CHAPTER 6:
ZIMBABWEAN FOREIGN POLICY

INTRODUCTION
If foreign policy is “the diplomatic policy of a nation in its interactions with other nations”\(^1\), and “diplomatic” refers to “skilled in negotiating between states”\(^2\), then, can one refer to Zimbabwe’s interaction with other states as foreign policy? Skilled would then have to refer to a friendly and defensive foreign policy. However, Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward Britain has not been friendly, yet has it achieved its aims? Does Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa have any direction?

This chapter uncovers the answers to these questions. Zimbabwean foreign policy is important because it highlights the sentiment of the Zimbabwean government and the personal characteristics of Robert Mugabe himself. This foreign policy is particularly important with regard to South Africa and Britain due to Zimbabwe’s complex past and relations with both these countries (see “Zimbabwean History” and “South African Foreign Policy Toward Zimbabwe”). Muagbe continues to wage a verbal war against Britain due to its decision to remove its land redistribution funding from Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is also heavily reliant on South Africa for economic and monetary assistance. This does not signal a significant change from white Rhodesian rule in Zimbabwe, and its reliance on the Apartheid regime – South Africa supplied Rhodesia with foreign investment, guns, and other ammunitions during the guerrilla war of the 1970’s.\(^3\)

“The Decisions of States” shows one that there are many different input and output variables for different states when it comes to foreign policy. “Practical problems arise in the affairs of these groups as they impinge upon one another. Foreign policy is the collection of measures, by no means intrinsically coherent, utilized by governments to meet these problems.”\(^4\) When investigating Zimbabwean foreign policy, one then has to consider the country’s past, the character of the country’s leader, international/regional organisations and treaties the country is party to, and the actions of other states.
ZIMBABWEAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA

When investigating the foreign policy of Zimbabwe one has to consider the ruling party (ZANU – PF), and how it rules and governs. This is because, as international relations theory shows, domestic policy works hand in hand with foreign policy.5

ZANU – PF came into power through an extensive struggle. For this reason, the new government’s aims at the time were to stabilise Zimbabwe, consolidate nation – building, and resolve the land crisis in a peaceful manner. At this time, the most powerful country in the region was Apartheid South Africa. During this time South Africa followed a policy of destabilisation in the African region, which refers to South Africa using force to attain its foreign policy goals – it backed UNITA in Angola, it provided covert military assistance to the anti-FRELIMO insurgency, RENAMO, and it threatened military intervention (which occurred) and imposed sanctions on Lesotho.6

In terms of international relations theory, one could say that Zimbabwe’s political objectives in the early 1980’s were ‘realist’ in nature. This refers to the school of Realism and its focus on the state itself – the most important factor being state power and state interest. Realism also upholds the notions of sovereignty and diplomacy, and in this regard, Zimbabwe respected South Africa’s sovereignty by not militarily intervening in Apartheid.

Referring to South Africa - Lesotho relations during the 1980’s - it gives one a good example of what Zimbabwe was facing.

Tensions between the two countries rose in the 1970s because of Lesotho's criticism of South Africa at the UN and at the OAU, its support for the ANC, its provision of safe haven to antiapartheid fighters such as MK, and its close ties to a number of socialist countries. Relations became severely strained in April 1983, when the Jonathan government announced that Lesotho was at war with South Africa, and again in 1984, when Lesotho refused to sign a non-aggression pact with South Africa. In response, South Africa impounded shipments of arms to Lesotho, threatened economic sanctions, and suspended talks concerning the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (a thirty-year cooperative engineering venture that would supply water to South Africa and provide electric power and financial compensation to Lesotho).7
Zimbabwe needed to keep up trade with South Africa for economic reasons, yet on the other hand it too was housing ANC supporters. Zimbabwe realised this, and decided that it needed regional support. For this reason, Zimbabwe’s focus turned to regional diplomacy. The country joined the Non – Aligned Movement (NAM) in the early 1980’s, and Mugabe became chairman in 1986. NAM stands for sovereignty, non – aggression, human rights, and non – discrimination, among other principles. This was important to Zimbabwe, because joining a force that protected sovereignty and was against discrimination gave her allies where South Africa was concerned. The country joined SADCC for the same reasons.

The Influence of African Organisations

When considering the interaction of states in organisations academically, Liberalism is a discipline that explains this interaction well. Its main critique of Realism is that it overlooks the many different voices (not just states) that are involved in the dialogue that is international relations. Liberal tradition believes that the world can progress together if there is more regional co – operation. The pressure that SADCC and NAM applied to Apartheid South Africa (economic assistance to African nationalist parties and verbally stood in disagreement with Apartheid policies) supports this notion due to the fact that it influenced the creation of a democratic South Africa.

As a member of SADCC, NAM, and the UN, Zimbabwe exercised regional diplomacy and joined with other countries in isolating Apartheid South Africa. Once South Africa had reached a negotiated settlement in 1994, the tensions and relations in these regional organisations shifted due to the change in hegemony (South Africa was still as powerful, but now it was also a democracy). For this reason, Zimbabwe now had to change its foreign policy approach to South Africa. Zimbabwe also lost its position as leader of SADC at this time. Also, as domestic politics in Zimbabwe worsened (the economy weakened and the land issue worsened), the country became more and more reliant on its powerful neighbour. This then supports the critique of Liberalism - as much as regional co – operation is beneficial, as a state, one can not rely on that alone – the domestic policies of a state also need to be strong and beneficial to its people. The natural state of anarchy in international politics produces
the need for self-help and state security. If a state does not put itself first, then it will become reliant on other states – like Zimbabwe on South Africa.

At the political level, Zimbabwe is grappling with a debilitating domestic and international political hiatus and has moved from being ‘my brother’s keeper’ to SA before 1994 to becoming reliant on the latter...In the economic and social areas, Zimbabwe has moved from being the second most important trading partner with SA, to what can only be described as a dependent state.11

For the above-mentioned reasons, Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa in recent years has been more or less amicable, and has highlighted the fact that Zimbabwe needs South Africa in order to survive. There has been no dramatic response to Zimbabwe’s domestic policy by South African president Thabo Mbeki, which suggests that Mugabe expected that exact reaction. President Robert Mugabe has been dealing with South Africa for many years and most probably assumed that South Africa would not be so bold as to withdraw her support for the country, and would therefore be left with the role of silent broker when it came to foreign relations with Zimbabwe.

In 2000, at a speech given in Tanzania, Mugabe highlighted states that seek sovereignty and undermine regional security to get it.12 Martin Rupiya states in the Turkish Journal of International Relations that this comment by Mugabe was perceived as a direct attack on South Africa, due to the countries past policy of destabilization. This means that worked into Zimbabwe’s foreign policy approach to South Africa, is the notion that SA places its own interests ahead of the regions. This means that in order to quieten SA, Mugabe would have to lean on other southern African leaders. The fact that Zimbabwe has remained a member of all southern African regional organizations means that this approach has worked. It also means that other African countries fear Zimbabwe – they fear a spill – over into the rest of the region, and a land dispute in their own countries.

Zimbabwe has defence pacts with Angola, the DRC and Namibia, but not with South Africa.13 Zimbabwe pursued a pact with South Africa, but SA would not sign one.14 This highlights the fact that Zimbabwe views South Africa as a military, as well as, an
economic ally. South Africa and Zimbabwe have, however, co–operated in SADC peacekeeping mission, for example, in Lesotho.15

During ESAP years in the early 1990’s, political considerations seemed to come before economic ones. One would think at some stage Zimbabwe would have attempted to follow South Africa’s example of economic policy in terms of sustainable development, yet it did not. Land redistribution was already playing a large role in Zimbabwe at that time, and it became a direct part of its economic decline. This set the precedent for internal politics in Zimbabwe greatly affecting its foreign policy. Politically, Zimbabwe has had the loudest voice internationally when defending its internal policies, and has used this as its foreign policy approach to sustain much–needed economic relations and quieten any disagreements of its land policy. In this respect, land policy in Zimbabwe has created an ‘I need you – but I don’t’ foreign policy approach toward South Africa. This is because Zimbabwe cannot overlook its dependency on South Africa because economically alone, it is so in need of the help, yet a belief in sovereignty means that it believes that the internal policies of Zimbabwe are not the concern of another sovereign state.

ZANU–PF aligned with the PAC post–Apartheid, so Zimbabwe now stands in a position where if South Africa openly disagrees with its land reform, it can put pressure on the PAC to disrupt land reform in South Africa. Mugabe must realise that the land issues in Zimbabwe are the same as the land issues in South Africa.16 Implementation has been different in the two countries, yet many South Africans agree with Mugabe’s aims.17

Zimbabwe disagreed with the proposed idea of NEPAD when it was launched (Mbeki’s brainchild), and neglected its commitment to the AU to sell the idea to its electorate.18 This was obviously because if Zimbabwe supported the idea, it would have to review undemocratic policies it practised. This difference in opinions between South Africa and Zimbabwe highlights that fact that in the last few years, these previously close political, security and social identities have begun to develop on different paths.19 This is because Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa over the last few years has been minimal and has failed to reenergize their previously
close relationship of the past. Over and above economic concerns, Zimbabwe has left South Africa alone, not interfering in its domestic policies while defending its own.

ZIMBABWEAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD BRITAIN

Zimbabwe’s foreign policy approach toward Britain in recent years has been completely different to the approach toward South Africa. Whereas Zimbabwe finds itself dependent on South Africa for financial and economic support and has therefore maintained amicable relations, Zimbabwe wants no support or interference from Britain. Mugabe has raged a verbal war against British Prime Minister Tony Blair when it became obvious that Britain would invest no further support in Zimbabwe until democratic principles are adhered to. By attacking Britain, Zimbabwe has attempted to rally African support by highlighting the adverse effect that colonialism and foreign involvement has on the continent.

The US$2 billion promised for land acquisition/resettlement by the UK and US at Lancaster House Peace Conference did not materialise. Some British money did come between 1981 and 1995 totalling US$75 million - a far cry from the US$2 billion originally envisaged. The British Labour government stopped any payment after 1996, saying they no longer recognized colonial commitments to Zimbabwe. The repudiation of pledges by Britain was the direct cause of the land crisis of the year 2000. The Zimbabwe government amended its laws so as to allow faster resettlement with or without British money. Over 60,000 liberation war veterans and other landless Africans occupied 1,700 owned by white farmers from February 2000 as a demonstration of their anger and frustration at the continuation of racial division of land 20 years after independence.20

To some extent, the argument (expressed in Zimbabwean foreign policy toward the UK) that Britain did not fulfil its promises toward Zimbabwe where land is involved is true. Britain could have monitored the process better from early on, for example they could have been in charge of the money instead of having to monitor it through the Zimbabwean government. Also, Zimbabwe was relying on British funding when it made what was then the current and future plans for its land redistribution programme. Promises were made to the Zimbabwean people based on these plans. Britain should have realised this and tried to solve the problem logically, instead of giving Zimbabwe an ultimatum that could not be met instantly anyway. However, the mismanagement of funds and land in Zimbabwe was not a gradual process – the British were alerted to it as soon as it happened. This did not allow for gradual
appeasement from the British. An ultimatum was the most effective solution considering the time restraints.

Zimbabwean foreign policy toward Britain centres on the land issue because the landlessness of the majority of black people in Zimbabwe was created during colonialism. Also, Britain funded Zimbabwe’s land redistribution programme until withdrawal of support due to the undemocratic manner in which it believed Mugabe was managing operations. Mugabe has taken no criticism for land reform since. Instead, he has blamed Britain for creating the situation, and not adequately fixing it.

At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Mugabe criticised Blair, his country, and his approach to politics. This came after Mugabe walked out of the room when Blair stood up to address the summit. Mugabe was basically trying to tell Blair that Africans are not Europeans, and they do not wish to be. He was suggesting that Africa is for Africans and the rest of the international community should respect that. This speech explains why Zimbabwean foreign policy toward Britain is purely confrontational and aggressive. Zimbabwean foreign policy focuses mainly only Africa now due to Mugabe’s belief that the West just interferes.

Mugabe’s sentiment toward Britain continued when in 2004 he compared Zimbabwe to Iraq, and stated that Britain imposed unfair sanctions on both countries. He went on to say that both Britain and the United States were trying to play God and were getting involved in sovereign states they had no right to be involved in. Later in 2005, Mugabe was quoted saying: “That’s false and we are very angry at that but if he wants reconciliation we are ready.” Mugabe was referring to Britain’s accusations of human rights abuses and undemocratic land reform. Mugabe might have said this because the 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe were looming and he was trying to rally as much support for his party as he could.

CONCLUSION

“The basis of many studies of foreign policy is the fundamental question of who did what to whom?” This means that by studying a variety of different incidences over time, one can conclude the general foreign policy approach of the country. As has
been shown in this chapter, however, one also has to place the country in the context of the region and the international community, in order to fully understand its actions.

Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa from the 1980’s to the present day has been affected by Apartheid, regional organizations, and land. Economically, their relationship has remained much the same from the Apartheid regime to today, with Zimbabwe relying on South Africa for support. Politically, Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa has become quieter and diplomatic from the days when she was still pressuring South Africa to reach a negotiated settlement.

ZANU – PF came to power through a struggle for independence, and this is significant because it explains their domestic policy approach of internal stabilization from the early 1980’s. Apartheid South Africa was the most powerful country in the region at this time, and this is important to note because South Africa was following a policy of destabilization at this time. This meant that it was using force to obtain foreign policy objectives. Zimbabwe did not want a negative relationship with the most powerful country in the region, even though it disagreed with the policies of Apartheid. For this reason, Zimbabwe required regional support, and therefore joined NAM and SADCC in the 1980’s. Both of these organizations joined in isolating South Africa.

After South Africa formally became a democracy in 1994, there was a large shift in power in the organizations in Southern Africa. This is significant because Zimbabwe then lost its position as leader of SADCC. Also, the worsening land situation in Zimbabwe at the time, and the economic effects of this, had Zimbabwe becoming more and more dependent on South Africa. Since then, Zimbabwe has defended the notion of sovereignty, stating that its internal politics is its business alone. Zimbabwe has refused to support democracy not only through its internal politics, but also by rejecting the notion of NEPAD, and neglecting its commitment to the AU by not attempting to sell the idea to its electorate. This is significant, because it highlights Zimbabwe’s need to have relations with a country like SA, but then its outright refusal to follow or support democratic principles (and NEPAD is Mbeki’s brainchild).
Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward Britain, on the other hand, went from co-operation with regard to land redistribution to a stalemate where the two countries hardly communicate. Mugabe blames much of the current land crisis on Britain due to the fact that it withdrew funding for the programme in the late 1990’s.

Zimbabwe wants no interference from the UK in its country. Mugabe launched a verbal war on Britain when it became obvious that the country would no longer fund Zimbabwe’s land redistribution programme. This is important because it suggests that Zimbabwe has not only blames Britain for withdrawing funding, but it has used the UK as a tool to deflect any blame for the current land crisis from itself. Mugabe has done this through repeatedly highlighting the adverse effects of colonialism. Mugabe’s attack on Blair at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development shows just how confrontational and aggressive Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward Britain has become.

The significance of Zimbabwe’s foreign policy toward South Africa and Britain is that it highlights the complexity of interstate relations, and places Zimbabwe in the context of the region (Southern Africa), and the international community. An overall view of events and relationships is always important when attempting to understand the specific events of a nation state.

A better understanding of the impact of land in Zimbabwe on foreign policy is obtained through reading the next chapter on South African and British foreign policy toward Zimbabwe. Recent foreign policy statements and decisions are more easily attained from these two countries than from Zimbabwe. This is due to the fact that Zimbabwe’s internal administration has collapsed in the last few years.
Endnotes


6 “South Africa seized Namibia from Germany during World War I and eventually instituted a system of apartheid similar to the one now existing in South Africa. Namibia’s resources came under the control of white settlers and of foreign corporations. In 1966, the United Nations declared the South African presence in Namibia to be illegal and ordered South African troops to vacate the area. However, successive South African governments have refused, claiming that the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) harbours and supports ANC “terrorists”. In response to this threat, 90,000 South African troops are stationed in Namibia to keep the peace. As you will recall, Angola purportedly harbours SWAPO “terrorists” in Angola, which explains the South African attacks on that country. South Africa dominates the transportation network of the entire region, and in order to maintain this dominance has launched attacks against alternative outlets to ports in Mozambique and Angola. In 1981, South Africa deliberately delayed oil and fertilizer shipments to Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana to hinder production and marketing of crops; this served to maintain the region’s dependence on South Africa for food supplies. These ongoing destabilization campaigns have put the CIA in an odd position: South Africa’s energy monopoly is somewhat threatened by Angola’s increasing ability to produce and refine petroleum.” - De Lancey, B., “…Meanwhile, in South Africa, the Bloody Capitalist-Apartheid Regime Remains…As Multinationals Reap Profits – November 1992” (accessed from http://www.etext.org/Politics/AlternativeOrange/2/v2n2_misa.html on 24 July 2005), pp. 1.


9 Zimbabwe was a member of the Frontline States (FLS) before SADCC, which was an offshoot of FLS. “The FLS alliance was formed from the remnants of the short-lived ‘Mulungushi Club’. Most of its members once belonged to PAFMECSA (the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and
Southern Africa). PAFMECSA, in turn, grew out of PAFMECA (the Pan-African Movement for East and Central Africa), established in 1958, which changed its name and Constitution in 1962 to accommodate newly independent countries outside its original Anglophone region.

PAFMECA/PAFMECSA had a series of eight conferences before it was eventually overtaken by the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963. At continental level, the OAU Liberation Committee took responsibility for much of the work that PAFMECSA had engaged in, but the feeling remained that this was too formal and broad an institution to cater for the particular and special needs of the sub-region. As a result, and subsequent to the dissolution of PAFMECSA, a series of Conferences on East and Central African Countries (CECAC) were initiated by Tanzania and Zambia to fill the vacuum left by PAFMECSA. Together with President Mobutu Sese Seko of the former Zaïre, Nyerere and Kaunda were the most active in the region.

For most of the time the region reflected an uncompromising commitment in support of the armed struggle as opposed to dialogue. Yet, the fifth CECAC issued the Lusaka Manifesto in 1969, which was later adopted by both the OAU and the UN and, for a limited period, provoked a debate on dialogue in Southern Africa. The seventh CECAC subsequently issued the Mogadishu Declaration that reassessed the situation and concluded that the white minority regimes in Southern Africa had not only rejected the Lusaka Manifesto, but were not amenable to negotiation. The Lusaka Manifesto and the Mogadishu Declaration laid a basis for the future alternative strategies of independent Southern African countries. Dialogue and peaceful settlement of Southern African conflicts were only to be revived by the Harare Declaration (1989) in a very different, post-Cold War context and at a time that both Namibia and Zimbabwe had joined the ranks of the FLS.

The Mulungushi Club was the most short-lived of the groupings preceding the FLS and there was a degree of co-existence between CECAC and the Club. Operating approximately between 1970 and 1974, the Club was the immediate predecessor of the FLS alliance. Its original four members were Tanzania, Uganda (until Idi Amin replaced Milton Obote in a 1971 coup), Zaïre (Mobutu attended meetings from 1973) and Zambia. Its name reflected its nature — that of an informal group of respected heads of state rather than an interstate institution. Like the previous groupings and others such as CECAC, the Club also had its focus on the liberation of Southern Africa. Its relatively small size allowed it to meet frequently and at short notice. Also, like all other regional and sub-regional groupings, leaders of active liberation movements in Southern Africa were being frequently invited to the Club summits. Most of these features were carried over to the FLS alliance.

Within a sub-regional context, the FLS was the most important and indeed most recognised structure to emerge in the mid-1970s at a time when the anti-colonial struggle was the most important concern in the sub-region. The FLS was constituted as an informal forum for the discussion of mainly political and, to a lesser extent, military problems common among the liberation movements, and the problems faced by newly independent governments in Zambia, Mozambique and Angola. Security issues were
discussed in the ISDSC, the informal substructure of the FLS. At Summit level, the FLS was not only a club of national governments, but included representatives from the various liberation movements in its meetings and, for a time, the head of state of Nigeria as a type of informal associate. The heads of state of Botswana (Sir Seretse Khama), Tanzania (Julius Nyerere) and Zambia (Kenneth Kaunda) can be considered to be the founders of the FLS in 1975, together with Samora Machel of Mozambique. Angola joined in 1976, Zimbabwe in 1980 and Namibia in 1990. South Africa briefly joined in 1994 before the demise of the FLS later that same year. Lesotho was never a member of the FLS, although representatives of the government of Chief Leabua Jonathan attended a number of ISDSC meetings.

The FLS alliance would play its most important role in the final years leading up to the end of white rule in the former Rhodesia and the creation of Zimbabwe in 1980. Thereafter, the alliance lost a degree of impact — compounded by economic decline among its members and South Africa’s aggressive destabilisation policies. Economic issues loomed as the next primary challenge for the region and, as a result, the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) was founded in 1980, resulting in the further erosion of the influence of the FLS.” – “The Legacy of the Frontline States” (accessed from http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Monographs/No43/TheLegacy.html on 24 July 2005), pp. 1.

17 Ibid, pp. 1.
18 Ibid, pp. 173.
19 Ibid, pp. 173.
22 Ibid, pp. 1.
For example, during the Nixon administration (1968-1974), the United States and the Soviet Union had a relaxation of diplomatic tensions known as the détente period. This was reflected in a variety of foreign policy actions, including arms control agreements, a decrease in hostile rhetoric, increased trade, and increased cooperation in resolving disputes. A decision maker living during this period would have a general perception that the hostility between the two superpowers had decreased. However, this perception would be based on a general pattern of cooperative interaction, rather than on a single incident.” – Schrodt, P. A. “Event Data in Foreign Policy Analysis” (accessed from www.ku.edu/~keds/papers.dir/Haney.pdf on 24 July 2005), pp. 1.