

South Africa's Foreign Policy Towards Swaziland and Zimbabwe

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Two of South Africa's neighbours, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, are engaged in struggles to open up political space. In the case of Zimbabwe, since the February 2000 referendum, the economic and political crisis in the country has accelerated, bringing the second most developed economy in Southern Africa to the verge of economic collapse.

Pretoria has chosen to apply a policy of limited engagement, 'quiet diplomacy', in dealing with the political crises in both countries. This diplomatic approach has evoked intense criticism of the South African government, especially with regard to the politics of Zimbabwe. Yet both countries are guilty of human rights abuses, ignoring the rule of law, political suppression of the opposition, economic mismanagement, and tyrannical leadership. Zimbabwe has been like a thorn in the ANC government's side since March 2000, when President Robert Mugabe's controversial land reform programme led to the seizure of white-owned farms by so-called 'war veterans'. This was accompanied by the murder and torture of white farmers and black farm workers who were unwilling to give up their land and jobs without compensation.

This paper examines why there is inconsistency in the debate, centred on human rights, over the application of South Africa's foreign policy towards Swaziland and Zimbabwe. It also considers why Pretoria is unable to exercise its will beyond the use of persuasive diplomacy² in trying to find solutions to the political governance problems within these two countries.

Though human rights abuses play a part in increasing the pressure brought to bear on Pretoria to take a decisive stand against Robert Mugabe, they do not take centre stage in the political controversy surrounding that country. To the contrary, economic concerns are at the heart of the debate on South Africa's policy position towards Zimbabwe.

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² By persuasive diplomacy I mean that Pretoria has chosen to deal with the political conflict in both countries through negotiation between the governments in power and the opposition parties, to open a dialogue that might bring a peaceful end to their crises.

Zimbabwe is the second most developed economy in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates indicated that growth in sub-Saharan Africa had risen from 2.1% in 1994 to 5% in 1995, and a further 5.5% in 1996. The Southern African region, particularly South Africa and Zimbabwe was chiefly responsible for this resurgence.³ Zimbabwe's economy has in the past contributed significantly to economic growth in SADC. Therefore its breakdown has serious implications for the economic and political stability of the entire SADC region. Swaziland, on the other hand, is a much smaller country than Zimbabwe, and exerts economic influence. Also, King Mswati III does not wield as much political authority in the region as Robert Mugabe, who is able to influence the debate on land not only in South Africa but in other countries in SADC. The crisis in Swaziland has been contained within that country for years, and its spillover effects on the region are viewed with less fear and suspicion because they are of relatively minor import to other countries.

Swaziland

Swaziland is a small landlocked country, almost wholly surrounded by South Africa. Eighty percent of its population relies on subsistence agriculture, and 40% live below the poverty line (according to 1995 estimate).⁴ The country has never been a big economic player in the region, and relies on South Africa for most of its imports. The gradual move of investors from Swaziland to South Africa in the early 1990s owing to the dismantling of apartheid dealt a severe blow to Swaziland's already fragile economy. Its annual rate of real GDP growth declined from 7% in 1980 to 3% in the 1990s.⁵ Though Swaziland's economy performed relatively well during the first years of the millennium, with real GDP growth rates between 1.7% and 3.6% each year (partly owing to its participation in the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act — AGOA), its economy is still very small.⁶

In 2003 the BBC described Swaziland as an 'island of dictatorship in a sea of democracy'.⁷ The small mountain kingdom has been ruled by an absolute monarch since King Sobhuza II issued a decree in 1973 giving him legislative, executive and judicial powers, which allow the monarch unlimited authority over all state institutions. In his Royal Proclamation of April 1973, King Sobhuza stated that the constitution introduced at

³ 'Policies for faster growth and poverty reduction in sub-Sahara and the role of the IMF', *IMF Issues Brief*, December 2000, www.imf.org.

⁴ CIA World Factbook, 'Swaziland', www.cia.gov.

⁵ *Afrol News*, 'Swazi socio-economic situation is serious', 4 November 2003, www.afrol.com.

⁶ *2003 Review of Swaziland's Economic Performance*, Article IV Consultation, www.imf.org.

⁷ BBC Country Profile, 'Swaziland', 21 November 2003: news.bbc.co.uk.

independence had allowed for the introduction of political practices that were foreign to, and incompatible with, Swazi society. They had caused insecurity and unrest in that country, and were also an obstruction to the development of the Swazi people.⁸

Little has changed in Swaziland since. King Mswati III has held to the 1973 decree, which also bans political parties and any political gatherings; restricts trade unions to matters dealing only with labour issues; and places the monarch above the law. Furthermore, the country's labour laws do not conform with International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards; the rule of law is non-existent; there is no bill of rights protecting civil liberties or granting women equal legal status to men; and violence against women remains a major problem. Freedom of speech is limited. The press is prohibited from speaking out against the king, or reporting anything that is deemed defamatory to the government. However, several political groups operate openly within the country and lobby the royalists for political reform, even though their efforts are banned by royal decree. Members of these pro-democracy groups are frequently harassed and arrested.

In 1996 King Mswati III established a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC). Its mandate was to make recommendations on a new constitution after consultation with civil society. The draft constitution was presented to the Swazi nation on 31 May 2003, seven years after the process commenced (the original completion deadline was for 1998). The king was expected to sign it into law before the end of 2004, but recent media reports state that this may not happen before 2005 because the king 'finds it difficult' to fit it into his royal engagement diary.⁹ Opposition parties claim it is a lack of political will towards reform on the part of the monarch that is the reason for the drawn-out nature of the process.

The constitution-drafting process and the draft constitution itself have been criticised and are being challenged by opposition parties, on the grounds that there has been no debate of issues as initially envisioned. Also the 30-member CRC was hand-picked by royalists, and led by Prince Mangaliso Dlamini and Prince David Dlamini, who are close relations of the king.¹⁰ Village chiefs were present when local communities made their submissions to the CRC, and prevented them from speaking out against the king. The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a pro-democracy movement consisting of lawyers, human rights activists and opposition parties, is planning to challenge the draft constitution in court before it

⁸ Matlosa K, 'Constitutional development', in *Swaziland Election Dossier*, 1, October 2003. Pretoria: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, p.12..

⁹ IRIN, 'Swaziland: Constitution process stalled, while MPs get back to work', 7 July 2004, www.irinnews.com.

¹⁰ Matlosa K, *op. cit.*, p13.

passes into law. They believe that the review process lacked transparency and accountability, and object that there is no record of consensus having been reached within the wider Swazi population on the CRC's recommendations to the constitution-writing committee. In the proposed constitution, executive authority still rests solely in the hands of the king, who maintains his dominance over all state institutions, and remains above the reach of the law. Section 166 (c) of the draft constitution states that the Human Rights Commission is prohibited from investigating 'a matter relating to the exercise of any royal prerogative by the Crown'. Because it does not state clearly what such matters are, the draft constitution leaves a loophole that allows the monarch to infringe on the rights of others without legal recourse for the victims. The king also has the authority to revoke constitutional laws. In short, the draft constitution fails to provide sufficient checks and balances on the exercise of the monarch's powers but instead, gives the king more authority. In this way it maintains the political status quo and sets the stage for further suppression of political and individual freedoms.

Opposition parties and trade unions have been active in Swaziland since the 1960s, but were not collectively organised until the 1970s. They include the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU, 1973), the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO, 1989), and the Swaziland Democratic Alliance (SDA, 1997), an umbrella group of banned political parties, labour organisations and human rights bodies, much like the United Democratic Front in apartheid South Africa. Reports of the harassment and physical assault of members of progressive forces such as PUDEMO, SDA, and SFTU, who were demanding the introduction of political reform, abounded in the run-up to the October 2003 parliamentary elections. The SDA called for a boycott of the elections because they were not being held under a democratic multiparty system, and therefore would not yield genuine parliamentary representation for the Swazi people. (Under the *Tinkhundla* electoral system, the king appoints 10 members of the 65-member National Assembly; the rest are elected through national elections from candidates nominated by the chiefs.¹¹ The National Assembly acts as an advisory body to the king, who can dissolve it without any prior consultation with state institutions.)

Swaziland's internal political dispensation has earned it an unflattering reputation abroad, especially among international donors. The volume of funding for NGOs in Swaziland has decreased substantially in recent years. Donors such as the Action of Churches Together (ACT), the International Red Cross, and German and Italian charities have reduced their support of projects. Denmark scrapped all its aid programmes in the

¹¹ Karume S, 'Swaziland's electoral process', in *Swaziland Election Dossier*, 1, October 2003. Pretoria: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, p.12.

country in 2002, and pulled out of Swaziland altogether. Like other international donors, it cited the absence of the rule of law, lack of accountability and corruption as reasons for no longer providing financial aid to Swaziland. These problems, together with poor labour standards, have contributed to low flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country: in 2001, Swaziland attracted only \$20 million.¹² As mentioned earlier, the decreased levels of FDI in Swaziland since the 1990s can also be attributed to the democratic transition in South Africa, when many firms formerly based in Swaziland moved to South Africa. However, Swaziland's inclusion in AGOA (an American initiative) has encouraged foreign companies, mainly Taiwanese investors in the textiles industry, to establish operations in the country. In this way they can take advantage of Swaziland's preferential access to US markets.

In 2003 Swaziland was forced to revise its labour legislation to improve workers' rights. It did this after the US threatened to withhold the extension of its AGOA benefits, because of repressive labour legislation (the 2000 Industrial Relations Act), which did not comply with ILO labour practices). Faced with the threat of foreign investors moving to other countries such as Botswana, South Africa or Mozambique to retain the preferential access to US markets conferred by AGOA,¹³ Swaziland amended its labour laws. However, despite moves to improve workers' rights (such as freedom of association, acceptable working hours and conditions, and better health and safety standards), Swaziland's labour procedures still do not meet internationally recognised labour criteria. Government supporters remain suspicious of trade unions. Though some union activities, such as the right to organise, have been allowed, controls on unions remain severely restrictive under the new constitution.

South Africa and Swaziland

The South African government has expressed concern over the detention of Swazi trade unionists and leaders of political parties. It has called on King Mswati III to restore free political activity, and attempted to steer Swaziland's monarch towards accepting a more democratic dispensation or a constitutional monarchy. Such efforts can be traced back to 1996 when the then South African president, Nelson Mandela, took advantage of South Africa's position as chair of SADC to put diplomatic pressure on Mswati to begin negotiations for multiparty democracy with local pro-democracy organisations. It was as a result of these efforts by Mandela

¹² 'Swaziland', *www.mbendi.co.za*.

¹³ *AGOA News*, 'Swaziland's AGOA privileges may be lost over workers' rights', 19 September 2003.

and the presidents of Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe that King Mswati established the CRC.

Political tension in Swaziland is complicated by cultural dynamics. These make it difficult for South Africa to press for political change within that country. Although political reformers in Swaziland are advocating democratisation with increasing urgency, the king has widespread support in the rural areas, where he is seen as a strong unifying force in the country. In these traditionally-minded areas, his rule is justified by appeals to culture and Biblical texts.

President Thabo Mbeki has also commented on the state of political affairs in Swaziland. In his 2003 state of the nation address, Mbeki expressed his support for a transition to a more democratic dispensation in that country.¹⁴ Later that year he publicly criticised attempts by the Swazi parliament to pass the Media Council Bill, which is aimed at regulating the media. The bill, which stipulates that, among other things, newspaper owners must have a degree in journalism and live in Swaziland, and that journalists practising without licences can be fined up to \$3,200 or face five years' imprisonment,¹⁵ was tabled by the minister of information, Abednego Ntshangase, in April 2004. In reaction to criticism from Mbeki, international rights groups, foreign envoys stationed in Swaziland, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Swazi government withdrew the bill. However, journalists fear that it might be revived at some time in the future.

Despite the South African government's concern over the political environment in Swaziland, the two countries have co-operated on a number of binational projects. South Africa and Swaziland have formed partnerships for the construction of dams so that they can use shared water resources to greater mutual advantage. Examples of these are the Komati River Development Project, the Drieskoppies Dam and the Magugu Dam. The Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative was launched in 1998 in KwaZulu-Natal under the Tripartite Permanent Technical Committee comprising Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. Its purpose was to upgrade the transport route between Richards Bay harbour, Swaziland and Mozambique, and to create the opportunity for globally competitive industries along the route. This in turn would create jobs and economic growth to the benefit of all three countries. Such initiatives are also regarded as making a concrete contribution towards regional development.

¹⁴ Mbeki T, State of the Nation Address delivered to Parliament on 14 February 2003, *www.gov.za*.

¹⁵ Africa News Service, 'Swaziland journalists prepare to fight restrictive media bill', 24 August 1998. *www.swazinews.co.sz*.

South Africa does not condone the somewhat dictatorial regime in Swaziland, but it cannot escape participating in joint projects with that country because it is a close neighbour. Also Swaziland shares waterways with South Africa which are important to the government's development strategy.

Pressures from within South Africa for the government to take a more active approach towards solving the political situation in Swaziland come mainly from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). The African National Congress (ANC) has also, on occasion, lobbied the government to do more about the human rights abuses and the suppression of democracy in that country. Cosatu has been the most vocal, both at the political and labour levels, against Swaziland's absolute monarch, and in solidarity with the SFTU. In July 2002 Cosatu and the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) called for the suspension of Swaziland from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and from the African Union (AU), claiming that the country did not practise the principles of democracy, good governance, accountability, and transparency that these institutions encourage in their member states. In April 2003 Cosatu led a successful blockade of the Swaziland/South African border, preventing trucks from entering or leaving Swaziland. The blockade was intended as a show of support for workers holding protest marches in Swaziland against the Global Smart Partnership International Dialogue Summit.¹⁶ The Swazi government called the strike by Cosatu a contravention of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and SADC trade protocols, which allow for the free flow of trade between the two countries.

The ANC has found it difficult to make public criticisms of the Swazi monarch, because his country was one of many in Africa that sheltered the party's stalwarts in exile during the apartheid years. It seems ironic that progressive political parties are banned in Swaziland now, after its history of providing refuge for members of South African pro-democracy groups. However, the ANC's public stance towards Swaziland changed with the release of its party manifesto prior to the 2004 elections, in which that country was described as one the ANC intended to help to strengthen democracy and assist in 'social normalisation and economic reconstruction'.¹⁷ In response to the offer of assistance to Swaziland contained in the ANC manifesto, the minister of foreign affairs in Swaziland, Mabili Dlamini, stated, 'the Swazis are capable of formulating

¹⁶ Naidoo K, 'South African civil society and the making of South African foreign policy', in *South Africa's Foreign Policy 1994-2004: Apartheid Past, Renaissance Future*. Johannesburg: SAIIA, 2004, p.192.

¹⁷ Manifesto 2004, 'A people's contract to create work and fight poverty', www.anc.org.za/elections/2004.

their own system of democratic governance, which does not have to be similar to the South African model'.¹⁸

This attitude (of seeing South Africa's intentions as interference), coupled with the cultural dynamics of the country, make it difficult for Pretoria to press for change within Swaziland. The majority of Swazis are not mobilising against what, from a democratic point, is an oppressive system of governance. The only way Pretoria can influence events in Swaziland is by using persuasive diplomacy and assuring supporters of the royal family that Swaziland's customs and traditions can continue to be nurtured within a more democratic dispensation. However, for such an outcome to be achieved, peaceful dialogue among all interest groups is required.

Zimbabwe

From the 1980s to the early 1990s, President Robert Mugabe successfully led Zimbabwe on a path of economic development. Zimbabwe was hailed as a model of third world development in sub-Saharan Africa. During the 1980s Zimbabwe recorded annual average growth levels as high as 12%, and in 1993 the country achieved the third highest GDP in the region at \$7.1 billion.¹⁹ Zimbabwe's economy was more diversified than that of any of its neighbours except South Africa. (Zimbabwe is South Africa's largest trading partner in Africa, with the balance of trade falling in South Africa's favour.) It had the most diversified and integrated manufacturing sector in sub-Saharan Africa, producing food, drink, textiles, wool, paper, chemical, metals and many other manufactured goods.²⁰ Zimbabwe also had an advanced commercial agricultural sector, exporting the highest quality of tobacco in the world. That product was the country's biggest foreign currency earner, bringing in approximately \$430 million in 1994.²¹ The country was also able to produce agricultural food outputs beyond subsistence level, eliminating the risk of any shortages.

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing its worst economic crisis in the 24 years since independence. Average annual inflation has been on an upward trend since 2000, and in the past three years it has been among the highest currently recorded in the world, reaching its peak in November 2003 at 619.5%. It dipped slightly to 448% in June 2004.²² Unemployment has reached extremely high levels (70%) and food

¹⁸ IRIN, 'South Africa–Swaziland: Mbabane chides Pretoria over ANC Manifesto', 2 March 2004, www.irinnews.org.

¹⁹ CIA World Fact Book, online at www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ 'Zimbabwe Tobacco Exports (Zimtabac Case), www.american.edu.

²² 'Zimbabwe inflation rate dips', 12 June 2004, www.news24.com.

assessors predict that 12 million Zimbabweans will need two million tonnes of grain to survive the year.²³ Industrial production is 60% below capacity owing to shortages in fuel, power, and foreign exchange, which make it impossible for firms to buy essential materials.²⁴ Zimbabwe used to be the front-runner for FDI in SADC, receiving as much as \$444.3 million in investment in 1998, but this amount dwindled to \$5.4 million in 2001.²⁵

These facts seem remarkable for a country that was rated as one of the most developed in sub-Saharan African less than five years ago. Zimbabwe's current economic problems can be attributed to the political crises that have crippled the country since the implementation of the March 2000 land reform programme, which damaged the commercial farming sector and dealt a blow to the confidence of investors in the country's industries. The IMF and the World Bank have suspended support to Zimbabwe because of the country's failure to meet both their budgetary goals and to service its debt since 2000.

The series of events that followed March 2000 are well known, and therefore this section will touch only on the latest reports on Zimbabwe.

On his visit to South Africa in July 2004, the Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, summed up the situation in Zimbabwe in one phrase: 'everything is geared to support one man, Robert Mugabe, in his dictatorship'.²⁶ The government is using its control of food supplies to buy support in the run-up to the March 2005 parliamentary elections. Food shortages have been caused by three years of drought and the government's neglect of the agricultural sector, but the government is seeking to turn even this situation to its own advantage through threats of withholding food supplies to non-Zanu-PF supporters. NGOs that previously ran feeding schemes are being forced to register with the government, which controls distribution. Armies of young people known as the youth militia, made up of children as young as 10 years of age, harass and torment anyone suspected of being opposed to Robert Mugabe. The president has warned these groups that they will be held accountable for any defeat Zanu-PF suffers in the 2005 elections.²⁷ The police and judiciary offer very little protection from this abuse.

²³ Archbishop of Bulawayo, Bishop Pius Ncube, speaking at a breakfast meeting on Zimbabwe, 7 July 2004.

²⁴ Catholic Institute for International Affairs, 'Zimbabwe', *www.ciir.org*.

²⁵ UNCTAD, 'Foreign direct investment inflows in individual countries, 1997-2001', *www.unctad.com*.

²⁶ Archbishop of Bulawayo, Bishop Pius Ncube, speaking at a breakfast meeting on Zimbabwe, 7 July 2004.

²⁷ Cornish JJ, 'Zuma tantrum hints at tougher Zimbabwe stand', *Mail & Guardian*, 16 July 2004.

The violations of human rights in Zimbabwe are undeniable. No one could have predicted that Zimbabwe, one of the few countries in Africa with a working democratic and majoritarian system, could so quickly turn to authoritarianism. After all, Zimbabwe was one of the six 'frontline states' that formed an anti-apartheid alliance calling for economic sanctions against the racist regime in South Africa.

South Africa and Zimbabwe

Since 1994 Pretoria has played a strong role in attempting to resolve conflicts on the continent. For example it was instrumental in bringing about ceasefires and dialogue between the warring parties in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which have resulted in various peace agreements. However, the political crisis in Zimbabwe remains unresolved. South Africa has been accused of not adopting as clear-cut a position towards Mugabe as it does towards other conflicts in Africa. In its defence Pretoria maintains that it is in constant dialogue with Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF leadership and that of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It is using discussion and persuasion in its efforts to restore law and order in that country, and does not intend to take any unilateral action against the country. Any moves against Mugabe will have to be made in concert with other member states of SADC.

Many in South Africa and abroad (civil society, opposition parties, NGOs and governments) are of the view that South Africa is the strongest and most influential country in the region. Being looked up to by other African leaders places a great deal of responsibility on the president. However, it also means that Pretoria is expected to take more forceful action against Mugabe. But this raises the question of what action it is feasible for South Africa to take, given its own national interests and its reluctance to exacerbate the situation for ordinary Zimbabweans.

The issue of South Africa's applying sanctions against Zimbabwe has been debated in various public forums. The EU and the US have already imposed targeted sanctions (travel bans and the freezing of funds, financial assets and economic resources) against Mugabe, high-ranking officials, and several government-related businesses in Zimbabwe. Pressure has been put on Pretoria to take the same or a more drastic line of action. For example, Zimbabwe's dependence on South Africa for power and exports could be used to force Mugabe to open a dialogue with the opposition and reach some form of peaceful compromise. However, a study carried out by the UN in 2000 reported that although sanctions may seem the most obvious form of action against a wayward leader, they are not necessarily the most effective. Sometimes they create greater human

rights abuses.²⁸ The UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, wrote in his Millennium Report:²⁹

When robust and comprehensive economic sanctions are directed against authoritarian regimes, a different problem is encountered. Then it is usually the people who suffer, not the political elites whose behaviour triggered the sanctions in the first place.

Following this line of argument, Pretoria believes that electricity cuts or the disruption of trade flows at Beit Bridge could simply aggravate the sufferings of ordinary Zimbabweans. The government and elite might even benefit economically from such action because of their control over smuggling and the black market. Also, if Pretoria cut off Zimbabwe's energy supplies that country would be able to rely on Mozambique, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for its power. Agreed electricity cuts by all four countries could simply cause greater economic decline and further food shortages in Zimbabwe. This reasoning is supported by the conclusions drawn in the UN report on sanctions.³⁰

Furthermore, contrary to the belief that South Africa is able to persuade other countries on the continent to act against Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe seems to be a more popular figure in many countries in Africa than President Mbeki. The reason is his symbolic status as a former freedom fighter and his defiance of Western countries. Mugabe is revered as one of the living symbols of African nationalism, of hard-won independence that must be protected, it would seem, at any cost. This perception is a unifying force in Africa. It was clear from the ululation that greeted Mugabe's arrival at President Mbeki's inauguration on 27 April 2004 that South Africans and others from the continent see Mugabe as a revolutionary icon in Africa. It is also widely acknowledged that he is able to use this reverence to his advantage: he has been described as having the 'capacity to exploit the residue of anti-colonial feeling' on the continent.³¹ Moreover, unilateral action against his regime would tend to confirm the suspicions of other African leaders that South Africa is trying to assume hegemonic power in the region. They also accuse South Africa of being a mouthpiece for the West, a charge that South Africa denies. The most obvious consequence of Pretoria's making a move against Zimbabwe without the support of other African states would be the isolation and exclusion of South Africa in the region, which in turn would cause extreme political and economic damage.

²⁸ Bossuyt M, 'The adverse consequences of economic sanctions on the enjoyment of human rights'. Issued by the UN Commission on Human Rights, 21 June 2000.

²⁹ UN Secretary-General's Millennium Report, 'We the peoples: The role of the UN in the 21st century', April 2000.

³⁰ Bossuyt B, *op. cit.*

³¹ Villa-Vincencio C, 'Saying "no more" to bullies', *Mail & Guardian*, 9 July 2004.

Lastly, approximately two million Zimbabweans have already entered South Africa illegally, fleeing the economic crisis and political repression in their country. If Pretoria were to force the Zanu–PF government into submission (unilaterally or otherwise), the consequences of more refugees coming across the border could have hugely damaging effects for this country. South Africa does not have the economic capacity to absorb them, especially given the high levels of unemployment domestically. This could spark internal problems, especially considering the feelings of xenophobia that so many South Africans have.

All of the above are reasons why Pretoria is unwilling to intervene in Zimbabwe, beyond diplomatic persuasions. President Thabo Mbeki has stated many times that the answer to Zimbabwe's problems lies in the hands of Zimbabweans themselves. However, the opposition in that country is not well organised; it lacks a clearly defined strategy to oppose the Zanu–PF government (the MDC has been criticised for failing to establish itself as a credible opposition party that is capable of leading Zimbabwe out of its political and economic chaos). This limits the means by which parties outside the country can offer the kind of support needed for an end to the impasse (as the South African anti-apartheid movements did during the last decade of Nationalist Party rule).³²

Pretoria has opted to deal with the situation in Zimbabwe through multilateral forums. However, its refusal to denounce Zimbabwe in public debate feeds the current perception that the ANC government is supporting Mugabe, especially when it challenges proposed resolutions against Zimbabwe. Mbeki's strong disagreement with the continued suspension of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth (on the basis that continued isolation of Zimbabwe would not help in bringing peace to that country) was interpreted as his siding with Mugabe. This damages the moral image and credibility South Africa has established abroad. It has therefore been suggested that South Africa abstain, rather than vote on issues concerning Zimbabwe within multilateral forums.

Notwithstanding public opinion, Pretoria continues to assert a policy of limited engagement with Zimbabwe, encouraging the leaders both of Zanu–PF and the MDC to come together and seek reconciliation. Unfortunately, the government has had little success in securing any positive outcomes from its discussions with the two parties.

Zimbabwe and Swaziland: What way forward?

South Africa has always maintained that political problems within any country belonging to SADC have negative implications for regional development and closer integration in Southern Africa as a whole. But

³² *Ibid.*

among the many obstacles in the path of solving the current crises in Swaziland and Zimbabwe is the issue of national sovereignty. Years of colonialism have caused former colonies in Africa to place great emphasis on the protection of their right to self-determination. This a natural consequence of decades of foreign rule. Therefore, any interference by a foreign power (African or not) within any African state is viewed with suspicion, especially when, as in the case of South Africa, that power maintains close economic and political links with the former colonisers. On the other hand, there is now a growing trend internationally to hold leaders accountable for their actions. This trend is beginning to dilute the inviolability of state sovereignty.

Nonetheless, there are no easy answers to the Swaziland and Zimbabwe question. Sometimes human rights clash with national interests, such as fear of regional isolation or the cost to the domestic economy. South Africa is committed to working through the structures of relevant regional organisations, and in particular SADC, to maintain peace and security and promote democratic governance and economic growth in the region. However, SADC seems to be an ineffective tool for dealing with problems of governance. The organisation has massive capacity and co-ordination problems that are aggravated by issues of sovereignty and the priorities of member states, whose national interests often pull in different directions.³³ These act as stumbling blocks to SADC's ability to maintain peace, security, good governance and democracy in the region, as is shown by the organisation's lack of any strategic policy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe.

If SADC is unable to exercise any control over its members, then at what point should South Africa forget about finding a regional solution to the political and economic problems troubles of its neighbours? When should Pretoria reject quiet diplomacy as a policy tool in dealing with the Zimbabwe crises? But, is the political crisis in Swaziland any less deserving of attention than Zimbabwe, because economic and political mismanagement in that country is not as threatening to regional economies? If that is the case, Swaziland's record of human rights abuses counts for less than the more self-interested calculus of economic reward and punishment.

³³ Landsberg C, 'Building a regional society in Southern Africa: The institutional governance dimension', *Newsletter of the CPS Government's Programme of the Centre for Policy Studies*, 15, 1. Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, November 2002.