Key:

SO = Interviewer - Sue Onslow

AP = Respondent - Aziz Pahad

SO: Dr Sue Onslow interviewing Mr Aziz Pahad at the [Department of International Relations and Cooperation] DIRCO Building in Pretoria on Wednesday, 5 August 2015. Mr Pahad, thank you very much indeed, for agreeing to be interviewed a second time.

AP: Pleasure, and welcome back.

SO: Thank you. Sir, I wonder if you could begin, please, by picking up on the aspects you raised in our first discussion: President Nelson Mandela's arrival in office and your appointment as Deputy Foreign Minister under Alfred Nzo as Foreign Minister. You said that there were a number of priorities which were foremost on South Africa's foreign policy agenda, and the re-joining the Commonwealth was one of them. How much importance do you recall was attached to the Commonwealth dimension/the Commonwealth platform in South Africa's foreign policy in President Mandela's time in office?

AP: Well, I think, it was clear for various reasons we saw our membership of the Commonwealth as very important: for the historical relations, the language, our institutions were so connected and, indeed, because of the role the Commonwealth had played in our democratisation process, members of the Commonwealth in different structures generally and the Commonwealth

Eminent Persons Group, specifically, etc. So, I think amongst the groups that we saw as important to join, without fully appreciating the totality of the work the Commonwealth did, we saw it as an important platform.

Also because we knew that members of the Commonwealth were in many other organisations, whether it was the UN or the OAU and other multilateral structures. We saw it as a platform where we could interact and where our leadership in the breakaways could informally interact without the presence of any bureaucracy and [we could] really discuss issues that mostly never see the light of day, and to really "find themselves." And so we saw membership as an important decision. At that time the minister was Minister Nzo and, of course, having been based in Lusaka, his interaction with the Commonwealth members was largely through the Africa group members and then through those who were members of NAM because that was where he, from Lusaka, really concentrated. So, I think, from the little records or discussions I had with him, he found our membership quite important, and, of course, Madiba had just come out of prison a few years earlier, and for him meeting so many leaders at that level formally and informally was quite an experience.

SO: So, please could I ask you just to describe where the formulation of South Africa's foreign policy lay with the new ANC government? Different countries have allocated varying responsibilities to different ministries or bureaucratic groups, in terms of strategic development and then implementation of foreign policy.

AP: Well, we were fortunate in a way that we had a Department of International Affairs, which was headed by senior leadership, including Johnny Makhatini, Josiah Jele and Thabo Mbeki; and under their leadership, especially during the height of the sanctions campaign, we had more ANC offices abroad than the South African government had. So, we had in that sense a good core of people that were involved in international relations work and the leadership of Mbeki and Makhatini... Makhatini was based at the UN but both had a very good understanding of foreign policy. So by the time we came back into the country, we had a good core of people who returned with international relations experience. Not all came into the then ANC Department of International Affairs.

Others were deployed elsewhere and some from the Mass Democratic Movement were being prepared to join the new Department of Foreign Affairs. In the early part we had discussions on the gradual lifting of sanctions and how we enter the world community of nations? So, those were discussions that were going on in the Department of International Affairs. We also discussed the transformation of the then Department of Foreign Affairs and how to bring our people into it. So, we did recruit not only those from exile but some internal people from the Mass Democratic Movement, and sent them for training to Europe. I think some even went to the UK. I don't know whether there was a programme with the Commonwealth on training our diplomats. I'm not sure.

SO: I'm just wondering, because they did that for Zimbabwe after independence.

AP: Pre-democracy I don't think there was, but I think through some structures in Europe we did send the new people, both from the old ANC Department of International Affairs and those who we recruited inside South Africa to go abroad. So, one of our main discussion documents was 'Ready to Govern'. The ANC conferences determine broad policies on all issues and the 'Ready to Govern' document sets out our broad parameters for foreign policy which was then adopted by the government in 1994, as the broad framework. And after that every ANC policy conference had an international relations working group. Before each conference the International Relations sub-committee, which meets regularly in between conferences, prepares documentation which is then discussed by all structures of the ANC. The draft document is discussed at the ANC Policy Conference and a final document is presented to the ANC Conference for adoption. This has been the standard rule up to now - the ANC International Relations Sub-Committee discusses broad policy, submits its recommendations at the policy conference. Delegates who are not on the Sub-Committee come to that particular workshop, and from there emerges broad guidelines (and that continues until today) which is then taken up by government, which then is discussed in the International Relations Cabinet Cluster**.** The International Relations Cluster had representation from ministers and deputy ministers of foreign affairs, finance, trade and industry, tourism and security. And then for some reason, Minister Asmal, who was Minister of

Education at that time, was very keen. So, he was on that particular cluster too and it's the cluster that discusses the broad guidelines and then discusses what Department of Foreign Affairs puts forward on how we implement the guidelines. But the broad policy always has to come from the conferences of the ruling party i.e. the broad framework. The implementation comes from government.

SO: Excuse me, sir, I'm just going to ask your opinion on a commentary that was written for Chatham House in London. It appeared in *International Affairs* 2005 talking about Nelson Mandela's presidency, saying that South African commentators complained loudly that Pretoria didn't have a coherent foreign policy in the 1990s. There were several reasons in this piece that were offered for an ad hoc and often haphazard approach.

> **"*The new government was inexperienced and preoccupied with domestic imperatives of national reconciliation and also the transformation of the departments. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfred Nzo was lacking in dynamism and vision. The Apartheid-era officials were still dominant at DFA and were dazzled by the light of democracy in an open world with high expectations of South Africa and that they rejected a comprehensive and systematic foreign policy."***

AP: I think earlier analysts of South African foreign policy did not interview people in the department and Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.** First of all, our communication strategy was not very good until quite late. Secondly, there wasn't sufficient interviewing of the then foreign affairs people at any level. So, too much had been written from perceived understanding of our foreign policy and its implementation. That sort of analysis was widespread at the time, by the way, amongst South African and even in international academia. It came largely from a very narrow interpretation of our commitment to human rights, democracy, good governance. That was, I think, where the problem came, and in that context a big issue was Zimbabwe and Myanmar which was less strident – more, not from the academics, but from the solidarity movement, and our relations with Israel. But the main criticism, in that perspective, was our policy

on the human rights issues, for example we were not consistent in implementing [foreign policy], and our arms sales policy. There was a lot of perception that we were just selling arms to governments that were undemocratic, etc., and the perception of Minister Nzo, I still believe was wrong. Unlike some of us who were interacting a lot, he was not someone that was outgoing; and a wrong perception of his lack of leadership was cultivated, and also a wrong belief that his vision couldn't be his own vision.

Our critics failed to understand that a policy vision had to come from the ANC structures. As I mentioned, our vision is contained in the ANC policy documents. I believe that many of the analysts did not sufficiently study our policy documents or look at our discussions and our explanations.

SO: Which is why I asked you for the framework of foreign policy formulation.

AP: Even during the struggle the ANC had strong and dynamic contacts with SA NGOs. In the early 90s and after the democratic changes, the International Department of the ANC had very close working relations with SA progressive NGOs and individuals. In fact, we helped set up what is now called the International Global Dialogue. Initially it was funded by the German Erburt Foundation and that came about because the then German President offered Mandela 4 million deutschemarks. He then realised that they could not use this money to fund political parties and Mandela then asked, "What do we do with this money?" And we said, "Well, let's encourage the establishment of an independent NGO," which was named the Foundation for Global Dialogue. It's now the IGD (the Institute for Global Dialogue). And we established a broad-based board - business, labour, academics - to help us formulate policy. Later, some of the NGOs and academics said that, while we worked together to produce the 'Ready to Govern' document and other documents, after we got into government we didn't interact with them sufficiently. So, a lot of the complaints are based, I want to repeat, on a perceived marginalisation and what some analysts believe were inconsistencies in how we dealt with the human rights issue; and in that context the SA arms sales, etc. was raised. We were trying to explain to them that they were wrongly looking for South Africa's "exceptionalism". They believed that South Africa could have a unique foreign

policy on issues such as human rights, democracy, and the One China policy. Add to this the perception of some that the new government had marginalised them. I believe that they failed to appreciate the complexity of the international relations environment and the realities of Africa, and they did not appreciate the complexities and the learning curve of a liberation movement being the ruling party in government.

SO: An ethical foreign policy?

AP: They wanted an absolutely ethical foreign policy and we had to try to disabuse them of this sort of thinking... I'm not sure we convinced them sufficiently. Today DIRCO and the Foreign Ministry is trying to continue consultations with NGOs and academics. The objective is to try to have a much more realistic debate. South Africa has a foreign policy that is based on the values that are in our constitution, but an absolute implementation of a "human rights" policy without looking at our national interests or without looking at the fact that we can't just impose policies outside of looking at what the region collectively – or the OAU/African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement's positions are. So, it'll be a continuing discussion. I hope analysts are beginning to have a better understanding of the African and international geo-strategic political and economic realities.

SO: How far would you say that in the 1990s, when the ANC came to office in the GNU, that the themes which became more evident under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki were already there? But they were, shall we say, in a process of negotiation with the existing structures of the State, and the ANC's agenda and its own structures and parameters? By this I mean, the Africanist impulse, democracy, respect for human rights and other aspects of good governance, a holistic understanding of security, a pacific approach to conflict resolution, multilateralism. Were these already established themes within the ANC that are then emerging as...?

AP: Honestly, I think all this you'll find in the 'Ready to Govern'. In the document, you will find it in subsequent policy documents of the ANC. Indeed, much of that you will find in a lot of the major documents of the ANC pre our

democratisation. We have consistently had policy re: our commitments to Africa, to peace and security, a nuclear-free world, human rights, etc. It's in ANC documents. I think what people didn't understand was the complexity of governance, diplomacy and implementation. Of course you'll find in our documents, including the strategy and tactics documents. Our documents understandably contains a lot of attacks against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. I've explained to governments since 1994 that you must understand where we come from. We were a liberation movement, we had a particular history with a particular understanding and you'll see in a lot of our documents – anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, etc. Once you're in government you had to come to an understanding that you are no longer an NGO, and therefore we had to implement policies in our national interest, which we always saw in the context of Africa... But on some of the issues, up until now people are debating whether we've not lost track of that understanding, that Africa is fundamental to South Africa's future and we are not what I said previously. We had to convince many people we are not a European outpost on the African continent, we are an African country.

So, all our policies still, up until today, as you'll see in the recent draft white paper, understand all that. Whether at some stages the implementation of our policies reflects that this is still in reality is a matter for discussions. The priority for us is the African Continent, precisely because if there's no peace and stability on the Continent or development it will impact negatively on South Africa.

SO: Continental problems do indeed affect South Africa.

AP: Many foreigners from Africa and Asia come to SA legally or illegally because of conflicts, or because they are economic refugees. This does create many challenges including violence against foreigners. I think we can't ignore that we are a young democracy, only a 21-years-old democracy.

SO: I think it's also fair to say, sir, that the critics who look for coherence in foreign policy and consistency, underestimate the contingent, the unexpected, and even the most skilful foreign policy diplomat or civil

servant is going to be dealing with forces which are largely outside their control.

AP: It's a real world we're dealing with and by the 1990s the world was changing. I think some fundamental international relation developments were taking place.

SO: Do you feel the officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs, precisely because of South Africa's previous isolation, were very slow to wake up to the speed and way in which the world was changing?

AP: Let me try to answer what I think. Too many of the critics of our foreign policy tended to lump everybody that we inherited in the old Department of Foreign Affairs as reactionaries, as holding back transformation. It's not my experience. It was a terrain of struggle and I think our Department of Foreign Affairs were one of the departments where most of the old guard remained. There were a few who took early retirement but most stayed. And I've always said that, look, many of them come from a different political orientation.

But this did not mean that they were hostile to the democratic government. A lot of the old guard in foreign affairs, security structures, etc., said, "We serve a government. We are not going to represent a political party." That's easier said than done and even those who opposed the new policies had to in the end implement government policy, which came from the ruling party. So, I find what we inherited, was a lot of experience, a lot of memory, institutional memory on issues of nuclear disarmament, on a lot of other multilateral issues, such as desertification and the law of the sea. There was a lot of expertise in the old department. We had a different background. In dealing with international relations, we found each other, I think. We developed a very good team, actually, and I still think that those who didn't leave were not as obstructionist as some of the analysts are saying.

It's understandable that some people were concerned about their job security and positions, and they try to hold back, as far as possible, certain changes but in the end they understood that they have to implement government policies. Even today, having come back to DIRCO, I find that some of what we called

the old guard are still continuing to play a very important role. When the new South African Association for Former Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Chief Reps was launched all the old guard who had been ambassadors or high commissioners were invited to join. I think that is an understanding that as a team together the Association can contribute to developing and implementing South African foreign policy previously as has been our experience from 1994 when we had to move SA foreign policy in a new direction. So, I think the time has come when we stop thinking that all the old guard were just apartheid left-overs.

SO: I'd also suggest to you, sir, the Department of Foreign Affairs tended to recruit a particular type...

AP: Absolutely.

SO: From within a different section of the South African employment force.

AP: Mainly Afrikaans male.

SO: But also it was a department that recruited more vernacular English speakers and by its very agenda, it was more outward-looking than many of the other departments.

AP: I think so. And although the majority was Afrikaans-speaking male, there were some English-speaking diplomats and their qualifications were quite high. They had university degrees. I am convinced that their own experiences when posted abroad convinced quite a few that apartheid was not sustainable. That's why you had the camps like the pro-Pik Botha camp and the "verligte" camp and also the pro-apartheid group. When we were in the Transitional Executive Council, I represented the ANC on the Transitional Executive Council. I was very fortunate that I was supported by the ANC Department of International Relations. Many of my colleagues who were in the ANC were saying to me, "Those guys are blocking changes," but I tried to explain to them that only once we got into government that we would be able to determine whether they were

abusing their positions, or whether they were following rules and regulations which was policy and very strict.

Whether they were using it to prevent quicker transformation is a continuing debate. Once we got into government, we knew we had to follow public management rules, etc., but one still hear complaints that the old guard are not committed to change. And the debate on whether some were genuinely distorting the rules continues. The fact that they had to follow the rules is no more debatable. I want to believe that, yes, there were some who were very narrowly interpreting the rules but these were a small group. I believe, that there is space to interpret the rules the way you want. Once we were in government, we appreciated that you have to follow rules. Today I think there's a tendency in some circles to believe that rules can be ignored.

SO: That they are just 'guidelines'?

AP: And you can't run a government without following the rules. If the rules are no good, change the rules.

SO: Sir, you have highlighted that the impulses on foreign policy and directives come from the party and then are fed into government. How much independence and authority does the South African Cabinet have? Or is this a dialogue, a symbiotic relationship? I'm wondering the extent to which there is a degree of autonomy and initiative in the Cabinet.

AP: Yes. My own experience was - after I resigned in 2008 I don't know - under successive presidents; and I served under the Mandela Presidency and twice under the Mbeki Presidency, we went through the processes – ANC conferences decide on policy, than the Department of Foreign Affairs/DIRCO discusses the policy and decides on implementation; it takes recommendations to the Director Generals cluster, the cluster discusses recommendations, and their recommendations goes to the Ministerial cluster. It is only after they have discussed recommendations and agreed to recommendations that it is submitted to Cabinet. My experience, once I got into Cabinet was that there were many international relations experts, because of their experience,

because foreign affairs was in the newspapers and the TV. Sometimes got exasperated and would say, “Please, don’t raise things here that you’ve just read or saw on BBC or CNN!” In the early years of our democracy some challenged many positions of foreign affairs on the grounds that foreign affairs was dominated by the old guard.

SO: So you had, say, 24 Foreign Ministers and experts, and only one Minister of Finance, I should think.

AP: Before the cluster system was introduced, I think we had a tougher time. Once the cluster system was established, many of the Ministries were part of the cluster system. So, when the issue went to Cabinet, they couldn’t attack a position that had gone through the process in which they had participated. Cabinet was always a vibrant terrain for discussions… Like any cabinet, I suppose, you’ll find there are a few that speak on many topics, which means they either had very good understanding of the issues or they had good support teams that briefed them fully about Cabinet memoranda. Because there were many Cabinet documents and they were circulated two nights, sometimes one before Cabinet meetings. Some colleagues tended to stick to their area of responsibility but there were a few - I think it’s universal - that spoke on many issues, because they were better prepared, and foreign affairs was an area of interest for many of my colleagues.

SO: Sir, I’m going to take you specifically back to South Africa and the Commonwealth. The first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting which President Mandela attended was, of course, in Auckland. Did you accompany him?

AP: No. Minister Nzo was with him.

SO: I know that before the Commonwealth summit, President Mandela had taken a public stance, calling for sanctions against the Abacha military dictatorship in Nigeria and had not got support from other African heads on this. It would seem that this was a particular rebuff to Nelson Mandela;

his call for sanctions had been a way of indicating immense disapproval for this anti-democratic manifestation.

AP: Well, I wasn't there but let me just contextualise because we were very involved in different ways. I was sent to Nigeria to discuss the importance of Nigeria returning to civilian rule, the case of the Ogoni 7 etc. Mbeki was the Deputy President and I also accompanied him on visits to Nigeria. At that time the ANC had a chief representative, who later became the SA ambassador to Nigeria, Ambassador Nene. And we had many discussions on how to manage the situation. The reality was that there's no way a big power like Nigeria would tolerate a new kid on the block that is going to challenge their importance and leading positions. Some Nigerians argued that SA was trying to challenging Nigeria for leadership in Africa, etc. Our analysis, based on the experience of our relations with Nigeria, convinced us that we had to deal politically to find some solutions and Madiba had agreed with that approach. One of our objectives was to prevent the execution of the Ogoni 7. By the time Mandela got to Auckland he had an assurance that the executions would not take place. I think Madiba went to Auckland with an understanding that he was given, that this won't happen, and on the eve of his arrival the Ogoni 7 were executed. For Mandela it was a betrayal of maximum proportions. In his anger, Madiba called for sanctions against Nigeria. By that time there was discussions on the Millbrook Declaration in terms of which suspension was possible.

SO: That came out at the Retreat. There were the two things: the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth, and separately, the Millbrook Declaration with the establishment of CMAG.

AP: By the way, I don't think he got massive support in the Commonwealth for absolute sanctions against Nigeria. He could have got more support later for the suspension of Nigeria in terms of the CMAG. But I don't know.

Many in CHOGM reacted negatively to Mandela's call for sanctions, and the African reaction generally was hostile. It was so hostile and we had to ask the OAU Secretary General, Salim Salim, to go to Nigeria and to try to explain Mandela's reaction. We understood that we could not be in confrontation with

Nigeria. We hadn't fully briefed SADC, the OAU and other role players about the circumstances and reasons for Mandela's call for sanctions. After he came back from Auckland I was part of some discussions and that is why I mentioned earlier that we asked the OAU Secretary General to go to Nigeria and diplomatically deal with the African criticisms within the Commonwealth and the OAU. At that time there was a very close relationship between the Commonwealth Secretary General and Mbeki. After that it's open knowledge on how we had continued with trying to deal with the Nigerians. But then the Nigerian dynamics took another turn too.

SO: Was there concern back here in South Africa that President Mandela was saying that Nigeria had to be suspended from the Commonwealth?

AP: Well, I would think that the concerns would have been that there was not adequate discussions of the positions Mandela took in Auckland. The executions overtook any discussions of SA's approach to CHOGM.

SO: Yes, that South Africa could not be too confrontational to Nigeria.

AP: SA had a process with Nigeria to deal with issues including, how to assist with Nigeria's isolation, the release of detainees, and the democratisation process to restore civilian rule. And they were giving undertakings that took them many more years to implement. Madiba and Mbeki established a good relationship with Chief Abiola who was a very powerful figure and was in detention with Obasanjo. He had a very good relationship with us. Madiba and I had met him previously, I think in the US, and so Madiba was very strong on his, Obasanjo's and other detainees' release. The Chief died in very mysterious circumstances; Obasanjo became the president.

SA was a member of CMAG. I did not attend all CMAG meetings. The Nigerian issue overshadowed discussions on other issues such as Gambia and Sierra Leone. It was at the British Commonwealth meeting in Edinburgh, where they started putting development on the agenda very strongly. Other issues that were controversial was the French testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific. And the chemical weapons issue.

SO: That was in the run-up to the Auckland meeting: John Major was certainly at odds with the Australian Prime Minister because the Australians were objecting, as were the New Zealanders to French nuclear testing in the Pacific, and John Major felt that this was inappropriate, to criticise a fellow NATO nuclear power.

AP: That's right.

SO: I know that there was enormous tension. But, as you say, the events at Auckland were overshadowed by the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa.

AP: And, of course, one thing about the Commonwealth outside of the communique, it's what they discuss in the retreats. These discussions are more crucial, actually. And I don't know whether anyone who'd been in the retreats has indicated what they were discussing at various summits. It would be good if you can see some people who were involved in the retreats.

SO: Well, the difficulty about retreats is that heads are supposed to go there without their officials, although officials sneak in.

AP: The point is that that summit then got overshadowed by the Nigerian issue and the decisions on that summit, which were not bad, actually.

SO: Sir, were you involved in preparing the briefing papers for President Mandela in going to Auckland?

AP: I think, yes, on foreign affairs issues, and the other agenda briefings would be done by the relevant ministries or the relevant clusters. I don't know whether the British have analysed whether their cluster system worked; SA's cluster system was influenced by the British experience.

SO: Sir, in addition to the issue of Nigeria on which you say President Mandela took personal affront, do you recall what other important issues

South Africa was determined to take to the Commonwealth, to use it as a platform?

AP: I think, based on the agenda the relevant structures would have given our delegation briefings and Nzo would have briefed Mandela and would have given him briefing notes and all that. The DIRCO library should have a lot of documentation on our relations with the Commonwealth and CHOGM meetings, including the briefing notes.

SO: I'm just wondering if these papers would be classified.

AP: No, I'm sure by now those are declassified.

SO: Sir, although South Africa formally operates a 20-year rule of release, they may not be.

AP: But it might be a good idea to check. While you're in this country, we should check with the library and indicate that you want to look at the documents.

SO: Sir, that would be enormously useful, as the briefing papers will highlight the areas of particular concern and make suggestions to your president where he might speak quietly to a particular leader, or a particular aspect or interest for South Africa.

AP: And as far as I'm concerned, from the TEC days, we never went to an international conference without briefing documents on the major topics on the agenda. That was the system during Mandela's Presidency and Mbeki's Presidency and the Zuma Presidency. I can't imagine that South African delegations will go to meetings without briefing documents. Line function ministers would have prepared briefing documents for cabinet discussions. What then gets discussed between the relevant ministers and the President is like the retreat.

SO: Sir, you said that you attended many of the CMAG meetings.

AP: By the time I was dealing with CMAG, it was mainly Zimbabwe.

SO: I just wondered whether, in fact, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs was trying to use CMAG in a way to re-correct South Africa's bilateral relationship with Nigeria.

AP: It would be good to have access to documents in the DIRCO library. In many discussions we did not agree with some recommendations on how to deal with Nigeria. We would have used informal discussions to deal with Nigeria-SA relations. We knew that Britain, despite the fact that relations had gone sour, had still a lot of influence with sectors of the Nigerian society. And so, yes, I would think at the level of the presidency, etc., there would have been a tactical approach, on how we utilise the mechanisms that had been created by the Commonwealth and the OAU to help consolidate that relationship with Nigeria, which, incidentally, goes through good patches and bad patches. I think under the Obasanjo/Mbeki presidencies, and Boutaflika in Algeria, that was a good period.

SO: Sir, please could I ask you about Zimbabwe?

AP: Yeah. Zimbabwe...

SO: There seems to me, as a historian, a certain bitter irony, that Robert Mugabe hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Harare in 1991 which laid down the important guidelines of good government and respect for human rights, which presented the Commonwealth as a values-based association. Yet because of a variety of problems which emerged within Zimbabwe and its interaction with the international community, under Mugabe's leadership, Zimbabwe increasingly diverged from that declaration. South Africa's particular position, was obviously particularly important, given its geographic proximity and the relationship of shared struggle values and experiences, as well as the relationship within SADC. How far was there a sense here in South Africa of the demands and needs of quiet diplomacy, and that

there were overinflated expectations within the Commonwealth of South Africa's ability to resolve the Zimbabwe growing crisis?

AP: This term 'quiet diplomacy', I think was a term coined by our media. We were never familiar with the term 'quiet diplomacy' because we've always worked on the basis that every government has approaches, including concerns and criticisms that is conveyed through the diplomatic channels, which by its very nature is "quiet". We insisted that government-to-government relations is conducted through diplomatic channels. This demands that you don't deal with such issues in the media, etc. so, we were attacked for quiet diplomacy. Nobody told us what was the alternative to quiet diplomacy in terms of government-to-government relations? We always understood that our churches, our unions, the NGOs, even the ANC positions should and can be different from that of the government and can be public. We understood that the ANC is the ruling party, but you don't conflate the party with government, although they have influence in government decisions. And we took many initiatives - I'm just giving a background - through the unions, through the churches, NGOs, civic/civil society to deal with the Zimbabwe issue. They could take positions on Zimbabwe that did not have to reflect what the government was doing diplomatically. The government had to move in a particular way and we differed fundamentally with our partners in the Commonwealth in our bilateral relations about an approach to the Zimbabwean issue. The Zimbabwean government still maintains that the British Labour government had agreed to provide funding for this initiative but reneged on this agreement. I think there is sufficient evidence to support the Zimbabwean position. We took an initiative with the UNDP to deal with the challenges of the Lancaster House Agreement on the Zimbabwe land issue. The initiative was to raise funds to assist with the buyer/seller principle to accelerated land reform and prevent land invasions. Incidentally Mbeki got guarantees from some Gulf countries to provide money for the seller/buyer principle of land in Zimbabwe. UNDP suddenly pulled out of the agreement to help implement the policy. A British person was head of the UNDP then.

SO: Mark Malloch-Brown?

AP: Malloch-Brown. So, he's fully aware that we took an initiative with the UNDP to deal with this issue. We took further initiatives, including no confiscation and an orderly process of dealing with the land issue. And, honestly, we were confident that the initiatives we were taking on the land issue amongst the other things, and initiatives of SA society including the SA churches initiative with the Zimbabwean Council of Churches, the Tutu initiative, the unions initiatives, the ANC initiatives to contribute to the finding of an all-party political solution was making progress. This is all what I'm supposed to write about in my second book. We had many approaches, even from the private sector, to support the regime-change option in Zimbabwe similar to the 'colour revolutions' in Eastern Europe. There was even talk of a military regime change. We rejected such approaches and explained that our policies reflected in documents such as the Freedom Charter, that you resolve conflicts not by force. This is a fundamental principle in our approach to crisis and conflicts.

SO: I know that Prime Minister Blair approached Mbeki, suggesting a British force should-

AP: This has never been public. Our position was, "Look, it won't succeed because the factors are very different from the Colour Revolutions, in Eastern Europe. And, secondly, it's against our policies. The ANC will never accept any attempt at regime change engineered by outside forces. The OAU has policy on the unconstitutional change of government. So, that's a principle that's very strong in our foreign policy. When we were in government, we took a position on the Iraq issue, on the Iran issue that differed fundamentally from the approach of some major powers.

SO: Indeed. And you were a lead critic on that.

AP: We took a position on Iran, and on many other attempts at regime change. We took very principled positions on regime change. SA voted on UN resolution 1735 on Libya and the SA government have explained why. It is now well documented that some major powers exploited the resolution to militarily change the Gadaffi administration. This has had disastrous consequences for

the Libyan people, the region and Sub-Saharan Africa. Libya today is a failed state and a haven for extremists and terrorists.

SO: Sir, if I could just go back to Zimbabwe: in South Africa's diplomatic ties and the network that you've alluded to, there was obviously head-to-head, president to president discussions but also engagement within the Zimbabwe Department of Foreign Affairs contacts, party to party, ANC with ZANU-PF. Was there a broad front approach by South Africa, or was it more a question of key individuals, by virtue of their office, engaging with Zimbabwean officials?

AP: Contact was through various channels including government channels, interaction with the religious leaders, NGOs, trade unions and through SADC. In SADC the debate was always frank, honest, critical and constructive. At the ministerial and summit levels. The MDC (Movement for Democratic Change, MDC) was always invited to participate.

SO: Indeed, but the MDC contained a pacific element together with those who were more militant on how far there should be accommodation with ZANU-PF.

AP: Well, in the end there was always a consensus that: "Okay, let's approach it by trying to see how we can help the Zimbabweans themselves find a political solution." Because everybody understood that there were challenges that had to be solved by the Zimbabweans themselves. Mbeki has made many public statements on the problem of how they dealt with the land issue. And in the end, when he became a facilitator assisted by a South African team, the Zimbabweans agreed to the Global Political Agreement. There was a lot of pressure to get SA to accept the Mugabe-must-go approach. We refused and argued we should create the conditions for free political activity, an end to violence and create conditions for a free and fair elections.

SO: You felt that you should be supporting the structures of democracy, rather than trying to achieve regime change through the ballot box?

AP: No, ultimately the Zimbabwean people themselves must choose their leaders. So that's why you had to improve the playing field for MDC to contest the elections in a terrain that was free and fair. It is my own view that a better playing field was achieved, and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by all the major role players.

SO: How much was South African policy also influenced by a somewhat cautious and critical view towards MDC and the quality of its leadership?

AP: No, we had, honestly, and I've said this in the public meetings and I've said it in many media briefings...that we were having, at various levels, interaction with MDC.

SO: Yes, but what did you think of the quality of the MDC leadership? Were they a party of government?

AP: Well, we thought that there was good potential. We even shared with them how to develop a mass movement and that the trade union cannot become a political party. It's the same debate we're going through here now. We had a lot of exchanges with them - at government level and non-government level - about forming a party that had deep roots in the country and making a distinction between the union and the political party, etc. I think I've even publicly said that I personally at that time had more interaction with MDC - and that's before they started splitting into different factions - than I was seeing ZANU-PF people. It doesn't mean that others were not interacting with ZANU-PF, at government level and at party-to-party level.

SO: Sir, did you identify conflicting strains within ZANU-PF? Simba Makoni of course later left the party, although there is now a debate whether he will re-join. ZANU-PF is not a monolith: there are generational divisions, there are different regional aspects and attitudes within the party.

AP: I think, that is not a unique ZANU-PF phenomenon. It is the experience of every movement in the world; also for the ANC, it would have been wrong to see us as a monolithic party. And some people misinterpret this concept 'we're

a broad church' to think that we just recruit anybody and that we go to church and read the Bible and keep the line. The broad church in our understanding was that it was a very important terrain where you were bringing together different class and social forces and trying to find a common approach. Of course, from my perspective, I would be trying to win what we call the broad progressive perspective within that broad church.

SO: Sir, can I suggest that there are aspects in this of a particular political culture of democratic centralism?

AP: It's been labelled 'democratic centralism' but, of course, yeah, we were actually...we were very strong adherents of the view that your differences you discuss, whether it's in Cabinet, in ANC structures including the NEC then or the policy conference. When a policy is agreed to by the majority it is binding on all and publicly you have to defend and implement that policy. What you do privately and through different structures doesn't matter, but you cannot publicly challenge decisions adopted through the processes by government and by the party.

SO: Was there the same type of political culture within the multilateral SADC as well?

AP: Yes. I think it would be the same position in the OAU/AU. But the OAU/AU was too big and so were their sub-regional groupings like SADC. However there is a continuing debate about whether AU policy decisions are implemented nationally.

SO: Sir, the Commonwealth produced a very critical election observation report on the Zimbabwe election in 2002. I know that there was considerable pressure within the Commonwealth to suspend Zimbabwe, but what was the South African government's private opinion?

AP: Remember, we had also sent observer missions, broad observer missions, representing various sectors of our society. They came up with a new novel term, 'substantially free and fair'. And that was a discussion we used to have

at government level with our interlocutors, and I think by now we should be writing about such discussions. At that time there was a committee made up of the American Under-Secretary of State, a British Minister of State and me. We constituted a committee to deal with the Zimbabwean issue and we had many meetings to discuss the challenges of Zimbabwe.

SO: Sir, in this committee meeting, were you discussing implementation of a land audit and how then to pay for...?

AP: And how to help the democratisation process in Zimbabwe and our total opposition to military intervention. If an opposition wins through the ballot box, that's a different matter. If it's any other regime change, we oppose this, then and now.

SO: What was the stance of the Americans?

AP: Well, the Americans did not have too much of a policy on Zimbabwe... You know how the system works. Zimbabwe was not a US sphere of strategic interest, and determination of policy was left to the British.

SO: It was Britain's problem?

AP: As far as I can remember, they used to put their positions, we used to put our positions. We had quite good discussions but then eventually decisions were taken that reflected British positions. It was never discussed in that structure to move in a particular way against Mugabe and, rightly or wrongly, we said that, "Now, look, we can't have a committee and then if we're going to change positions it is taken outside for some consultations." I think it was through the EU that the first major change came. We said "But that's not the way we should go." In fact, by this time I was not leading the SA delegation.

SO: Where was the actual locus of international decision-making?

AP: If you're going change the approach publicly, then you have to then discuss and say to us, "Look, this is where we are going." We disagreed with the sanctions approach.

SO: Did you feel that the Brits should then have kept you informed on the discussion on the EU side of things?

AP: Yes. Because we had such close diplomatic contacts on this issue and they knew our view on it. And they were very aware. It was the British Labour Party that was in government. The British representative on the [EU/SADC] committee was Baroness Amos. She is now in the House of Lords. So, they were fully aware of our positions.

SO: **Sir, what you're suggesting here then is that South Africa was far from persuaded by the cogency and the presentation of British policy on Zimbabwe.**

AP: No, we differed quite a lot on an approach to the Zimbabwean issue.

SO: So, where do you feel Britain went wrong?

AP: He was even given a Queen's award. I think there were elements who felt betrayed by Mugabe. Others were informed by the 'kith and kin' arguments, others by perceived threats to their national interests. And I think some sections of the British Labour Party felt very betrayed and it became more like a personal thing between some sections and Mugabe, and Mugabe publically criticised Blair for leading the anti-ZANU-ZAPU campaign. And so the politics got lost in the public debate. Yes, we had sharp differences of approach with the British on this, definitely. And I'm saying especially with the British Labour Party because they were in government.

SO: Were you privately particularly critical, making representations to the British, "This is inappropriate. We suggest that you..."

AP: At every level - at the President's level, at our level, at foreign affairs. We raised this and I think... Unfortunately, after a while this became the issue that clouded all our discussions, even with the Nordic countries, because they were also very strong on the 'Mugabe must go' argument and we were saying, "But help create the conditions for free and fair elections and for the Zimbabweans to solve their own problems." So, it clouded all our discussions at one stage, including in the International Socialist Movement (the movement of world social democratic parties). So, all our discussions, at bilateral levels, and at some multilateral levels. In the end we could discuss and come to a common position on many issues but when we came to this issue, the differences could not be resolved.

SO: To what extent did you feel that there was an understanding for South Africa's particular position within the Commonwealth? The Secretary-General by this point was Don McKinnon.

AP: There were many discussions with him and the President of South Africa, Mbeki. I think they differed sharply on approaches. I think later there was an understanding, that "We understand the South African approach but this is the approach we're going to take". SA continues to argue for a more realistic approach in the interests of Zimbabwe and the region.

SO: Why was the Commonwealth Secretary-General so critical of the South African approach? Because they felt that South Africa wasn't being sufficiently robust, that it was focussing on more soft elements of creating the conditions, that more could be done by South Africa?

AP: Well, I think the Secretary-General and even the British government at that time had a different approach on that. That the situation was so bad that the only way to solve it was for Mugabe to go. We did argue that most of the Zimbabwean army at that stage was quite professional, and many of them were trained in the UK. And it was not clear what was influencing the British positions.

SO: After Zimbabwe's independence, did the ANC's relationship with ZANU-PF not improve?

AP: It was only in the late 80s that Zimbabwe allowed us to function from Zimbabwe. But the traditional link was with ZAPU. ZAPU was also part of what was then called the 'authentic' liberation movements. You know the background to the Lancaster House talks.

SO: I know a great deal about the Lancaster House discussions, but not the ANC/ZAPU-Zambia, nor ZANU-PF/Mozambique angle.

AP: I think the official records will indicate that the Zimbabwean delegations were told by some African leaders that they must find a solution or they will not be able to function from their territories.

SO: Sir, was South Africa ever concerned that the revolutionary approach to land reform that President Mugabe initially authorised and then supported might be replicated here in South Africa?

AP: Well, there are some people - Malema and EFP - who are saying that the willing seller/willing buyer is a wrong policy and we must just nationalise, but they want to nationalise everybody and anything. So, there are such voices. I think that sort of populist rhetoric you will find amongst some South Africans. Historically in many countries in the world, the land issue has been one of the most burning issues. But I don't think that the South African government would agree to a policy of violent land invasions. A new land law is being debated publically. Some newspapers and analysts are reporting that the Minister is arguing that the willing buyer/seller policy is not working, so we have to now work on the basis that there is a need for land to be purchased at determined market value. There is some argument that this is unconstitutional, and will be challenged legally. The land issue will be an ongoing debate and it is in the interest of the country and nation that a solution is found through discussions.

SO: Sir, please if I could just ask you one last point about Zimbabwe, as I'm very conscious of pressures on your time. President Mbeki was part of

the Troika that between 2002/2003 sought to encourage Zimbabwe's return to the Commonwealth - because there had been a suspension but it was only for a certain limited amount of time.

AP: Sure, yeah.

SO: Do you know, what was President Mbeki's relationship like with President Obasanjo, who was a key element of the Troika? So much is focussed on President Mbeki's tensions with John Howard, the Australian prime minister, but what about his relationship with Obasanjo?

AP: Their relations were very good, actually, but, of course, the experience of all countries is that on some issues they might not fully agree. I thought, however, on the Zimbabwe issue SADC/OAU/AU came to the same positions after much discussions. Basically that we need an approach that will help the Zimbabweans to create the conditions for a political solution. What eventually was agreed to by all major Zimbabwean political parties was the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

SO: In this then you're implying that South Africa had always looked primarily to SADC and the OAU. So, the Commonwealth aspect was not such a strong focus and direction of South African diplomacy?

AP: SADC met more regularly. Commonwealth met every two years, I think, or at least every three years. In any case SA could not have a position that was not a SADC position.

SO: So, the Commonwealth might be expecting South Africa to implement Commonwealth policy within SADC, but actually it was a-

AP: We would have gone to Commonwealth meetings and argued for SADC positions and the OAU positions would be the same as SADC positions.

SO: Sir, please could you reflect on Chief Emeka's qualities as Secretary-General and those of his successor, Don McKinnon as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth?

AP: Chief Emeka was the first Secretary-General from Africa and I believe that he had to take into consideration SADC and OAU positions. Incidentally these positions were also accepted by the Non-Aligned Movement. It is realistic to assume that therefore even the non-African members outside of the "old" Commonwealth would have been influenced by the African position on many issues. I also believe that when Sonny Ramphal and Emeka were Secretary Generals issues such as sustainable development, poverty eradication, peace and security and globalisation were priorities.

SO: And certainly on the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) issue.

AP: Another very important issue. And the British, who were members of the EU, the G7, played quite an important role to putting these issues on the agenda of these groupings. I think it was at the Edinburgh Summit that these issues became the sharp focus.

SO: Indeed, with the Canadians.

AP: Yeah, it became the key issues and so I think even McKinnon who differed with Africa on the issue of Zimbabwe, but I think on all other issues referred to above, he continued with the same direction of Ramphal and Emeka.

SO: Do you think, given the changing climate of international relations and the problems that were by now confronting the Commonwealth, that it was problematic to have a Secretary-General from the 'old' Commonwealth, from New Zealand? Would the Commonwealth's influence have been enhanced as an organisation, and been given greater credibility had its Secretary-General come from South Asia, or from Africa, or the Caribbean?

AP: By the time McKinnon's term started, there were other issues that the Commonwealth was confronted with. It was sustainable development, and peace and stability. I suspect our ministers of trade and industry, and finance would have had more interaction with the Commonwealth. On other issues I think we were beginning to see eye to eye. The Zimbabwean was the only major contentious issue, basically. I mean, it's strange. The issue of the Middle East came up in one Commonwealth meeting; that was after the Millbrook Declaration, but the Middle East never seemed to me to have become a contentious issue, or a matter of priority for the Commonwealth.

SO: The Commonwealth then wasn't a platform for Commonwealth consensus on external international issues?

AP: No. I don't know what was discussed in the retreats.

SO: It was more a forum for internal debates on what was going on with the 52 nations group?

AP: I suspect the business forums and the other economic sector meetings were seen as more important. The British stopped putting money into the [Commonwealth] Development Agency and it became a private initiative. So, I think that's where a lot of the work of the Commonwealth in relation to Africa was going through, I would think, and, as I say, by the time we got to Edinburgh, the British in the Commonwealth were leading on the issue of sustainable development and challenges of globalisation. I think it was at Edinburgh that the decisions were announced of globalisation and sustainable development. By that time I think the G7 had accepted the same priorities. In those areas the Commonwealth was quite an important instrument. On another issue I don't know how the scholarship programmes were progressing. SA was one of the few members that paid our membership fees on time and we did not have arrears. I hope it's still like that. We were even on the Board of the Education Trust, and the science and technology substructure. There were also the women and youth sub-structures. I don't know how they're functioning now.

SO: Sir, how far then did the issue of Zimbabwe cloud South Africa's view of the value of the Commonwealth overall?

AP: On Zimbabwe, we agreed to disagree, but it didn't affect our other relations. Some personal relations might have been strained. Although the Blair/Mbeki relations never got strained to that extent, that there were no contacts or discussions. At times debates could have been tense and sharp but it never got antagonistic. We also had differences with some Commonwealth countries on other issues including the issues of Iran and Iraq...

SO: There was no Commonwealth consensus on the Iraq war of 2003.

AP: No. We had differences, on the militaristic regime change issue under the false accusations that the Iraq administration were responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and were developing weapons of mass destruction. New information since then has proved critics of intervention to be right. Today a strong body of opinion believes that the present extremist and terrorist threats stem from wrong foreign policy decisions relating to Iraq.

SO: Indeed. So, how important is the Commonwealth for South Africa these days?

AP: I can't comment whether, after 2008, we maintained the importance of the Commonwealth and whether, at the summits, our voice is still as influential on major issues. It is difficult to respond adequately because I have been outside of government structures since 2008. I think Commonwealth countries are in too many other structures now, and we can't ignore the challenges of costs and capacity to manage all such relations effectively.

SO: There's certainly a multiplicity of international organisations, and international summits.

AP: What is the role of the Commonwealth in a fundamentally changing international environment? I don't know...

SO: There was a discussion at Coolum in 2002 on the role of the Commonwealth going forward. There are regular discussions of what is the value and the contribution of the Commonwealth. Does it need a reappraisal?

AP: Given reality that we are all having different challenges. Europe has its own different challenges such as the economic crisis, extremism and terrorism immigration etc. African, Caribbean and Asian Commonwealth members all face different and new challenges. Whether the Commonwealth is a platform that can play a role, to deal with such challenges I don't know. These are issues that the DIRCO Ministry and department can answer.

SO: Sir, in your time was there also private meaningful Commonwealth discussion on international corruption and money-laundering, or international security?

AP: I suspect there was. I think it was on the agenda... Again, wasn't that one of the issues that had been raised first in Auckland?

SO: International financial flows were a critical part of the HIPC discussion and then in multilateral debt relief discussions. There was also President Obasanjo's Commonwealth anti-corruption initiative.

AP: I think so. It would have been part of the discussions on financing for development. The discussions on the Millennium Development Goals would have been important. Africans in the Commonwealth would have argued for an African position based on OAU decisions and also reflecting NAM decisions. Commonwealth decisions are taken by consensus. There's no voting and there's no veto. The ECA set up a working group, under the leadership of former President Mbeki to look at the illegal flows of funds from Africa. Their report is shocking. It is modestly estimated that about $51 billion dollars is taken out of Africa every year. Will the Commonwealth or other structures like the UN, the EU and the G20 seriously take up the recommendations made?

SO: The committee on the criteria for membership was set up under the chairmanship of PJ Patterson, to make sure that there were key aspects-

AP: That's right. On new members, wasn't it at Edinburgh that they took the decision to set up a committee to look at rules of how you become members? New non English speaking countries like Mozambique have joined the Commonwealth. And since then, Rwanda has joined. And so rather than becoming just former British colonies, it's expanded to other countries.

SO: And that in itself is contentious within the Commonwealth.

AP: Absolutely. Some have argued the French are objecting to their former colonies joining the Commonwealth. Today we also have the reality that member countries are members of partnerships such as FOCAC, the French/Africa Forum, TRICA, IBSA, and BRICS. The 'old Commonwealth" countries are also members of many other groupings. I don't know whether the Commonwealth now discusses the EPAs and all that. But in the past such issues were always discussed. So, the agenda now of the Commonwealth would give us some sense of whether it has changed its structures functioning or orientation?

SO: Or is the Commonwealth too attached to declaratory process, rather than actual outcome and achievements?

AP: That might necessitate a change in the nature of the Commonwealth, and the Secretary-General and the role of the Secretariat. Because the Commonwealth did intervene in different ways with the Lesotho processes. It was one of your questions.

SO: It was - Lesotho, and Swaziland.

AP: On the African continent I believe that similar interventions were made in other non-African member countries.

SO: In Lesotho, there was an important Commonwealth contribution from Secretariat diplomatic actors, both of whom I've interviewed (Max Gaylard and Moses Anafu). It really was a success story.

AP: It worked. And now, look, it's unravelling and maybe the Commonwealth should return back. Because that constitutional changes were quite essential to deal with the root causes of what the problem was. It seems to have taken a different dimension now.

SO: But the Commonwealth doesn't have the resources, even though it may have excellent information networks, for the early warning system to kick in and for early intervention. And the current situation in the Maldives is another classic case in point, where the Commonwealth did not provide sufficient on-going support mechanisms for democratization, following President Nasheed's election in 2008.

AP: Commonwealth constitutional experts who were working in Lesotho used some South Africans to help; this was an indication of important areas of involvement. Africa is trying to set up the early warning system effectively because we are intervening after conflicts erupt. Today there are some explosive situations in Africa. But our capacity to intervene will be enhanced by an effective early warning mechanism and non-tied financial, institutional and capacity building support to the AU Peace and Security Council will assist Africa to take preventative action.

SO: Well, I'm sure people would see it as an important role. Whether they're prepared to contribute the financial resources to enable that, is quite another matter.

AP: But it is very key that that sort of intervention is important. It is less costly to prevent wars that to deal with conflict resolution.

SO: Well, Sir, just to say that Mr. Patterson also understood the need for support for Zimbabwe: how systems could be put in place, and elements that could contribute to a greater degree of democratisation and

amelioration of political tension. But by the Abuja meeting, it was rejected.

AP: The EU's decision last year to have a new tactical approach to Zimbabwe is belated but necessary. In the past some SADC/OAU countries proposed many non-sanctions or regime approaches, including the involvement of the British Queen.

SO: A Commonwealth 'secret weapon', I think.

AP: Correct, and there were other proposals. The policies of sanctions, isolation and regime change were wrong and not sustainable.

SO: Indeed. Sir, thank you very much, indeed, I'm very grateful for your time.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]