

BOOK REVIEW

By

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ZIMBABWE'S DIPLOMACY 1980-2008 BY WENCESLAUS MUDYANADZO, 2011

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This book seeks to provide an analysis of Zimbabwe's foreign relations from independence to 2008. I was excited by the prospect of reading a text on Zimbabwe's foreign policy and hoped that this text would fill the lacuna in the study of Zimbabwean foreign policy. However, the book turns out to be a false dawn and I still await what would be described as a definitive guide to Zimbabwe's foreign policy. This is an ambitious project considering the paucity of university texts on Zimbabwe's foreign policy and international relations as well the burgeoning popularity of courses on Zimbabwe foreign policy and international relations at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The author spent 15 years as a diplomat serving as Deputy Head of Mission; currently he is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and Public Management at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe and it is his first book. The text is targeted at both undergraduate and post graduate students taking courses in Zimbabwe's foreign policy as well as foreign policy practitioners. The book aims to present a critical review and analyses of Zimbabwe's diplomacy and foreign relations.

The book is 166 pages long (including index) and is made up of twelve chapters composed of unequal number of pages. The longest chapter is the second which is twenty pages, the shortest being chapter nine with a miserly four pages. The book is divided into two parts with the first part uninspiringly and unimaginatively entitled 'General Introduction and Basic knowledge about Zimbabwe's Diplomacy.' This is a lengthy title and hardly inspires any confidence in the reader that the book is a worthwhile read. Part one is made up of three chapters and from the onset there is a deficiency of a strong theoretical grounding and academic rigour bearing in mind that this text is targeted at academia.

Foreign policy practitioners and students of international relations are cognisant that foreign policy is determined by a set of theories which go on to inform the policy choices of the government. Instead the reader is

subjected to a harrowing and excruciating historical account and narrative which leads one to wonder if they are reading a text on foreign policy. The reader is left perplexed by the lack of clear definition of the terms ‘foreign policy’ and ‘diplomacy’ as the writer seems to use them interchangeably. This is problematic as one observes that diplomacy is one of the tools of statecraft and therefore an extension of foreign policy. Therefore an analysis of Zimbabwe’s diplomacy is impossible without providing a theoretical basis and a critique of its grand strategy, the grand strategy is informed by ideological and theoretical outlook.

Part two of the book examines regional and international co-operation and for the next nine chapters the reader has to endure the descriptive and uncritical presentation by the author. One expects that the anchors of Zimbabwe’s foreign policy such as South-South co-operation would occupy a central role in the text. South-South cooperation is one of the key pillars of Zimbabwe’s foreign policy yet there is hardly a discussion on it as well as Zimbabwe’s foreign policy in Africa. It would have been interesting to read about Zimbabwe’s foreign policy towards apartheid South Africa, as well as Mozambique during the Renamo insurgency and the country’s role and relations with South Sudan during the civil war with Khartoum. No serious analysis of Zimbabwe’s foreign relations can be discussed without mentioning South Africa as both countries share a common historical experience as well as strong trade and economic ties. South Africa is an economic and political hegemon in the region and relations with both countries have evolved since the days of apartheid when South Africa engaged in a campaign of regional destabilisation in what was known as ‘Total National Strategy’, to the presidency of Nelson Mandela where tension and competition characterised the relationship as Zimbabwe accused South Africa of wanting to be big brother in the region.’ Furthermore, there is no discussion on relations with the wider African continent, the Organisation of African Unity which later was renamed the African Union, Zimbabwe’ role in peacekeeping, security on the continent, North Africa and issues relating to environmental diplomacy especially climate change.

Chapter nine looks at relations with the European Union and is in three pages. It only becomes four pages because of examination questions which overlap into the next page. Seeing that the book traces Zimbabwe’s diplomacy since independence, it is surprising that there is no analysis of European Union’s predecessor-European Commission, as well as relations between East Europe and Zimbabwe in the era after independence. The chapter is also memorable for its glaring weakness of concentrating on Britain as she is not a member of EU. The book does not address relations between Zimbabwe and EU countries such as Austria , Belgium, France Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Portugal to mention but a few.

Chapter eleven is entitled ‘The Look East Policy’ which has been one of the mainstays of Zimbabwe’s foreign policy. The author has not done justice to this chapter as he fails to critically appraise and evaluate the net benefits accrued through this policy. One expects that the book will be laced by statistics on volumes of trade between Zimbabwe and the East, a quantitative approach would not have been out of place. The author lets himself down as the references are drawn largely from the newspaper. The author oversimplifies and romanticises relations with China hardly surprising as his analysis is based on sentiment rather than a solid theoretical base. He does not analyse the tensions and evolution of the relationship between the two countries neither does he point out that states have interest in self-preservation and self-interest. I therefore find it simplistic to label China as an all-weather friend. Such pronouncements lead to a dearth of analysis and a lack of comprehension of international relations. The book fails to bring out that relations with China were part of the

regime's strategy of international survival as it played on the East versus West divide and rivalry between China and the USA. Furthermore the chapter though entitled 'The Look East Policy' only deals with China and ignores Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and other nations.

A major flaw within the text is a lack of solid scholarly sources. I would expect that archival material be employed as opposed newspaper articles as sources of information. Primary sources as well as credible secondary sources would be employed in order to make the book more scholarly and compelling. As a former diplomat, one would expect that the author would have been able to use elite interviews in order to enrich his book, as a former diplomat, he would have access to the corridors of power, something that most academics and researchers may not be privy to. One may only speculate that perhaps he was afraid of falling foul of the Official Secrets Act. As a text aimed at students and practitioners, one expects that triangulation be used to synthesise information thereby providing a balanced and accurate picture.

The author embarked on an ambitious project which promised so much yet failed to deliver. The text would have greatly benefitted from incorporating political history to augment his text. Zimbabwe's foreign policy exists within a historic milieu and these contours, dynamics, changes and developments have to be placed in a proper historic context. For instance, every student of international relations is familiar with realpolitik, realism as well as the idea of *zeitgeist* and how these shape and influence foreign policy options. Yet the author does little to offer a political history perspective as well as theoretical considerations. One is left with the feeling that the author should have written a memoir about his career as a diplomat as opposed to a book as he clearly falls short of his stated goal. I also found some of the pictures irrelevant to the text as they make no contribution at all to the discussion. One such picture is that of the author and his wife being received by the governor general of Australia as well as a picture of President Mugabe alighting from a car.

A clear weakness exhibited by the text is that it lacks the scholarly analysis and rigour on foreign policy issues. This is not helped by the lack of a clear interrogation of international relations theory except a cursory mention of Hans Morgenthau's realist perspective. This is crucial as Zimbabwe's relations are fluid informed by realism as well as post colonialism depending on the spirit of the times, the *zeitgeist*. This is a huge oversight by the author seeing that the target group is students at university taking courses at both graduate and undergraduate level and the discipline requires a sound theoretical grounding. Unfortunately, the book does not do this.

The author does not conceptualise an important variable and term within his work-foreign policy. One is left groping in the dark trying to figure out whether foreign policy and diplomacy are the same, this conflation and conceptual mudding is a major weakness in the text. As a former diplomat as well as an academic, one would expect that a substantial chapter would be devoted towards providing an insight and analysis on the structures, processes, actors and parties involved in formulating foreign policy. Furthermore, I also find it odd that the author does not offer any analysis and a discussion on Zimbabwe's relations with non-state actors, these have integral players in foreign policy.

The text also does not give a trajectory into the future of relations between Zimbabwe and the regional blocs examined. Also worrying is that the text does not fully cover the whole spectrum of diplomacy, for example it does not consider issues of economics, commerce, trade, international development, environmental diplomacy

amongst other issues. In addition, the text does not ask difficult questions, for instance it is well known that Zimbabwe though opposed to the apartheid regime employed realpolitik and traded with the apartheid regime, Zimbabwe had close relations with Muammar Ghaddafi and there is no examination of relations with Britain and the USA in the early years after independence. Equally puzzling is that there is no chapter analysing relations with the world superpower-America. Zimbabwe and North Korea enjoyed a close relationship which even led to elite troops known as the Fifth Brigade trained by the Koreans to unleash havoc in Matabeleland and Midlands.

The book would have benefitted from a more thematic based approach as well as an in-depth case discussion of the themes under consideration. One gets the feeling that this was a good idea which was not well-executed. Perhaps an edited volume bringing together various scholars, practitioners and researchers would have resulted in a more polished and highly analytical product.