

## **Introduction: A Historical Overview of Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy**

Soon after independence in 1980 Harare quickly became Southern Africa's diplomatic hub and a key player in the Frontline States' efforts to dismantle apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa. Zimbabwe adopted a policy of non-alignment in international affairs and its foreign policy trajectory was governed by sanctity of the right to life, self-determination, defense of national sovereignty, anti-imperialism, equality of sovereign states, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Zimbabwe adhered to the positions of the Southern African Development Community, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Commonwealth. In 1983/4 and 1991/2 Zimbabwe assumed one of the non-permanent seats in the United Nations Security Council. Assumption of these positions gave it significant skills in international affairs. The 1986 NAM summit meeting was held in Harare and Prime Minister Mugabe became chair of the organization. As chair of the Front Line states Zimbabwe strongly argued against apartheid and frequently called for the imposition of economic sanctions against Pretoria. Zimbabwe helped launch the African Fund whose main aim was to assist the liberation movements in Namibia and South Africa, and Southern African states threatened by Pretoria's policy of destabilization. Through its military intervention in Mozambique, Zimbabwe provided the FRELIMO government decisive support against RENAMO forces that had originally been nurtured by Rhodesian forces and later adopted as surrogates by apartheid South Africa. Ultimately, President Mugabe, as the honest broker, of the Rome Accords helped to end the seventeen-year Mozambican civil war. In the 1990s, Zimbabwe's security forces helped in 58 peacekeeping missions in Angola, Kosovo and Somalia. Though controversial, in 1998, Zimbabwe, together with Angola and Namibia deployed troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to prop up the Laurent Kabila regime, which was under immense threat from Ugandan, and Rwandan backed rebels. At its height in 2000, the DRC military venture drained at least US\$1 million per day, from the Zimbabwean fiscus. Among other factors, which shall be highlighted in preceding sections, this war was one of the major contributory factors to the Zimbabwean crisis. Zimbabwe's high profile foreign policy and effective domestic management record in the 1980s enabled President Mugabe to win numerous international accolades such as the 1988 World Freedom against Hunger Award. In the 1980s, many correctly labelled it the "African Jewel", its economy was diverse and vibrant, it had a young well-educated population, and the currency was even stronger than the United States dollar. Due to international goodwill, many in the western financial, donor and multilateral communities were enthusiastic to underwrite its economic development programmes. Aid flowed from many quarters of the Western world, including the Bretton Woods Institutions who were to underwrite its economic structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the 1990's. Many international and multilateral institutions set up their regional headquarters in Zimbabwe during this period. Zimbabwe's relations with the former colonizer, the United Kingdom, were also good. In 1991, Harare was host to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) which crafted and adopted the famous Harare Declaration on good governance. Although Zimbabwe's foreign policy pursuits were quite successful in the 1980s and 1990s hitches were encountered at times. For example, its firm stance towards apartheid South Africa sparked diplomatic standoffs with some western powers. Between July 1986 and August 1988, the United States froze aid to Harare because of its criticism of the US policy of 'constructive engagement' toward South Africa. Zimbabwean authorities viewed this as tacit approval of apartheid Pretoria's policies. The Reagan administration was suspicious of the socialist rhetoric of the country's political leaders, despite the administration's often-expressed enthusiasm for

Zimbabwe's political and economic direction. Like in many parts of the globe, the United States was against countries with socialist leanings and in most instances went to the extent of destabilizing their governments by supporting their "anticommunist" opponents. The end of the of the Angolan civil war and the holding of majority rule elections in Namibia eased tensions and enabled the resumption of sound diplomatic relations between the United States and Zimbabwe. By the turn of the twenty first century Zimbabwe's fortunes on the international arena had turned upside down. This scenario was a result of the ruling party's (ZANU PF) waning legitimacy in the late 1990's. The Zimbabwean economy began to collapse in the mid-1990s. Fiscal deficits, foreign currency shortages and fuel scarcity became common. Mismanagement and corruption, unfair terms of trade and indiscriminate servicing of foreign debt caused the underperformance of the economy. Unemployment levels increased coupled with reduced government expenditure on social services. These developments prompted the emergence of a vibrant alternative political movement, in the form of the labor-backed opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Pressure from a popular opposition, vocal civil society and a disenchanted populace compelled the ruling party to revive its political fortunes through aggressive and violent means. In an attempt to win lost political ground the ruling party co-opted various interest groups through violent means. Notably, President Mugabe embarked on a controversial and chaotic land redistribution exercise using veterans of the liberation struggle, the youths and party cadres in an effort to revive his party's waning fortunes. The infamous cliché the land is the economy and the economy is the land became the 'war cry'. Land assumed a hegemonic position in day-to-day discourse, political rhetoric, the media, and the country's international relations. Land became the sole signifier of patriotism and sovereignty. Brian Raftopoulos argues that: This mobilization has taken place through a heightened, racialised discourse, reminiscent of the liberation war rhetoric that has also sought to project a radical, Pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist image. Whether in SADC, the OAU, or in Harlem, Mugabe has proclaimed the need for a broad black, Africanist alliance, an essentialised and combative subject, to confront the racist West that has dismissed him as an anti-democratic tyrant...Those who seek to question the modalities of Mugabe's version of land redistribution, are defined as outside the nation, and mere imposters for imperialist designs. The central target for this invective has been the MDC, who have continuously been characterized as outside of "genuine" nationalist aspirations. Intolerance is central to the Zimbabwean crisis. The ruling elite have strong elements of sectarian and totalitarian approaches to nationhood. They cannot tolerate political plurality and harness diversity for development. Citizens who do not belong to and identify with the ruling party ZANU (PF) and did not participate in the liberation struggle are vilified as unpatriotic and traitors without any rights to participate in the Zimbabwean body politic. Those who try to get breathing space on the Zimbabwean political arena, as individuals, organizations and political parties outside ZANU (PF) set parameters have to endure a hostile state controlled media, and restrictive laws. Zimbabwe's checkered international relations in the past six years is closely connected to the liberation war legacy. Like all liberation war movements that got into power, ZANU PF, the ruling party, considers itself the vanguard movement and this thinking has affected Zimbabwe's foreign relations. As in many post-colonial states, there has been a failure to tolerate political plurality and to harness diversity for development. The state has become intrusive and all permeating. The ruling ZANU PF's thinking and approach to governance is that of a hegemonic and commandist party and this has narrowed space for citizens' democratic participation. In the 1990s Jonathan Moyo argued against ZANU PF's style of governance by aptly stating that: To suggest that political participation is only possible within the context of the machinery of the ruling party is tantamount to saying that what is

good for ZANU (PF) is good for everyone, a suggestion that is patently false as far as what is known about the diversity of the human conditions goes. To a large extent the ruling party is still stuck in the exclusionary mode of liberation war politics (Then it was a convenient survival strategy) whereby citizens, groups of any nature and even countries are separated into neat binaries of friends and enemies, patriots and traitors, western stooges and anti-imperialists/Pan Africanists. The Third Chimurenga/Liberation War and other associated struggles are being fought on two fronts. On the domestic arena, the war is against white farmers, civil society and the legitimate domestic political competitors. On the international arena, they involve vitriol against the United Kingdom, the United States of America, multilateral organizations and the international community at large. This bellicose stance obliterates sensible debate on national issues and even Zimbabwe's position in the community of nations. On the domestic political arena, ZANU PF refuses to engage the domestic opposition, notably the MDC, because they assume they are surrogates of the British and in resolving the Zimbabwean crisis they would rather engage their principal at Number 10 Downing Street. This is incongruous thinking, especially for a government claiming to be on a warpath against foreign interference, a government that thinks it can go it alone. As far as modern international relations are concerned the notion of sovereignty entails none deference to outside powers and authority beyond that of international/multilateral institutions such as Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union, the International Court of Justice, and the United Nations. If Harare and London were to engage in the context of the ongoing crisis there is no way they are going to relate on an even keel. The later will give conditionalities and the former simply has to comply. I am sure the Harare foreign policy experts are well aware of this. One is bound to ask, do the ZANU PF arch proponents of sovereignty and territorial integrity still want a Second Lancaster House Conference after twenty six years of independence? It appears Harare's call for bilateral engagement is aimed at giving credence to the notion that the Zimbabwean crisis is externally induced.