

DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Jan Smuts House/Huis
1 Jan Smuts Avenue/Laan 1
Braamfontein, Johannesburg
☎ 339-2021



☐ 31596
2017 Braamfontein
South Africa/Suid-Afrika
✉ 'Insintaff' Johannesburg
⚡ 4-27291 SA

Brief Report no.58
for SAIIA Members only
- Not for Publication

RECENT TRENDS IN ZIMBABWE - SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS

South Africa's relations with its neighbouring states have been dominated by one overriding consideration - the neutralisation of African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) bases in the adjacent territories, from which guerrilla attacks could be launched against South Africa. In this respect, Zimbabwe is no exception.

MUGABE'S STANDPOINT ON NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS:

Although refusing to enter into a Nkomati-type security arrangement with the South African government, the official Zimbabwe government line has been to offer material and moral support for the ANC and PAC in the armed struggle against apartheid, but not to allow bases on its territory. In June 1985, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe reportedly told an ANC delegation led by Mr. Alfred Nzo, the organisation's Secretary-General, that his government would not permit ANC bases on Zimbabwean territory, as he was not prepared to involve his country in conflicts with the South African military authorities. However, Mugabe reiterated his support for the ANC's attempts to overthrow the minority white government in South Africa, and indicated that material support would continue to be channelled through the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) Liberation Committee. Both the ANC and PAC have representatives stationed in Harare, but the operations of their offices are kept low-key, with Lusaka serving as the centre for most statements and senior exiles of these movements.

ALLEGATIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN SUPPORT FOR 'SUPER-ZAPU' ELEMENTS:

Mugabe has often alleged that South Africa is arming and training Super-Zapu elements at a military camp near Louis Trichardt (across the border from Mwenzi, in south-eastern Matabeleland) as one aspect of its policy of ensuring that no one country in the region becomes strong enough to support South African liberation movements.

The Zimbabwean Minister of Information - Dr. Nathan Shamuyarira accused the South African government of attempting to set up an organisation of Zimbabwean dissidents, along the lines of the Renamo movement in Mozambique, to destabilise Zimbabwe. He pointed specifically to the anti-Mugabe broadcasts of Radio Truth from the Northern Transvaal, aimed at inciting the Ndebele against the Shonas and alleged the existence of a training camp in the Northern Transvaal for dissidents and the kidnapping of school children in Matabeleland for military training in this camp.

MUGABE'S STANDPOINT ON SANCTIONS:

Zimbabwe has been one of the more vociferous proponents of the use of sanctions to end apartheid. Mugabe has often called upon the international community to impose mandatory and comprehensive economic sanctions on South Africa, despite the adverse repercussions that the imposition of such sanctions would have on the Zimbabwean economy. As a land locked state, Zimbabwe relies on access to sea-ports and international trade via routes through South Africa and Mozambique.

If Pretoria chose to do so, it could totally disrupt rail and road traffic by closing two frontier posts - at Beit Bridge and Mafikeng, and as a result, approximately 85% of the traffic to and from the Frontline States would be cut overnight. It is generally estimated, that improvements to alternative routes through the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala would take about two years and around R2 billion to complete. This rather tenuous situation obviously troubles Mugabe who has, since 1983, maintained a protective force inside Mozambique guarding the oil pipeline and railway link from Mutare to Beira.

More recently though, Zimbabwean security forces have been deployed in the neighbouring state on a larger scale to 'preserve security' in anticipation of a decision by Pretoria to close the routes through South Africa in the event of major sanctions being imposed. In August 1985, Mugabe told Parliament that 30 000 troops would be sent to Mozambique if necessary to defend the 250 mile corridor from Mutare to the port of Beira to safeguard Zimbabwe's gasoline and diesel oil supplies and railway.

The trade relationship between South Africa and Zimbabwe is significant and is conducted within the framework of the bilateral Preferential Trade Agreement between the two countries. Since independence the Zimbabwe government has attempted to reduce its dependence on South Africa in respect of both imports and exports. The 1983 trade figures show that imports from South Africa were valued at \$259.9m (24.5% of total imports) and exports to South Africa at \$186.5m (18.4% of total exports). Imports from South Africa consist mainly of basic items - machinery, transport equipment, chemicals, manufactured goods and mineral fuels. This high degree of trade dependence suggests that the Zimbabwean economy would be particularly vulnerable to any disruption in trade relations.

Despite the obvious damage that the imposition of economic sanctions would cause to the Zimbabwean economy, Mugabe's attitude has hardened, and this brought him into direct conflict with the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit at Nassau in October, resulting in a souring of relations between Britain and Zimbabwe. However, while admitting that economic sanctions would have an adverse effect and would undoubtedly hurt, he sees them as a necessary burden that Zimbabweans would have to bear, since they would end apartheid. He does acknowledge though, that the Frontline States would require international assistance in the event of retaliatory actions by South Africa if punitive sanctions were imposed on Pretoria. He stresses that if such action was taken by South Africa, the Mozambican link would be used. Presently only 800 000 tons (10%) of Zimbabwe's total volume of goods coming into, and going out of the country, are channelled through Beira.

The issue of sanctions, and their effects on the Zimbabwean economy has received a great deal of media attention. The President of the Zimbabwean Confederation of Industries (CZI), Mr John Mkusui, was heavily criticised for stressing the negative effects of sanctions and for going as far as to say that they would mean the total collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. This suggests a possible conflict of interests between government and business.

Mkusui's remarks on sanctions have also caused a split within the CZI itself, with some black members of the Mashonaland Chamber of Industries dissociating themselves with the President. This is indicative of how potentially divisive the issue of sanctions has become. Consequently, much stress has been laid on preparing the Zimbabwean population for the negative effects of sanctions while stressing the moral necessity for these measures.

THE LANDMINE EXPLOSIONS:

More recently, relations between Zimbabwe and South Africa have deteriorated sharply as a result of a series of landmine explosions on the South African side of the border. In late November 1985, a series of four landmines exploded in the Soutpansberg military area in the Northern Transvaal. Following this, the South African Foreign Minister, Mr. Pik Botha, warned that ANC insurgents attacking from across the Limpopo would be pursued into Zimbabwe by South African Defence Force troops. The Zimbabwean government denied that the ANC used the country as a springboard to launch the attacks, while the ANC claimed responsibility for the attacks on personnel and installations in the northern and eastern Transvaal, as well as the attacks on Sasol 2 and 3 at Secunda. In a statement from ANC headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, the organisation claimed that the attacks were carried out by separate units of the military wing - Umkhonto we Sizwe, based and operating inside South Africa, and that they had not infiltrated from Zimbabwe or any other neighbouring state.

In response to the South African allegations, the Zimbabwean authorities claimed that the SADF had been building up its strength along the border and that Zimbabweans should prepare for invasion. Moreover, they alleged that South African jet fighters and helicopters had infiltrated Zimbabwean air space by flying 100 km into the south-eastern corner of Zimbabwe. It was also claimed that SADF personnel had been sent across the Limpopo in the vicinity of Chikwarakwara, east of Beit Bridge, and had carried out checks of the area, before returning to South Africa. This was denied by South Africa's Defence Minister, General Magnus Malan, who accused some members of the Zimbabwean government of seeking confrontation with South Africa.

Relations took a further plunge with the Messina landmine explosions in mid-December, which were followed by Malan's stern warning on the 'control of terrorists'. The ANC again claimed responsibility for the landmines which were aimed at the military presence in the area and the Zimbabwean government again denied that its territory was being used as a conduit for insurgents.

Following on these explosions, high-level security discussions were held between government officials and senior security-officers, activating machinery that had been set up more than two years ago for regular contact between army officers on both sides.

CONCLUSION:

Just as swiftly as the 'war of words' had developed, relations once again normalised. The main reason for this was the continued denial by Zimbabwean authorities that the ANC was using their territory to launch attacks on South Africa - this is generally accepted in Western diplomatic circles. Moreover, it was rumoured in diplomatic and intelligence circles that the insurgents had been given shelter by the Mozambican government in retaliation for South Africa's violations of the Nkomati Agreement - a fact that is strongly denied by ANC spokesmen.

Although relations have more or less returned to normal, it is increasingly likely that the sanctions issue will remain to the fore, especially when Mugabe takes over leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September. He has already stressed that the Non-Aligned Movement must continue as a group to put special emphasis on forcing the South African government to end apartheid, and to step up pressure in various ways - military, diplomatic, political, on the sporting front and by imposing economic sanctions to achieve this end.

JAN SMUTS HOUSE
April 1986