

ZIMBABWE-IRAN RELATIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY.

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Abstract

The 21st century has witnessed the intensification of relations between Zimbabwe and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The country's relations with Iran are part of its Look East Policy which was officially promulgated by the government at the inception of the 21st Century. The relations between the two countries has grown stronger following the unprecedented USA pressure on Zimbabwe opening an embassy in Teheran in 2003. On her part, Iran has solidly supported Zimbabwe at international fora. Trade agreements between the two countries have been signed. The intensification of relations between the two countries stem from the fact that the two countries share a common adversary in the West and have since been labelled out posts of tyranny. The aim of this paper is to highlight how a common adversary in the West, common principles regarding the safeguarding and respect of a sovereign state and non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state have led to cooperation between Zimbabwe and Iran. Issues characterising the contemporary global order, shared values and aspirations between the two countries will provide the appropriate framework upon which the intensified relations between Zimbabwe and Iran could be understood.

Key words: foreign relations, look east policy, Iran, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed intensified relations between Zimbabwe and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These intensified relations saw Zimbabwe setting up an embassy in Teheran in 2003. Both countries share a common adversary in the West. The contempt received by the two countries from the West has seen the bilateral relations between the two countries growing stronger. The intensification of relations between Zimbabwe and Iran is depicted by state visits, diplomatic relations, trade agreements and support for each other at international fora. The end result has been a relationship that has proved beneficial to both countries. It is the purpose this paper to analyse the ensuing relationship between Iran and Zimbabwe and how it has contributed to development.

ZIMBABWE- IRAN RELATIONS

The intensification of relations between Zimbabwe and Iran is mostly driven by the fact that both countries have an adversary in the West. The Islamic Republic of Iran like the Republic of Zimbabwe has been a target of unprecedented wave of hostility from Western countries led by the USA. This is primarily over Teheran's commitment to develop its nuclear energy. This saw a sanctions regime being slapped on Iran over the issue of nuclear development. (<http://www.misa.org.pipermail/misnet/2005/july.000000.htm/>). USA has been on the lead with propaganda and accusations against Iran of acquiring nuclear weapons. Like her counterpart Iran, Zimbabwe has also been sanctions. For Zimbabwe the Fast Tract Land Reform received condemnation from Western countries. The Land Reform

programme has been presented and widely interpreted by the West as a challenge to their policies and a refusal by the country to conduct its economy according to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank and general western thinking. As such general assistance to Zimbabwe from the IMF, World Bank and western governments was restricted. Western investors also moved away in response to the ongoing political and economic problems thereby contributing to the country's foreign currency crisis.(Ibid). Shortages of foreign currency resulted in shortages of basic commodities and supply of basic services. The pressure exerted by West forced Zimbabwe to formulate the Look East Policy which was directed at courting friends who understood her situations. Among a host of countries courted included the Islamic Republic of Iran. This happened at a time when Iran was equally undergoing the same antagonistic relations with the West as a result of her attempts to develop nuclear energy.

As such the solidarity between the two states is an indication of resistance to West's domination of the international system in relations to arms control, disarmaments agreements, contempt for multilateralism and continued unilateral tendencies. The double standards of the Western countries towards Zimbabwe and Iran are shown when the two have been declared as outpost of tyranny. President Mugabe explained that both Zimbabwe and Iran are being unjustly vilified and punished by the USA and its Western allies because of the principled positions the two states have taken at both the domestic and international level. (Herald; 24,2010). On his part President Ahmadinejad explained at the same occasion that Zimbabwe and Iran`s friendship is based on a principled stand against the USA and Western interference (Ibid).

Further more, Zimbabwe and Iran`s cooperation stem from the fact that the two countries share common revolutionary backgrounds mainly characterised by stiff resistance to the Western imperialist onslaught. Zimbabwe won independence from Britain after a protracted liberation struggle and up until now is still fighting the same although under changed circumstances. During the past decade the West led by USA and Britain have been demonising and punishing Zimbabwe for its decisive and hugely popular economic indigenisation policy. Zimbabwe paid for this defiance through a raft of sanctions and isolationism. On the other hand, since defeating a Western puppet regime in the 1979 revolution, Iran has been subject to undue interference from the West. This has been high lightened in 1980-88 war Iraq, to the current opposition to its nuclear programmes.(Herald;27 .04.2010). As such the solidarity and the newly relations between Zimbabwe and Iran should be viewed as a reaction by the two powers to the tendency of USA and its Western allies to disrespect bilateral arms control, disarmaments agreement and their outright contempt for multilateralism. According to president Mugabe, Zimbabwe and Iran have to fight to put up against the USA and its evil systems, also adding that it was imperative that the two countries come together to work out a mechanism to defend themselves.(Herald;21.11.2006).On his part President Ahmadinejad explained that Zimbabwe and Iran share common perceptions as they are both against hegemony and control by arrogant powers and both have been damaged in the past by this hegemony.(Ibid).

Both countries are also against the occasional unilateral tendencies of the USA. The two countries are opposed to what appear to be the double standard of the US and its Western allies. Relations between the two counties have intensified because both feel that they have been punished not for bad governance or for violating human rights but for daring to defy and directly confronting the West. USA`s double standards are shown when one considers that in America, after the war of independence, the new USA government simply confiscated vast estates from the Tories (www.tpif.org). In Eastern Asia, USA assisted South Korea and Taiwan in the agrarian reform providing the much needed resources to carry

out with the USA army also accompanied the South Korean Army in enforcing the removal of the landowners (Ibid). Whilst the US is condemning Iran due to its refusal to stop its uranium enrichment saying that it is intended for nuclear weapons, when nuclear energy can be harnessed for peaceful purposes to enhance development.

Common contempt received by the two countries from the West and US has resulted in a close relationship between the two. The two countries are labelled as the remaining out post of tyranny alongside with North Korea. The West has isolated the two countries of alleged bad human rights and of dictatorship. Again when one consults history the West and its allies' double standards are revealed. The USA is friends with Saudi Arabia, yet the latter is not a democracy. The USA is also friends with Kuwait but it is not a democracy. (Herald;27.04.2010). As such hypocrisy and double standards is what defines US foreign policy. Furthermore, the two countries have been drawn to each other because in both countries the West has been trying to effect regime change and settle with much more favourable governments that will guarantee Western interests. According to the USA Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Walter Kensteiner, Mugabe's govt was illegal and irrational since his govt was not democratic. He also pointed out that the political status quo was unacceptable and the US was putting pressure on neighbouring states to correct that situation.(<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/nov2002/zimb-n18.shtm/>). The West has also been trying to effect illegal regime change in Iran as well through sanctioning the current government in order for it to crumble. The above cooperation between the two states confirms Chigora's observation about common interests and cooperation. (2006). Chigora (2006) states that cooperation between states exists primarily when there is a commonality of interests. In this case, a common situation and a common adversary in the West have drawn Zimbabwe and Iran together.

Cooperation between the two countries has also resulted due to the fact that they both share common principles. During his state visit to Zimbabwe, the Iranian President said him and Mugabe share a common principle regarding the safeguarding and respect of a sovereign state and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.(Herald;28.04.2010). Both leaders believe in their right to defend and protect their country's security and independence. They emphasise their independence as sovereign states, their territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. By being against Zimbabwe's indigenisation policies and Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons the West defeats the whole concept of sovereignty of states and their right to shape their development sustainably. Furthermore, by insisting that they have violated human rights and the rule of law and by trying to effect illegal regime both countries feel that the West has no respect for their independence and territorial integrity. Yet these countries' foreign policy principles are guided by the need to uphold and safeguard their sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and upholding their national interests.

Explaining how the US has disregarded the independence of Iran, President Ahmadinejad stated that during the course of past 29 years, Iran has been continuously a target of adverse propaganda and many threats by the Western countries, particularly the US which has been responsible for supporting Iran's opponents with armaments for the military invasion of Iran .(http://www.misa.org.pipermail/misnet/2005-july_0000_00.html). Both countries share common perceptions on the issues characterising the contemporary global order. The two countries believe that sanctions imposed on their regimes are a result of serious conflict between revolutionary states and imperialist -backed states. They abhor the imperialist tendencies of the West disguised within democratic movements that are aimed at reversing the gains of independence of any revolutionary state. Iran and Zimbabwe believe that the crisis they face is part of a ground

imperialist conspiracy to forcibly dislodge all revolutionary leaders and rules. What has united the two countries is the fact that both states are less enthusiastic about substantive political and economic liberation. They both do not trust the West and suspect the West of harbouring sinister motives in their countries. To them neo-liberalism is a Western - propelled strategy to re-conquer and exploit the natural resources

of Africa and other developing nations. The two countries uphold the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. To this effect in November 2009 President Mugabe voiced his support for Iran's nuclear programmes saying that only countries without nuclear weapons could make an informed decision about Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities. Mugabe explained that they were both members of the non-aligned Movement and they shared a history of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism.(Herald;28 .04.2010).

In 2006 Mugabe pledged his support for Iran and denounced Western intervention in Iranian Affairs saying that non-aligned countries must fight to put up against these evil men and their evil systems.(all.africa.com.stories/2010010 40024.html). Both countries claim to adhere to the non-interference norm in their international relations. To this effect Iran did not criticize Mugabe for the manner in which the harmonized elections and the Presidential run -off elections were conducted, instead Iran endorsed the results of both the March and June Presidential elections. Mugabe explained that Iran and Zimbabwe were like minded in their belief of sovereignty and independence. He said like minded revolutionaries were unjustly condemned for defending their independence and sovereignty and vowed that both nations will defend each other's national integrity,sovereignty against any aggression ([http://www.new.24.com/africa/zimbabwe-/Iran zim-boost ties-20061121](http://www.new.24.com/africa/zimbabwe-/Iran%20zim-boost%20ties-20061121)).

President Ahmadinejad stated that they both believed in safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of their countries. He explained that all nations are respected and believed by their creator God the merciful yet there are some oppressive and arrogant countries who wanted to deprive people of their rights, peace and prosperity (Herald;28.04.2010).Diplomatic relations by these two states were enhanced by the establishment of an embassy in Teheran by Zimbabwe in 2003.Furthermore exchange of diplomatic visits by the heads of these states is evidence of the depth of these relations. From 2003, 2006 and 2007 President Mugabe visited Iran to sign trade agreements. In September 2007 he was invited to participate in the non-alignment Movement Ministerial session on human rights in Teheran ([http://www.news.24.com/africa/zimbabwe-/Iran-zimbabwe boost ties-2007/12/](http://www.news.24.com/africa/zimbabwe-/Iran-zimbabwe%20boost%20ties-2007/12/)).On his part, President Ahmadinejad was also cordially invited to open the Zimbabwe international trade fair in April 2010.

On the international forum, Iran has solidly supported Zimbabwe at various forums including the United Nations where it has called for the immediate lifting of what it considers as illegal sanctions against Zimbabwe. Iran has also publicly denounced what she calls Western satanic pressures on Zimbabwe aimed at perpetuating injustice and impoverishment in that country. On her part Zimbabwe has publicly announced her support for the Iran's nuclear programme. In April she awarded Iran exclusive mining rights of her uranium deposits. Any deal to supply Iran with uranium is likely to put Zimbabwe in breach of current UN sanctions of Iran. Under security council resolution 1737, passed in December2006,all countries are ordered to prevent the supply, sale or transfer of all items, materials, equipment, goods and technology which could contribute to Iran's enrichment of her nuclear programme.([http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world news/african dianocean/zimbabwe/7628750/iran-strikes-secret- -nuc](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world%20news/african%20dianocean/zimbabwe/7628750/iran-strikes-secret--nuc)). This stance by Zimbabwe means the state is prepared to support Iran. President Mugabe explained that it was Zimbabwe's sovereign

right to decide how to utilise its natural resources. He added that Zimbabwe is fully supporting Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy as enshrined in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and at the same time defending Zimbabwe's right to exercise its sovereignty over its natural resources.(Ibid).

Again at the international forum, Iran and Zimbabwe's bilateral relations have been strengthened by the formation of a coalition for peace in response to the aggression of the global bullies. In 2007 both countries announced their collaborative coalition of peace, following negative statements about the two regimes from the USA President Bush. The Iranian ambassador stated that the two countries being opposed to the expansion policies of world super power have jointly called for peace for all the oppressed across the world.(Herald 27 .04.2010).Both countries share common ground in promoting regional and international peace and stability and the economic development of the developing world. They believe strongly that the actions of the USA and its Western allies are an anti-thesis for peace and development. They also argue that the Western's actions are not democratic and neither should it be preaching about human rights. Ahmadinejad explained that Iran has not wronged the West, or founded genocide in America, Britain, France and Germany like they did during the Iran-Iraq war. They are of the opinion that this meddling by the West in the internal affairs of sovereign states have only led to the derailment of development in these countries.

Mugabe explained that the West had always worked against the rise of developing countries. He is of the opinion that the West does not want anyone, any country in the developing world to make any meaningful developmental strides and the West's attitude is more pronounced in regard to Zimbabwe and Iran.(Herald;18.02.2010). Guided by the belief in promoting international development on development countries, Iran has provided financial, moral, humanitarian aid for the Zimbabwean people. Although not endowed with American mega bucks Iran has been very supportive to Zimbabwe. Various Memoranda of understanding and bilateral agreements have been signed between the two countries. These are in areas of finance, technology, education, tourism air service and diplomatic issues. Following these agreements, Iran has invested in Zimbabwe's industry, power and energy industries. Sanctions on Zimbabwe by the West have left the country very impoverished. Foreign currency shortages have resulted in fuel shortages. A lack of domestic energy source and oil refining capability had a major effect on the Zimbabwean economy. Iran chipped in when in 2006 it pledged to send fuel technicians to Harare to investigate the possibility of revamping the country's only oil refinery a facility originally built to refine Iranian crude oil.(www.assat shakur.org.>....Africa world news). Zimbabwe's Minister of Energy Mike Nyambuya explained that Iran made a number of proposals to meet Zimbabwe's needs of fuel and oil products. A memorandum of understanding was signed to renovate Zimbabwe's oil refinery in exchange for giving Iran exclusive mining rights of strategic minerals.(Ibid).

In April 2010 the two countries signed an agreement under which the two intended to jointly run three energy projects worth millions of US dollars.(Zim-Iran in mega energy deal <http://new.zim.situation.com/419//rs.zim-iran.htm>).The Feruka Oil Company, the Lupane Methane gas Project and Chisumbanje Ethanol Plant are the ventures earmarked for investment((Ibid).Iran is expected to fund the three projects identified while Zimbabwe provide the gas i.e in the gas project .These developments are bound to benefit Zimbabwe immensely since Iran is the OPEC OIL'S cartel number two producer. The intensification of relations between the two countries are also depicted in their trade agreements. Trading relations culminated in the official opening of the Zimbabwe I international Trade Fair by the Iranian president on the 23rd of April 2010. Iran provided the largest number of foreign companies exhibiting at the ZITF (Herald;23.04.2010),

whilst many Western nations steered clear of the fair. This is a result of the US'S anti-Zimbabwe sanction law ZDERA, which prohibits and punishes companies that do business in Zimbabwe. Iran's visit to the ZITF and exhibition has been demonised and belittled by the West. The US conservative journal, *The Right perspective* called the meeting by the two leaders a meeting of the evil minds; anti-white, Marxists and dictators (Herald;27.04.2010). Justifying Western sabotage of the ZITF the journal said that the Western nations have steered clear of the trade fair since Mugabe began his racist eviction of white farmers ten years ago.(Ibid).

Despite the West's sabotage of trade with Zimbabwe annual trade between Zimbabwe and Iran is expected to rise to 1.5 billion dollars by 2010 from the levels of 35 million dollars. Iran has exported technological and technical know-how to Zimbabwe. Furthermore, she has also assisted in the modernisation of Zimbabwe's state television and radio services. On the 25th of April 2010 the two states signed an agreement aimed at increasing trade between them. Zimbabwe's Minister of Industry and Commerce, Ncube explained that Zimbabwe proposed to enhance trade with Iran explaining that Zimbabwe's economy had been depressed and her traditional trading partners in the West are reluctant to cooperate which has left Zimbabwe with no choice but to seek alternatives.(Zim-Iran Foreign Relations/Tracker [www/IranTracker.org/...relations/Zim/Iran foreign relations](http://www/IranTracker.org/...relations/Zim/Iran%20foreign%20relations)).

In March 2010, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Didymus Mutasa visited Teheran and formally signed a secret nuclear mining deal. Iran has been given exclusive rights to mine Zimbabwe's untapped uranium reserves in return for supplying oil which Zimbabwe needs to keep its faltering economy moving (Ibid). Most of Iran's uranium come from South Africa during the 1970s but the stock piles are running low so its access to the Zimbabwean reserves has been granted at a crucial moment. Zimbabwe's uranium was first discovered in the Kanyemba district 150 miles north of Harare by German prospector in the 1980s but were not exploited due to low world prices([http://www telegraph.co.uk.news/world news/African dianocoean/zimbabwe/7628750/Iran-strikes-secret-nuc](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world%20news/African%20dianocean/zimbabwe/7628750/Iran-strikes-secret-nuc)).

Iran has also aided Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. In 2008 an agreement was signed between the two countries to aid Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. Teheran and Harare signed a joint venture deal to manufacture tractors in Zimbabwe in March 2008.According to the pact, Iran's foreign investment company would control 55% of the venture whereas Zimbabwe's Industrial Development Co-operation mentioned the balance. ([www Iran-Trucker.org/--- relations/zim-iran relations](http://www/Iran-Trucker.org/---relations/zim-iran%20relations)).The target product was 5000 tractors per year with the expectations that the product would expand to regional market in the year to come .Components would be imported from Iran and later be substituted by Zimbabwe's domestic components. Iran investedUS\$4 million in the deal.During his state visit to Zimbabwe in April 2010,the Iranian president officially launched the industrial Development Corporation tractor project in Harare and also toured the Modzone Enterprises(formarly Corn-Textiles) in Chitungwiza which is also a joint venture between Zimbabwe and Iran.(Herald;27.04.2010).

In January 2010 Iran also donated funds to chief Mashayamombe's zunde ramambo project for the purchase of 250kgs of maize seed (Ibid).This project is part of an effort to improve agriculture and to feed the poor in Zimbabwe. Iran has also offered humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe. In January 2010 Iran's deputy ambassador to Zimbabwe, Javad Dehghan donated food hampers comprising cooking oil, mealie-meal and salt .She also donated 80 wheel chairs, 25 boxes of vitamins supplementary tablets ,maternity kits and food hampers to nine clinics for disabled Zimbabweans(Ibid).The deputy ambassador explained that in Iran's further desire to further expand the already existing relations between the

two states in all areas of cooperation based on the common saying that a friend in need is a friend in deed, his embassy has made donations to other several constituencies in Zimbabwe. Iran has been recorded as giving Zimbabwe humanitarian aid on at least 93 separate occasions. Iran has also come to Zimbabwe's aid financially. In 2009 Zimbabwe received financial aid totalling to US\$25million. The country has also pledged to grant the country further loans. In April 2010, the Iranian President during his state visit stated that Iranian banks and financial institutions are set to provide credit facilities and financing to Zimbabwean projects.(herald 27.04.2010).

Cultural interests also comprise a significant component of Zimbabwe -Iran relations. In 2006, the two heads of states signed a joint communiqué where they both emphasised their goal to expand cultural co-operation. At the opening speech of the library Iran's ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr.Rasal Moneni hoped that the cultural exchange between the two countries will be furthered. He said the library is aimed at attracting readers towards the books on culture and customs of Iran in order to familiarise the people of Zimbabwe with the Iranian culture. (All Africa.com.stories/201001040024.htm/).

Pontificating about the future, Zimbabwe- Iran relations are bound to continue given the increased interdependence of the two countries in a number of spheres of life. As long as Zimbabwe and Iran continue sharing a common Western adversary, share common perceptions regarding the contemporary global order, common principles regarding the inviolability of state sovereignty and non-interference, share common values and aspirations, Iran will most likely maintain its friendly relations with Zimbabwe but only to the extent that their national self-interests are safeguarded.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century has witnessed intensified relations between Zimbabwe and Iran. A common enemy in the West has seen the two countries cooperating in a number of spheres of life. In essence common interests, shared values and aspirations as well as shared perceptions regarding the contemporary global order has resulted in co-operation between the two countries. The intensification of these relations has seen trade agreements signed. Iran has also invested in Zimbabwe's various industries, agriculture, power and energy. The future of Zimbabwe-Iran relations will most likely continue but only to the extent that both nations' national self-interests are safeguarded.

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