

DECONSTRUCTING QUIET DIPLOMACY: PINNING DOWN THE ELUSIVE CONCEPT

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1. INTRODUCTION

People have engaged in diplomatic practices as a means of communication and negotiation for thousands of years. However, the term “quiet” diplomacy specifically has come to feature prominently in many articles, speeches and other avenues of political discourse, yet without an apparent in-depth explanation as to its actual “quiet” nature. In other words, what is quiet diplomacy? Moreover, the practical use of quiet diplomacy as an effective method of foreign policy has been widely criticized. A case in point would be former South African President Thabo Mbeki’s consistent use of quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe and its President, Robert Mugabe. The worsening situation in Zimbabwe has resulted in much local and international criticism of Mbeki’s apparently ineffective quiet diplomatic policy in that country.

This article is not an attempt to analyse all aspects and theory of diplomacy. Rather it intends to identify characteristics or indicators of quiet diplomacy that will hopefully add meaning to this commonly used but insufficiently defined term. South Africa’s ineffectual use of quiet diplomacy with regard to Zimbabwe is analyzed in order to drive home the need for developing new kinds of diplomacy. Before delving into the more specific concept of “quiet” diplomacy it is first necessary to understand the basic term of “diplomacy”.

2. THE CHANGING NATURE OF DIPLOMACY

It is generally agreed that diplomacy is an instrument of foreign policy whereby those engaging in diplomacy shape, implement and protect their own nation’s interests or foreign policy objectives (which are wide-ranging and can include political, economic, national, trade, aid, human rights, arms control, scientific, cultural and academic enrichment) by structuring and managing international relationships.² The

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² Types of diplomacy have expanded to such an extent that references have been made to "church" or "gospel diplomacy", such as the kind employed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu during apartheid where clergy used moral persuasion to call on Western governments to do more to fight apartheid; and "competitive" diplomacy, for example, when the National Party (NP) and the ANC appeared to use their trips abroad to "score diplomatic points off each other". C Landsberg, *The quiet diplomacy of liberation International politics and South Africa's transition* (Johannesburg, Jacana Media, 2004).

process of diplomacy itself is vast, with gathering information, engendering goodwill and presenting intentions among the many tasks that diplomatic officials undertake. It is also generally understood that successful diplomacy requires that compromises be made and those engaged in diplomatic endeavours need to understand and accept that the outcomes will not be perfect since obligations are imposed on both sides.

The purpose of diplomacy has traditionally been to avoid military action. Diplomacy is vitally important in preventing war and maintaining peace because skilful negotiation can deter violence from being used in an effort to settle an argument. Should war break out regardless, negotiation is still crucial if peace can eventually be achieved.³ Diplomacy also seeks to persuade or compel through the conveyance of threats, promises, codes and symbols.⁴

The diplomacy practiced today is very different from the classical diplomacy which originated in the 15th century.⁵ Diplomatic theory also appeared around this time with writers questioning the role of the ambassador.⁶ More recently theorists emphasize that diplomacy “is not simply lobbying, bargaining and eavesdropping. Instead it accomplishes these tasks *in such a way* that the moderating and thereby civilizing effect of diplomacy on the general conduct of states is maximized.”⁷ There are three primary elements that represent vast change in contemporary international politics and which have subsequently affected the nature of diplomacy.⁸ These are the end of the Cold War, the process of globalization and the popular doctrine of humanitarian intervention (which is increasingly threatening the Westphalian system of state sovereignty).

The collapse of the Cold War brought with it a sharp increase in intrastate conflicts, which often resulted in gross human rights abuses and mass genocide.⁹ These violations ensured that human rights diplomacy continues to be emphasized, with many countries citing humanitarian assistance as reasons for intervention (or “the doctrine of humanitarian intervention” as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair referred to it). Other issues related to human survival increasingly appear on

³ GR Berridge, *Diplomacy Theory and practice* (Hampshire, Palgrave, 2002), p. 209.

⁴ Landsberg, p. 10.

⁵ During the late 1400s, a network of diplomats appeared in the Italian city states where the resident embassy was born. The resident emissary who presided over this embassy would be a subject of the prince or republic it represented and would seek that republic's interests. This Italian method developed into the French diplomatic structure when the first office or ministry of foreign affairs was established. Berridge, p. 2.

⁶ B Behrens, "Treatises on the ambassador written in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries", *English Historical Review* 51, 1936, pp. 616-627.

⁷ GR Berridge, M Keens-Soper, TG Otte, *Diplomatic theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), p. 5.

⁸ C Hill, *The changing politics of foreign policy* (New York, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2003), p. 11.

⁹ A Stemmet, "Globalisation, integration and fragmentation: forces, shaping diplomacy in the new millennium", *Politeia* 21(3), 2002, p. 28.

the diplomatic agenda and include the population explosion, food scarcity and HIV/AIDS, as well as arms control, disarmament and the illegal trade in arms. Underlying this now expanded agenda are a number of issues focusing on threats to sovereignty, the relationship between domestic and external policy and the sufficiency of the agreements at global, international, regional and bilateral levels.¹⁰

Furthermore, globalization (or the increasing interdependence of state and non-state actors locally and globally) has instigated the meteoric rise of thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with some arguing that they do not trust governments to represent them in international matters, electing instead to do so themselves.

The result has been that private citizens (whether as individuals or as part of social movements or organized pressure groups) are becoming increasingly assertive in foreign policy and diplomatic issues.¹¹ Indeed, during the height of the land invasion crisis in Zimbabwe, the demonstrations by groups of individuals at Zimbabwean diplomatic missions as well as the many letters from private citizens in South Africa that appeared in newspapers there, the majority of which criticized the South African government's diplomatic approach to the Zimbabwean issue, all demonstrate this growing trend. Additionally, the national media in many states has been led by the ability of the public to "connect to world politics" and the media are consequently increasingly committed to reflect, inform and even lead public opinion on foreign policy and diplomatic issues.¹² An illustration is the ineffectual but nonetheless very strong criticism by the independent media in South Africa of the relative silence of President Thabo Mbeki on the Zimbabwean issue.¹³

New technologies have also created the potential for a far more efficient and rapid means of communication. The technological advances of the 20th century, particularly the medium of television and more specifically the emergence of CNN, BBC World and other worldwide media, meant that any and all global agendas are now able to be instantly marketed.¹⁴ Additionally the explosive global spread of the internet in the last decade has changed the dynamic of traditional diplomatic negotiations so that more foreign ministries and embassies are now engaging in so-called "digital diplomacy".¹⁵

¹⁰ RP Barston, *Modern diplomacy* (Harlow, Longman, 1997), p. 5.

¹¹ Stemmet, p. 26.

¹² RW Mansbach, *The global puzzle Issues and actors in world politics* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), p. 86.

¹³ Stemmet, p. 35.

¹⁴ Davenport, "The new diplomacy", *Policy Review*, p. 19; Mansbach, p. 5.

¹⁵ See N Westcott, "Digital diplomacy: the impact of the internet on international relations, University of Oxford", available at <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/events/details.cfm?id=162>.

To better understand what is meant by quiet diplomacy, it is necessary to briefly explore what other types of diplomacy exist, including those that are the antithesis of “quiet” diplomacy.

2.1 A typology of diplomacy

The concept of diplomacy has expanded in modern times.¹⁶ While many kinds of diplomacy are quieter in nature, diplomacy can also be “loud”, in which case it is referred to as megaphone diplomacy, which is public as opposed to private criticism.¹⁷ Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, preventive diplomacy, gunboat diplomacy, coercive diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft or quiet diplomacy are all examples of diplomacy.

There has been a rapid increase in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy through conferences, meetings and more informal gatherings of technical, political and diplomatic experts.¹⁸ Bilateral diplomacy has been the definitive form of diplomatic relations for centuries.¹⁹ It is a term that refers to a communication limited to two parties at a given time, for example, when the British high commissioner in South Africa directs a question to the South African government or when a direct telephone call is made from London. It can also occur when British and South African representatives at the UN discuss an issue together.²⁰

Whereas bilateral negotiation can be relatively informal, multilateral negotiation is ordinarily conducted through formal conferences, that is, conference diplomacy. International conferences can be classified in terms of their objectives, such as serving as a forum for discussion on a specific issue; to make non-binding or binding decisions on governments; to draft treaties; to exchange information on an international level and to pledge voluntary contributions to international programmes such as the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Furthermore, with the rapid development of multilateral diplomacy since the formation of the UN, the resultant expansion of international organizations and committees ushered in a new dimension to traditional diplomacy in the form of group voting.²¹

While international law states that there should always be an attempt at a peaceful settlement of disputes as opposed to war, the success of such a mission is

¹⁶ See Barston; GR Berridge, *Talking to the enemy How states without "diplomatic relations" communicate* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994); Berridge, *Diplomacy Theory and practice*; G Berridge and A James, *A dictionary of diplomacy* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁷ See C Stols, "Some reflections on the relations between the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe", *Peace and Governance Programme*, Briefing Paper 20/2002", available at <http://www.ai.org.za/monographs.paper202002.html>.

¹⁸ Barston, p. 103.

¹⁹ N Cornago-Prieto, "Diplomacy" in *Encyclopedia of violence, peace and conflict*, p. 563.

²⁰ Berridge, *Diplomacy Theory and practice*, p. 105.

²¹ RG Feltham, *Diplomatic handbook* (London, Longman Group, 1982), p. 116.

not always assured. Therefore, a successful diplomatic technique in trying to resolve international disputes should be to use different methods of preventive diplomacy.²² Preventive diplomacy has been defined as “action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disparities from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur”.²³ These actions include a number of strategies to demonstrate intentions and capabilities in order to manage any emerging threats. Preventive diplomatic strategies can be military or non-military depending on their goals, which could include crisis prevention, pre-emptive engagement or pre-conflict peacebuilding. The theory behind preventive diplomacy is based on the assumption that “it is better to forestall conflict than to allow it to spread”.²⁴

Gunboat diplomacy is defined as “trying to solve international problems by force or by threatening to use force”.²⁵ It includes measures such as military alerts, troop movements and naval manoeuvres, all designed to coerce parties into doing something.²⁶ Sending troops overseas in an effort to intimidate an enemy is a common instrument of foreign policy, as many states believe that “actions speak louder than words”.²⁷

Realists argue that the primary motive of many states and non-state actors is to persuade others to do certain things that do not actually serve their own interests and to convince others to agree to contracts that may not be to their advantage. This kind of international behaviour is referred to as coercive diplomacy. Coercive diplomacy therefore refers to “threats or limited force to persuade an opponent to call off or undo an encroachment”.²⁸ While coercive diplomacy can involve the use of military force, this is not a prerequisite for success in influencing another state to do something against its wishes. Economic sanctions can also have the desired effect and are defined as “deliberate government actions to inflict economic deprivation on a target state or society through the limitation or cessation of customary economic relations”.²⁹ For example, economic sanctions were used with relative success, particularly by UN member states, against South Africa during apartheid.

²² Cornago-Prieto, p. 564.

²³ Rupesinghe, as quoted by H Solomon, "South African foreign policy, preventive diplomacy and the false promise of conflict resolution", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 9(2), 2002, p. 148.

²⁴ AL Bennett, *International organizations Principles and issues* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1995), p. 158.

²⁵ PH Collin, *Dictionary of government and politics* (Middlesex, Peter Collin, 1997), p. 89.

²⁶ KJ Holsti, *International politics A framework for analysis* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall International, 1995), p. 201.

²⁷ CW Kegley and ER Wittkopf, *World politics Trend and transformation* (Boston, Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), p. 444.

²⁸ CW Kegley and ER Wittkopf, *World politics Trend and transformation* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), p. 510.

²⁹ Leyton-Brown, as quoted by Kegley and Wittkopf *World politics Trend and transformation*, p. 447.

Another method of diplomacy is public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is essentially foreign propaganda “conducted or orchestrated” by diplomats.³⁰ This propaganda is designed to influence a foreign government to accept a certain view by winning over the general public, the media, pressure groups and foreign allies. For example, following the 11 September 2001 terror attacks and the subsequent US-led war in Afghanistan, the US military dropped leaflets depicting members of the Taliban beating up women and carrying the message: “Is this the future you want for your children and your women?”³¹ Despite the fact that propaganda itself is not diplomacy, this method has become generally accepted. Certain embassies also try to influence the receiving state’s foreign policy by helping to export their own cultures to the receiving state. This is termed “cultural diplomacy”.

Preventive, public, coercive and gunboat diplomacy can all make use of physical or intrusive acts of force or military threats in an attempt to persuade countries to do certain things. However, there is another diplomatic practice that is used extensively in international relations and employs methods that are the antithesis of the louder diplomatic approaches. Often referred to as “careful persuasion” or the “softly-softly” approach, this method is best known as “quiet diplomacy”.³²

2.2 What is “quiet” diplomacy?

Scholars, intellectuals and politicians regard the former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, as arguably the most prodigious diplomatic player in modern international relations. His essential contributions to the negotiations to end the Vietnam War made him a joint winner of the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize (his co-winner was North Vietnamese counterpart Le Duc Tho). Kissinger always espoused negotiations as being the primary instrument of diplomacy. He defined diplomacy as “a series of steps, merging into a continuum”, that is, step-by-step diplomacy that progresses slowly but surely through a series of interim agreements. Kissinger argues that those who seek eagerly for a diplomatic victory will invariably lose since a unilateral victory has no hope of being maintained, as no country will want to adhere to an agreement that is against its own interests. Therefore Kissinger urges that moderation and pragmatism in diplomatic practice, that is “quiet diplomacy”, and the cultivation of a sense of reliability in diplomatic negotiations, are both essential assets of a state’s foreign policy.³³

³⁰ Berridge, *Diplomacy Theory and practice*, p. 17.

³¹ M Leonard, "Diplomacy by other means", *Foreign Policy*, September 2002, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_septoct_2002/leonard.html.

³² N Cohen, "Our friends the Saudis", *The Observer*, 2003, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/saudi/story.html>.

³³ TG Otte, "Kissinger" in Berridge, Keens-Soper and Otte, pp. 197-198.

Quiet diplomacy is also defined as “discussing problems with officials of another country in a calm way”, usually without informing the media about it.³⁴ The elements of negotiation and persuasion, intrinsic to all diplomacy, are also evident in quiet diplomacy. Where it differs from other types of diplomacy is in its lack of an overt nature. Quiet diplomacy is thus named because of its quiet and *unpublic* nature. As former UN Secretary-General U Thant once noted: “(T)he perfect good offices operation is one which is not heard of until it is successfully concluded or even never heard of at all.”³⁵ For example, Dag Hammarskjöld (another former UN Secretary-General) employed quiet diplomacy in his style of peacekeeping in that he always negotiated skilfully with “tact, persistence and impartiality, but without fanfare”.³⁶ Similarly, when US special envoy Jack Pritchard and North Korea’s deputy UN ambassador met in New York in March 2003 to discuss the growing nuclear programme in North Korea, it was done as quietly as possible with very little publicity.³⁷ Professional diplomats often emphasize their importance as quiet contributors to a conversation or discussion, working behind the scenes to achieve results.³⁸ John Negroponte, US ambassador to the UN, is another practitioner of quiet diplomacy. He argues that “for the 10% you see on the surface or in the public arena, 90% of the work has been done behind closed doors”.³⁹

Quiet diplomacy has also been linked to a policy of dialogue as opposed to military coercion. Japan’s use of quiet diplomacy or *aikid*, for example, includes dialogue and negotiation as being more effective instruments in achieving foreign policy objectives than exclusion or overt coercion.⁴⁰ Tony Blair also used quiet diplomacy as a method of foreign policy when tackling China’s human rights abuses in Tibet. Blair visited China in 1998 when he quietly engaged in negotiations with the Chinese leaders to release democracy activist Xu Wenli.⁴¹ However, in this case the soft approach to diplomacy failed because despite Wenli being released initially, he was re-arrested weeks later and sentenced to 13 years in prison.

³⁴ Collin, p. 89.

³⁵ Quoted by K Annan, "Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organisation, United Nations", available at <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/Report99/intro99.htm>.

³⁶ Bennett, p. 157.

³⁷ D Struck, "With N. Koreans, a quiet diplomacy" (2003), available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2>.

³⁸ I Taylor and P Williams, "The limits of engagement: British foreign policy and the crisis in Zimbabwe", *International affairs* 78(3), 2002, p. 78.

³⁹ B Nichols, "U.N. envoy works quiet diplomacy" (2001), available at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/sept11>.

⁴⁰ I Vodanovich, "Constructive engagement and constructive intervention: a useful approach to security in Asia Pacific?" (2002), available at <http://www.focusweb.org/focus/pd/sec/Altsec2/vodanovich.htm>.

⁴¹ A Reynolds, "World Tibet Network News" (1999), available at http://www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive/1999/10/18-2_4.html.

From the countless examples spanning hundreds of websites and newspapers, it is evident that the term “quiet diplomacy” is used extensively although loosely in international relations to refer to many types of soft diplomatic approaches. It is nonetheless possible to identify a set of characteristics of quiet diplomacy:

- Personal or direct diplomacy between heads of state or government or senior officials,
- little (or no) media involvement,
- the appearance of limited action or even inaction,
- calm and tactful but persistent negotiation or dialogue in a non-threatening atmosphere,
- constructive engagement with the target country in an effort to help solve the problems as quietly as possible,
- diplomacy often carried out in the context of bilateral or multilateral efforts.

2.2.1 Personal or direct diplomacy between heads of state or government or senior officials

With transportation becoming so much faster and easier, policymakers, high-ranking officials and even heads of state can maintain direct communication, thereby bypassing the traditional diplomatic intermediary.⁴²

Diplomacy is essentially the communication of thoughts and ideas between the governments of states (although also increasingly between states and multinational corporations (MNCs) and among international organizations). This communication can be directly conducted between the heads of government or indirectly through an ambassador or written correspondence. The most logical way that diplomacy can be conducted is by heads of government meeting face-to-face and talking, reasoning and discussing. Personal or direct diplomacy is a useful tool in foreign relations because through visits, correspondence and telephone conversations, heads of government can form contacts, promote their own country’s image, try and improve bilateral relations and secure approval on a critical agreement.⁴³

As a result of personal diplomacy, with the head of state or government becoming increasingly prominent in modern diplomacy, the local ambassador will tend to have a limited formal involvement. Nevertheless, the ambassador’s role remains important in terms of assessing political situations, explaining policy at crucial moments, being involved in trade and economic work and participating on occasion in international conferences.⁴⁴

This kind of direct diplomacy proved successful in 1994 with regard to the “King’s *coup*” in Lesotho. President Nelson Mandela was keen to avoid military intervention

⁴² Holsti, p. 134.

⁴³ Barston, p. 103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

and sent Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mr Rusty Evans (Director-General of Foreign Affairs) to Lesotho to negotiate a successful agreement with King Letsie III (who had initially staged the King's *coup*).⁴⁵ Another example of personal diplomacy took place when both US President George W Bush and Tony Blair engaged in quiet diplomacy with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon over the siege of Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah in April 2002. While Blair suggested that the use of British monitors (to guard alleged murderers of Israeli tourism minister Rehavam Ze'en) be discussed at a White House dinner, Bush personally telephoned Sharon in an effort to persuade him to accept the plan. The deal was eventually agreed to.⁴⁶

South African President Thabo Mbeki and South African government officials met personally with Robert Mugabe and Zimbabwean government officials on many different occasions. This is in keeping with a quiet diplomatic approach, but has not proved productive in any real sense. On more than one occasion Mugabe promised Mbeki good behaviour. Following one meeting, Mugabe appeared on camera to declare that he would uphold the rule of law, that veterans who harassed farmers would be arrested and that all war veterans would soon be forced to leave the farms they had invaded in 2000. In return Mbeki promised to provide aid and mediate with the International Monetary Fund for funds. When Mbeki left, however, Mugabe publicly asserted that he had never said any of the things that he had in fact said the day before.⁴⁷

Even after Mugabe's blatant defaulting on his promises, Mbeki continued to back him in the international community. At the UN Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, Mbeki tried to broker deals between the UN, UK and Zimbabwe, only to have them ripped apart when Mugabe once again refused to concede transparency and uphold the rule of law.⁴⁸ Former South African Minister of Defence, Mosiuoa Lekota, later also acknowledged that in spite of efforts made during numerous talks between South Africa and Zimbabwe, "the government of Zimbabwe would not listen to us. We asked them to do something to stop the looting of farms and not to follow the route of lawlessness, but we failed."⁴⁹ Although he explained that these were his personal views and not government policy, his statement did not do much to enhance global support of South Africa's quiet diplomacy in Zimbabwe.

Following the disputed March 2008 elections, when the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission refused to release the presidential election results for more than two weeks, Mbeki met with Mugabe again and was photographed holding hands with

⁴⁵ D Venter, "South Africa and Africa: relations in a time of change" in W Carlsnaes and M Muller (eds), *Change and South African external relations* (London, International Thomson Publishing, 1997), p. 89.

⁴⁶ T Harnden, "Blair's dinner diplomacy was vital to deal" (2002), available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main>.

⁴⁷ RW Johnson, "Mugabe, Mbeki and Mandela's shadow", *The National Interest*, Spring 63, 2001, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴⁹ *Saturday Star*, 11 May 2002.

the Zimbabwean President. He was also quoted as stating that “there is no crisis in Zimbabwe”. This statement (although evidently taken out of context, as will be discussed later) and the television footage of Mbeki holding hands with Mugabe were perceived by many, not least many Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party members, as a show of solidarity by Mbeki for Mugabe. The anger was so great that these MDC members demanded that Tsvangirai publicly denounce Mbeki for his stance on the delayed release of the presidential poll results.⁵⁰ Mbeki argued that he was dealing with the issue in his capacity as the SADC appointed chief mediator between Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party and Morgan Tsvangirai’s MDC. However, Mbeki was accused once again of playing down or simply ignoring the seriousness of the issue. Even Mbeki’s successor as head of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, was more outspoken about the situation in Zimbabwe arguing that “(he had) never heard of elections being conducted and counted and the commission not allowing the result”. Zuma further asserted that the problem in Zimbabwe has to be addressed urgently to avoid that country being “plunged into a more serious crisis”.⁵¹

It is evident that despite many attempts at personal diplomacy and the appearance on many occasions that it might work, Mugabe routinely ignored Mbeki’s attempts. The results have been an increasing loss of faith not only in Mbeki’s ability to handle the situation in Zimbabwe, but also in the efficacy of quiet diplomacy.

2.2.2 Little (or no) media involvement

The media and diplomacy depend on each other.⁵² Diplomats have long recognized the influence that the press, radio and television have on the formulation of foreign policy and on diplomatic processes, and as such a “wary, but mutually advantageous relationship” developed between the media and those involved in diplomacy.⁵³ However, while there are benefits to this relationship, the nature of the news media is such that there can be misinformation or distortion of a message.⁵⁴ Editors and producers, no matter how objective they intend to be, have personal perceptions that will influence what news is selected and how it is disseminated to the public. These disadvantages prompted many foreign policy formulators, emissaries and diplomats to conduct their negotiations away from the public eye.

⁵⁰ *Business Day*, 16 April 2008.

⁵¹ Anon, "There is no crisis in Zim – Mbeki" (2008), available at <http://www.news24.com/News24v2/Components/Generic>.

⁵² E Sucharipa, "21st century diplomacy" (1997), available at <http://textus.diplomacy.edu/campus/lms/pool>.

⁵³ RG Feltham, *Diplomatic handbook* (Essex, Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), p. 151.

⁵⁴ E Gilboa, "The global news network and U.S. policymaking in defense and foreign affairs" (2002), available at www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Papers/Working_Papers/2002.

For example, the thaw in the India-Pakistani relationship in 2004, culminating in the summit between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in New York in September of that year, was widely attributed to secret talks between the two governments. The New York summit followed several unpublicized meetings between India's National Security Adviser JN Dicit and his Pakistani counterpart Tariq Aziz, who had met in Amritsar, Dubai and London to lay down foundations for the summit.⁵⁵ Officials from both sides appealed to the media not to restrict the peace process by "trying to determine who the winner or loser was at any given time". Strategic affairs expert C Raja Mohan insisted that if India and Pakistan wanted to continue with the dialogue process, "then they should not expect the negotiations to take place in the glare of the camera". Former Pakistan Foreign Secretary, Najmuddin A Shaikh, agreed that the meeting only came about because of behind-the-scenes discussions or "backroom" diplomacy. Shaikh added that the meeting proved that India and Pakistan could advance peace talks by continuing to have "quiet contacts rather than meeting under the prying eyes of the media".⁵⁶ Former South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Sang-ock also on numerous occasions spoke about diplomatic relations between China and South Korea being most successful when tackled quietly rather than publicly. He also emphasized the importance of neighbouring countries resolving friction and disputes with frequent and direct contacts.⁵⁷

South African government officials often chose to conduct their meetings with their Zimbabwean counterparts behind closed doors. In October 2004, Mbeki met privately with Morgan Tsvangirai, head of the opposition party, the MDC, in Zimbabwe, to discuss electoral promises made by Mugabe. The time and venue for the talks were kept secret because, as presidential spokesman Bheki Khumalo asserted, "they must be allowed to have their meeting in quiet" in order to increase the likelihood of success.⁵⁸

2.2.3 The appearance of limited action or even inaction

The principle behind quiet diplomacy is that it should take place in an atmosphere of quiet engagement. The unfortunate result of such tentative dialogues however is that they are often seen as being ineffectual.

An illustration is the Australian Prime Minister John Howard's meeting with China's leaders in Beijing in August 2003 to discuss the lack of human rights in that

⁵⁵ Indo-Asian News Service, "Give 'quiet' diplomacy a chance, media told" (2004), available at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/041010/43/2h7yr.html>.

⁵⁶ Indo-Asian News Service, <http://in.news.yahoo.com/041010/43/2h7yr.html>.

⁵⁷ S Jae-yun, "Former FM urges 'quiet diplomacy' with China" (2002), available at <http://www.hankooki.com/times>.

⁵⁸ *Cape Times*, 26 October 2004.

country. Howard came away from the meeting insisting that quiet diplomacy was producing “sufficient results”. Human Rights Watch, however, condemned quiet diplomacy as ineffectual, arguing that “experience in China shows that dialogue will not produce results without accompanying international pressure”.⁵⁹

Perhaps the issue is more that successful diplomacy is often characterized by the desire of both parties to derive some kind of satisfaction from the negotiation process. Diplomacy is more likely to succeed if the parties involved are committed to achieving a result. The idea behind this is similar to democratic peace theory in that democracies will not fight each other because they are like-minded and generally have the same objectives.⁶⁰ In the same way parties who are not like-minded will find successful diplomacy elusive because they are unwilling to view the objective in the same way as the other. This could possibly be the explanation for the lack of success in Mbeki’s diplomacy with Mugabe. Mbeki’s objective is to address the lawlessness and general chaos in Zimbabwe where Mugabe is viewed as the prime culprit whereas Mugabe continues to blame Zimbabwe’s problems on the country’s former colonial rulers, the UK.

The international community’s quiet diplomacy and humanitarian assistance during the ethnic clashes in Kenya in the early 1990s are also regarded as being largely unsuccessful, given the recurrence of violent conflict there. Some go so far as to argue that “the international community never made any serious, conscious attempt to prevent violence from occurring or recurring”⁶¹ in Kenya; the implication being that the international community may have felt the need to “appear” to be assisting without undertaking any real efforts to resolve the crisis in a sustainable way. There are several possible reasons for this. Often states engaging in quiet diplomacy with other states find that they need to choose between their own foreign policy goals (such as security, stability, trade and investment) and effective conflict prevention (which may necessitate a confrontation with the government of the target country). When countries have vested interests in other countries (as was the case with donors in Kenya), they feel unable or unwilling to jeopardise these relationships with the target country’s government. As a result, governments often engage tentatively in dialogue with the target government and this can be seen as being ineffectual.⁶²

Mbeki’s policy towards Zimbabwe has often been severely criticized and even referred to as non-policy. Some suggest that South Africa’s diplomacy has amounted to “a complete and public excusing of Mugabe’s human rights atrocities” and has given the

⁵⁹ ABC Online, “PM’s ‘quiet diplomacy’ on China under fire” (2003), available at <http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common>.

⁶⁰ KA Mingst, *Essentials of international relations* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 121.

⁶¹ S Brown, “Quiet diplomacy and recurring ‘ethnic clashes’ in Kenya” (2002), available at <http://www.isanet.org/noarchive/brownstephen.html>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, <http://www.isanet.org/noarchive/brownstephen.html>.

domestic public and the international community the general impression of acquiescence.⁶³ Domestically, the independent media has consistently and strongly criticized the Mbeki government for its apparent inability to solve the Zimbabwean crisis.⁶⁴

Following Mugabe's backing of the farm invasions by so-called war veterans, foreigners looked to South Africa to use its considerable power in the region to "subdue, control, influence and punish" Mugabe's government.⁶⁵ Initially it did appear that the South African government had a method in mind to deal with the situation. It did not criticize Mugabe on the grounds that it was attempting "to make President Mugabe more amenable to negotiate behind the scenes".⁶⁶ This step is a legitimate method of quiet diplomacy as defined by the theory. As the months passed, however, the lack of an effective engagement strategy only weakened South Africa further and emphasized its apparent inability to promote adherence to the rule of law in the region.⁶⁷

It has been argued that South Africa's quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe is "non-verifiable, non-specific, has no clear or given objectives or deliverables and does not permit either the local or international community to understand the substance of the positions adopted".⁶⁸ In this view, quiet diplomacy is a flawed approach since it assumes that Mugabe, who ignored basic principles of democracy and rule of law, will be influenced by a soft diplomatic approach to change. Even the Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni, acknowledged that Zimbabwe would "never be moved by diplomacy".⁶⁹

In 2001, Mbeki conceded that Mugabe had ignored his quiet diplomatic advice, insisting that "he (Mugabe) didn't listen to me".⁷⁰ In May 2006, Mbeki admitted that he was waiting for the outcome of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposed intervention in Zimbabwe on a visit there later in 2006 (a move that was subsequently rejected by the Zimbabwean government).⁷¹

Following the 2008 election (discussed earlier) Mbeki briefly stopped over in Zimbabwe on the way to a SADC emergency meeting to be held in Zambia. While

⁶³ Johnson, p. 61; MR Rupiya, "Zimbabwe in South Africa's foreign policy: a Zimbabwean view", *South African Yearbook of International Affairs* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of International Affairs, 2003), p. 168.

⁶⁴ See for example *Cape Argus*, 20 February 2001; *The Citizen*, 29 May 2001; *Business Day*, 19 November 2001; *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 14 February 2002; *Business Day*, 16 April 2008.

⁶⁵ M Schoeman and C Alden, "The hegemon that wasn't: South Africa's foreign policy towards Zimbabwe", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* XXV(1), 2003, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Quoted by Taylor and Williams, p. 559.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁶⁸ T Hughes and G Mills, "Time to jettison quiet diplomacy", *Focus*, 29, 2003, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Quoted by *The Financial Gazette* (2002), available at <http://africaonline.com.fingaz/>.

⁷⁰ Quoted by P Bond, "Zimbabwe: Pretoria's new Africa dilemma", *Indicator South Africa* 19(1), 2002, p. 17.

⁷¹ C Landry, "Zim: Mbeki pins hopes on UN" (2006), available at news24.com.

in Zimbabwe Mbeki was quoted as saying that there “is no crisis in Zimbabwe” – a statement that added to the world’s perception that Mbeki was not willing to take any real action on the deteriorating situation in that country. Mbeki later argued that he was not referring to “the socio-economic conditions in Zimbabwe or anything like that”⁷² and that his remark declaring that there is no crisis in Zimbabwe referred specifically to the issue of election results as matters stood then.⁷³ Even though it became evident that Mbeki had been quoted out of context, his reference to there being no crisis in terms of the election results simply added to the view that Mbeki was either oblivious to what was going on in terms of violence and intimidation against MDC supporters or was not willing to acknowledge them. The “no crisis” quote merely reinforced the international opinion that Mbeki was taking insufficient action with regard to Zimbabwe.

The food shortages, post-election violence and an inflation rate of close to one million percent in Zimbabwe forced many of its citizens to flee to South Africa. The problem of Zimbabweans fleeing across the border has been growing since 2000 and has escalated following the 2008 elections so that undocumented Zimbabweans form the majority of the foreign national community estimated between one and ten million people living in South Africa. It is widely believed that this sudden massive influx was the catalyst for the spate of xenophobic attacks by South Africans against foreigners in May 2008 which left 42 dead and 17 000 displaced.⁷⁴ It is reasonable to argue that a massive number of people only flee a country if there is something wrong in that country. Zuma acknowledged this to be true and went as far as to say that “it means politically things have gone wrong and we have got to correct them”.⁷⁵

Shortly after the infamous “there is no crisis” statement, Mbeki chaired a summit of the United Nations Security Council and the African Union at the UN headquarters in New York. At the meeting Mbeki defensively asserted: “I know, as much as you do, when something is wrong...I think it would be good if people just credited us with a little bit of intelligence...We (the SA government) are perfectly capable of recognizing when something is wrong...”⁷⁶ In one breath Mbeki agrees that “much is wrong in Zimbabwe” and in the next he is quoted as describing

⁷² Allen, “‘Things have gone wrong,’ says Mbeki” (2008), available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200804170807.html>.

⁷³ Mbeki was apparently referring to the fact that should no one win a clear majority then Zimbabwean law provides for a second run – a normal electoral process in terms of the law and hence no crisis. Anon, “There is no crisis in Zim – Mbeki” (2008), available at <http://www.news24.com/News24v2/Components/Generic>,

⁷⁴ Anon, “Xenophobic attacks spreading”, UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (2008), available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200805231033.html>.

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, 24 April 2008.

⁷⁶ Allen, “‘Things have gone wrong,’ says Mbeki” (2008), available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200804170807.html>.

the situation as “manageable” and consistently urges “patience” in the matter.⁷⁷ Statements like this contribute to the belief that Mbeki is not doing enough to help resolve the situation – hence the appearance of limited or no action.

In contrast ANC President Zuma has been far more outspoken arguing that “Zimbabwe is something that we need to take very serious note of”.⁷⁸ While Zuma denies that quiet diplomacy has failed, he has nevertheless spoken out frequently in favour of renewed intervention by southern African leaders to restart dialogue between Mugabe and Tsvangirai.⁷⁹ His readiness to comment on the matter has prompted many political analysts to regard this as a departure from Mbeki’s method of quiet diplomacy.

2.2.4 Calm and tactful but persistent negotiation or dialogue in a non-threatening atmosphere

The purpose of diplomacy as a form of statecraft is to mediate differences and resolve disputes and as such diplomacy is often described as “the art of persuading others through a patient process of give-and-take”.⁸⁰ Indeed, diplomacy has often been referred to as the peaceful art of negotiation where states relate to each other by agreement rather than by the exercise of force, for example, military action.⁸¹ Negotiation is defined as “an attempt to explore and reconcile conflicting positions in order to reach an acceptable outcome”.⁸² Negotiations enable members of states’ foreign policy bureaucracies to meet, exchange views and communicate desired objectives and essentially find common ground on specific issues behind the scenes.⁸³

The Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) values negotiation and similar methods of enquiry and mediation as fundamental tools of preventive diplomacy. The OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities in 1994, Max Van der Stoel⁸⁴, listed the following elements as essential when undertaking negotiations: intelligence gathering; discussion of the problem at hand; promotion of dialogue, confidence and cooperation between the negotiating parties; and following this, the fostering of continued consultations between the parties with the aim of finding possible solutions.

⁷⁷ Anon, "There is no crisis in Zim – Mbeki", 2008, available at <http://www.news24.com/News24v2/Components/Generic>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* <http://www.news24.com/News24v2/Components/Generic>.

⁷⁹ *The New York Times*, 24 April 2008.

⁸⁰ A Quinton, "Diplomacy: still our first line of defense", *America* 188(2), 2003, p. 9.

⁸¹ Otte, p. 194.

⁸² Cornago-Prieto, p. 559.

⁸³ Kegley and Wittkopf, p. 459.

⁸⁴ M Van der Stoel, 1994, "Keynote speech by Max van der Stoel, CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the CSCE seminar on early warning and preventive diplomacy, Warsaw, 19 January 1994", available at <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/speeches/1994/19jan94.html>.

Soft or non-coercive diplomacy is by its nature a low profile activity and requires absolute confidentiality at each stage of the process.⁸⁵ Rolf Ekeus, OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities in 2001, agrees that discretion in diplomacy is invaluable as it often allows for better results in future negotiations.⁸⁶

In September 1978, US President Jimmy Carter invited Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to Camp David for a series of meetings away from the public eye. Twelve days of negotiations and bargaining ensued. Two agreements in principle came out of the meetings, including a statement on eventual self-government for the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas and Egypt's diplomatic recognition of Israel in exchange for the return of Egyptian territories held by Israel since 1967. In 1979 Sadat, Begin and Carter signed the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, which formalized what was essentially agreed to at the Camp David talks.⁸⁷

A succession of secret, informal talks was also undertaken in early 1993 between two Israeli academics and three senior Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officials with the goal of drafting a document of basic principles for possible future peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. The negotiations eventually included senior Israeli diplomats and Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst and the Israeli-Palestinian *Declaration of Principles* was worked out. The signing of the *Oslo Accords*, as they became known, was witnessed by then US President Bill Clinton in September 1993 in the presence of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.⁸⁸

South Africa has employed a policy of "good neighbourliness" and "non-interference" with Mugabe since 1999. Even after the war veterans had invaded farms and farmers had been killed, South Africa stuck to its policy of quiet negotiation.⁸⁹

2.2.5 Constructive engagement

The essential idea behind the method of constructive engagement is that it lies halfway between isolation and more direct confrontation and is associated with

⁸⁵ VY Ghebali, "Preventive diplomacy as visited from the OSCE" (1998), available at http://www.isn.ethz.ch/3isf/Online_Publications/WSS/WS_5B/Ghebali.htm.

⁸⁶ OSCE, Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Q & A: Preventing ethnic conflict" (2003), available at <http://www.osce.org/features/show>.

⁸⁷ R Milbank and JL Pimlott. "The Middle East" in R Milbank (ed.), *The Guinness Encyclopedia of World History* (Middlesex, Guinness Publishing, 1992), p. 212; US Department of State, "Carter and the Camp David Accords" (2004), available at <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/ho/time/dt/16330.htm>.

⁸⁸ Anon, "Oslo peace negotiations", Palestine facts (1993), available at http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_oslo_background.php.

⁸⁹ *Time Atlantic*, 23 April 2001.

strategic engagement and critical dialogue.⁹⁰ Constructive engagement implies that it is possible to apply pressure that will result in constructive change through mediation rather than a military response. It is worth noting that constructive engagement not always succeeded in its objectives. Canada's soft approach to Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba had little, if any, positive effect on human rights there. Furthermore, American and British quiet engagement in China's human rights also proved fruitless.⁹¹

In the mid-1980s the Reagan administration adopted a policy of constructive engagement⁹² with South Africa. However, the escalation of political violence in South Africa overshadowed US diplomatic efforts. Eventually, to rid the US of the growing perception that Reagan was "soft" on white rule in South Africa, the US Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986, which crushed any hope of a continued mutually beneficial bilateral relationship.⁹³

The South African government has a distinct view on its constructive approach to Zimbabwe. South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dlamini-Zuma, insisted that quiet diplomacy is an inherently African form of foreign relations and that, "if your neighbour's house is on fire, you don't slap the child who started it. You help them put out the fire. This is the African way."⁹⁴

2.2.6 Softly-softly: Bilateral or multilateral efforts

During the 1990s, a combination of quiet diplomacy, bilateral US sanctions and a multilateral decision by the UN to institute sanctions played an important role in shifting Libyan foreign policy away from supporting terrorist activity.⁹⁵ South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe formed a multilateral partnership (effectively led by South Africa) when they engaged in soft diplomacy with Lesotho during the King's *coup* in 1994.⁹⁶

Mbeki's preference has always been for an intra-African multilateral approach to Zimbabwe. Since Mbeki assumed the South African presidency, he had been at great pains to assure fellow Africans that South Africa will not be the bully on the continent and as such he consistently urged the international community to leave it

⁹⁰ Vodanovich, <http://www.focusweb.org/focus/pd/sec/Altsec2/vodanovich.htm>.

⁹¹ GN Green, "No more Mr. Nice Guy" (1999), available at <http://www.fva.org/0899/story13.htm>.

⁹² For a more complete explanation of Reagan's constructive engagement policy, see Landsberg, p. 10.

⁹³ M Clough, "The end of constructive engagement" in RS Jaster, M Mbeki, M Nkosi and M Clough (eds), *Changing fortunes War, diplomacy, and economics in southern Africa*, (Ford Foundation, Foreign Policy Association, 1992), p. 120.

⁹⁴ F Khan, "South Africa ends 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe" (2001), available at http://www.affol.com/News2001/zim043_sa_diplomacy.htm.

⁹⁵ RB St John, "Lessons from Qaddafi" (2003), available at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/sanction/libya/20030314us.htm>.

⁹⁶ M Muller, "South African economic diplomacy in the age of globalization" (2000), available at <http://www.ciaonet.org/isa/mum01>.

to the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to resolve Zimbabwe's situation in "the African way".⁹⁷

The southern African region appears to believe in Mbeki's ability to deliver, evident in SADC's appointment of Mbeki as the mediator between Mugabe and the MDC in 2007 in the run up to the election and its request for him to continue in this role following the 2008 election. Nevertheless his role as mediator has been criticized as ineffectual which in turn has led to Mbeki rejecting the use of the term "quiet diplomacy" to describe his mediation effort. He was quoted as asserting, "What is loud diplomacy? That is not diplomacy."⁹⁸ Mbeki appears to be implying that loud diplomacy refers to the use of force, which he asserts is not a measure of diplomacy, and therefore the only way to proceed is quietly. However, this statement ignores the fact that loud diplomacy does not necessarily equal the use of force. Loud diplomacy includes other forms of action that are not invasive but still firm and effective – for example megaphone diplomacy, as mentioned earlier in the paper.

3. CONCLUSION

While diplomacy has been carried out in various forms since ancient times, constantly changing circumstances have resulted in many states now seeming to attach greater value to quieter or softer diplomatic approaches to international conflict situations as opposed to more direct military involvement. This article has attempted to break down the term "quiet" diplomacy into characteristics that allow for a better understanding of the concept. Therefore quiet or soft diplomacy can generally be defined as including personal or direct contact, often in a context of bilateral or multilateral relations, between heads of state or government or officials of state, without much if any media involvement, and in a non-coercive or non-threatening atmosphere of calm and constructive dialogue.

Mbeki and other government officials engaged in personal or direct contact with Mugabe, often in the context of bilateral or multilateral relations (as members of SADC and the AU). This engagement mostly took place away from the public eye, therefore without media involvement, and in a non-coercive or non-threatening atmosphere of calm and constructive dialogue. Thus it could be said that Mbeki demonstrated remarkable consistency in implementing the above definition of quiet diplomacy despite overwhelming criticism at home and abroad. Mbeki could be applauded for this had it yielded positive results but it has not. Evaluating Mbeki's quiet diplomacy policy in Zimbabwe is important in offering evidence to either encourage or discourage the use of this kind of diplomacy as an effective foreign policy tool in the future.

⁹⁷ *Cape Times*, 27 March 2003.

⁹⁸ Allen, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200804170807.html>.

Accompanying a better understanding of quiet diplomacy is the logical question: How appropriate and effective is quiet diplomacy? While it may have proven successful to a point in some international cases in the past, it is nevertheless possible to discern that Mbeki's use of it in Zimbabwe has clearly been unsuccessful. It could even be argued that Mbeki's apparent inability to address the post-election "crisis" effectively in Zimbabwe has directly and negatively affected South Africa in the form of millions of refugees flooding the country and a subsequent explosion of xenophobic violence there. This prompts the suggestion that Mbeki could have considered a more coercive form of diplomacy with regard to Zimbabwe in the future. While Zuma agreed that South Africa should not use force in Zimbabwe, favouring negotiations and persuasion instead, he was nevertheless far more open and critical of the situation in South Africa's neighbour than Mbeki. This suggests that, should Zuma become South Africa's next President, South Africa's foreign policy with regard to Zimbabwe may adopt, if not a militarily invasive attitude, at least a tougher one.

Perhaps the reality behind quiet diplomacy is that it is only really appropriate for presidents and politicians worldwide to use when their intention is to demonstrate the appearance of careful, conservative, even ethical foreign policymaking to the world. However, as an instrument of forceful foreign policy, at least in the South Africa-Zimbabwe situation, quiet diplomacy has failed. Should quiet engagement continue to be proved ineffectual, then the implication is that new kinds of diplomacy will need to be developed with the hope that these will be effective. In a world where diplomacy is the most commonly used method of contact between international actors, innovation must surely be the only solution.