CHAPTER 9

ZIMBABWE'S FOREIGN POLICY TRAJECTORY: DAWN OF A NEW ERA?

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In most recent times, as the West started being hostile to us, we deliberately declared a Look East policy...We have turned east where the sun rises, and given our backs to the west, where it sets. (Zimbabwe's former President, Robert Mugabe cited in Maroodza, 2011:1)

... our foreign policy at the moment targets at reengagement with those countries that have seen us in a negative way and who should therefore unlock this particular area. That's why since his inauguration, His Excellency (President Emmerson Mnangagwa) has dynamised Zimbabwe's quest to normalise relations with the West through engagement.
(Zimbabwe's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade)
(Sibusiso B. Moyo in The Herald 23/08/2019)

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, Zimbabwe's foreign policy under Robert Mugabe had followed clearly marked contours. The country pursued a foreign policy trajectory underpinned by animosity and hostility (adversarial diplomacy) against the European Union (EU), United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and their allies; Look East Policy; Amin's (1990) 'delinking'; and South-to-South cooperation policy prescriptions. On the domestic front, the state had embarked on a programme of massive repression against dissenting voices. Consequently, Zimbabwe earned labels such as 'outpost of tyranny,' 'pariah state,' 'axis of evil,' 'rogue state,' 'banana republic,' 'weak state' and 'failed state,' particularly in Western political circles. The country's national image was also significantly dented during this period, leading to constrained foreign direct investment (FDI) and tourism (Moyo 2019). A cocktail of policy mishaps such as the chaotic land reform programme and the economic indigenisation policy, chronic corruption, and roughshod human rights violations attracted sanctions from the West on the country. The USA and EU sanctions against Zimbabwe are the most notable.

In 2001, the US Senate passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). ZIDERA is 'the policy of the United States to support the people of Zimbabwe in their struggle to effect peaceful, democratic change, achieve broad-based and equitable

economic growth, and restore the rule of law' (ZIDERA, 2001:1). Some of ZIDERA's restrictions include multilateral financing restriction and travel and economic sanctions against individuals responsible for the 'breakdown of the rule of law in Zimbabwe' (ZIDERA, 2001:5). On the other hand, the EU sanctions on Zimbabwe were first imposed in 2002 in response to the escalation in political violence, intimidation against political opponents and harassment of the independent press. The EU sanctions include travel bans, freezing of assets, 'blacklisting' of companies and an arms embargo (Lester & O'Kane, 2021). The EU sanctions have been subjected to reviews since their imposition in 2002. The arms embargo is the only notable restriction that still exists.

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), also disengaged with Zimbabwe as early as 1999. Accordingly, a concoction of sanctions, corruption, economic mismanagement and lack of confidence in the country by the IFIs and the international community at large, resulted in the country's political and economic turmoil popularly known as the 'Zimbabwe Crisis'. The Zimbabwe crisis is addressed by a host of scholars such as Makumbe (2006,2009); Makumbe and Compagnon (2000); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004, 2009); Masunungure (2009); Linington (2009); Badza (2009); Bratton and Masunungure (2011); and Sachikonye (2011).

In November 2017, Robert Mugabe was ousted from power through a 'soft coup' - the so-called Military Assisted Transition. The unceremonious departure of Mugabe from the political scene led to the emergence of a 'new' political order led by Emmerson Mnangagwa (Mugabe's former deputy). The Mnangagwa administration has rebranded itself as the 'New Dispensation' or 'Second Republic' and has attempted to follow the Rwandan-business-friendly and anti-corruption model ('Kagameism'). Consequently, the country has adopted albeit in theory, the twin leitmotifs, 'Zimbabwe is Open for Business' and 'Zero Tolerance to Corruption' (essential hallmarks of the Paul Kagame administration). In addition, there have been attempts by the New Dispensation to unlock FDI, re-engage IFIs (neo-liberal orthodoxy), thaw relations with the EU, re-join the Commonwealth and lobby for the lifting of USA sanctions on Zimbabwe. However, the 'new' political order in Zimbabwe has not cut the umbilical cord linking it with China and the former Eastern bloc (Look East Policy), the SADC and many countries of the Global South (South-to-South cooperation).

At face value, the 'New Dispensation' seems to have abandoned the radical 'left nationalism' and 'Mugabeism' ideologies of local and international engagement. This raises the question: has there been a genuine foreign policy shift by Zimbabwe in the post-Mugabe era? Therefore, this chapter seeks to tackle the above question by trenchantly dissecting Zimbabwe's current foreign policy trends, pitfalls and prospects. Crucially, the chapter compares Zimbabwe's foreign policy dynamics during the Mugabe and Mnangagwa eras respectively. Such a comparison is necessary considering the intimate working relationship between the former and the latter over the years.