomacy was exhibited and or employed when the ZANU PF's stranglehold in power was severely threatened for the first time since independence. Several factors contribute to a fairer prediction of where diplomacy in Zimbabwe is going. These include the liberation struggle alliances, the socialist oriented economic focus, regional geopolitics, bilateral and multi-lateral relations, foreign policy, sanctions and also the recently formed inclusive government now in its second year running. The ZANU PF has shown that crisis can turn out to be an opportunity and that orchestrated diplomacy can take good advantage of the crisis to create more options to defend it and subsequently maintain power to the detriment of the regime change agenda. There is little doubt that Zimbabwe seems to have won the diplomatic battle with the West, especially if one considers the defining factor that regime change has been avoided. On the other hand, it is important to appreciate the fact that the coming in of the inclusive government cannot possibly be read as the beginning of the end for ZANU PF, at least. Whilst both parties entered into the compromise arrangement, with minds and eyes wide open to share power in order to take it, the real deal lies ahead. Regime change will be possible if the opposition deals with the brazen ZANU PF maneuvers we have witnessed in the infantile years of this temporary marriage.

The very reality that an inclusive government is now in place in Harare provides an exciting take off in any discussion that attempts to predict the future of diplomacy in Zimbabwe. To the extent that ZANU PF and the key MDC partner that make up the sedimentary structure differ markedly not only in terms of foreign policy beyond Africa (pro East and pro West), but essentially ideology (state led capitalism versus full blown capitalism), political history (liberation war versus modern neo-liberal), and governance (centralized Presidential democracy and loyalty to a supreme leader versus decentralized people power) makes the attempt even more challenging as new diplomatic players have come into the fore. The 'power sharing' itself has been a bone of contention with some arguing that ZANU PF still holds the reigns as it has not lost control of the key positions of Presidency, but key posts like defense, home affairs and especially for purposes of this paper, foreign affairs. Be that as it may, it matters little in Zimbabwe which posts the parties may share. We argue that the governance structure is much that decision making rests with the President with the Prime Minister actually seeming more and more like a Senior

Minister, than Head of Government. The State media always prefix any reference to Robert Mugabe with ‘His Excellency the President, Head of State and Government and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces’. That is a very significant factor that cannot be ignored.

The EU which has endured an almost decade long diplomatic battle with the Zimbabwe government both individually and collectively, has reengaged with the same beginning in September 2009, exactly seven years after the fallout began. An EU delegation was deployed to Zimbabwe to start what Mugabe hoped would be ‘fruitful discussions’ as he noted, “We welcome you with open arms... We hope our talks will be fruitful with a positive outcome.”<sup>17</sup> This was to lead to the EU-Zimbabwe political dialogue which started in June 2009 with a ministerial troika meeting in Brussels and continued in September with an EU Troika visit to Harare. Since then, the dialogue has been carried out in Harare. The objective is to normalize relations (including lifting of Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement and restrictive measures) alongside with tangible progress in the implementation of the Global Political Agreement. As it turned out, by ‘fruitful’, Mugabe meant nothing other than the total removals of sanctions that the EU however maintains are “restrictive measures mainly consisting of arms embargo, a visa ban and freeze of assets of targeted individuals and entities”.<sup>18</sup> In view of this, it is highly predictable that the future official line in diplomatic circles will be that the EU is suffocating the efforts of the shaky inclusive government by maintaining the sanctions. It is much unexpected that Mugabe will implement the full Global Political Agreement unless and until the sanctions come to an end. According to Horace Campbell,

*The Zimbabwe Government is very aware of the anti-imperialist and anti-racist sentiments among oppressed peoples and thus has deployed a range of propagandists inside and outside the country in a bid to link every problem in Zimbabwe to international sanctions by the EU and USA.<sup>19</sup>*

Whereas economic recovery has an umbilical relationship with the removal of sanctions, Mugabe has shown before that he is prepared to sacrifice the economy for political survival, especially when the threat is from the Western backed regime change quarters.

The SADC will continually be roped in by Zimbabwe in its diplomatic drive as the regional body is the first port of call when it comes to institutions with better proximity to the political happenings in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe government has perfected the art of arm-twisting a hapless SADC into adopting its stance on the diplomatic chessboard for more reasons than one. Not only is Mugabe the most senior and surviving crop of Africa’s liberation leaders, but he seems to dominate the grouping totally while at the same time drawing awe and admiration. The SADC simply has no clue to deal with him especially with regards to his insistence that the regional grouping should never forget its founding principles as well as dance to the whims of the big powers. So amazing is this fact that it appears Zimbabwean

hardliner diplomacy is also simply too superior than even that of SADC combined especially when one looks at the way Zimbabwe has also abused the SADC Tribunal, as it relates to cases on land reform in Zimbabwe. The communiqué of the just ended SADC Summit (August 2010) is also useful as the group now feels the sanctions are not Zimbabwe's alone. Point 18 of the Summit resolution on Zimbabwe,

*3. Urged the Zimbabwe stakeholders to remain committed to the implementation of the Global Political Agreement;*

*4. Reiterated its call on the international community to lift all forms of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe and the SADC region in general,*

*5. Mandated the Chairperson of SADC assisted by the Chairperson of the Organ and the Facilitator of the Zimbabwe Political Dialogue to engage the international community on the issue of sanctions on Zimbabwe.<sup>20</sup>*

It is also expected that the Zimbabwean diplomacy regionally will work to continue to avoid Zimbabwe being placed on the agenda, but would rather adopt the ZANU PF stance calling for the removal of sanctions. It is unimaginable the SADC will ever censure Mugabe on any day.

The recent discovery of mineral wealth in the form of diamonds in Manicaland Province, and more importantly their certification by the Kimberley Process will definitely make Zimbabwe take its arrogance towards the West to a new level, at least in the short to medium term. Even though the EU remains the largest provider of development assistance to Zimbabwe, especially in health, education, food security and governance, any window of economic opportunity for Zimbabwean government will only increase the resolution of the Harare government to extricate itself from more Western development assistance that definitely lends credence to the West's interest in Zimbabwe's home affairs.

The economic crisis that was on a freefall and was on the edge of the precipice in 2008 was part of the US diplomacy in its drive for regime change in Zimbabwe. In 2007, US Ambassador to Zimbabwe predicted regime change due to the record levels of inflation and food shortages that hit Zimbabwe so hard. At the time, Ambassador Dell actually said the government was now 'committing regime change on itself'. Zimbabwe's official inflation in mid-2007 was 4,500%, but independent economists and retailers maintained that it was really above 11,000% and picking up speed.<sup>21</sup> The black market rate for the Zimbabwean dollar was tumbling to death daily against major currencies. He did not mince his words,

*By carrying out disastrous economic policies, the Mugabe government is committing regime change upon itself. Things have reached a critical point. I believe the excitement will come in a matter of months, if not weeks. The Mugabe government is reaching end game, it is running out of options.<sup>22</sup>*

The economy did not collapse as expected and the Zimbabwe government was able to pick up the pieces with the help of the partners in the inclusive government. This will therefore push the US and EU to relook at this diplomacy and surely its diplomatic offensive will have to move away from the economic argument, at least in so far as it is no longer in crisis mode.

## NOTES

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