

The Burundi Peace Process, From Civil War to Conditional Peace

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This summary focuses on Chapter 3, South Africa's policy towards Africa, and Chapter 4, the implementation of South African policy in Burundi. These chapters discuss South Africa's motivations for participating in the peace process in Burundi. (Chapter 2 offers a historical overview of the conflict in Burundi and the peacekeeping process, while Chapters 5, 6 and 7 deal with the role of the African Union and the United Nations in Burundi, and the final stages of the peace process.)

In Chapter 3, the authors clearly state that South Africa's involvement in the Burundi peace process was not the result of a conscious decision following a careful governmental review of the situation. Rather, it resulted from Mandela's role as chief facilitator of the peace process when he took over from Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. The South African President at the time, Thabo Mbeki, and the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) used the appointment of Nelson Mandela as an opportunity to show their support for peace and security across Africa, and to demonstrate the need for an African Renaissance and "African solutions for African problems."¹ Thus, South Africa saw Mandela's involvement as "an opportunity to demonstrate its intentions on the continent."²

The authors exalt Mandela himself and his negotiation skills. Their initial focus is less on South Africa's tangible role in the peace process and more on Mandela's public image, which enable him to put significant pressure both on international parties, such as the United States, to support the peace process, and on rebel parties in Burundi to participate in it. However, the authors paint a simplistic view of the African continent, suggesting, for instance, that a region of 52 countries would benefit from one "African" approach to peace-building.³

When Mandela's role in the peace process was eventually curbed by ill health, Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, then South Africa's deputy president, took on a more involved role. Over time, South Africa established a field presence in Burundi through a Liaison Office, an embassy in 2004, the deployment of the South African Protection Support Detachment, and a promise to support economic reconstruction efforts.

Among other challenges, Zuma was not always trusted as a facilitator by the CNDD-FDD and Palipehutu-FNL. CNDD-FDD seemed uncomfortable with Zuma's extensive discussions with Palipehutu-FNL. In turn, Palipehutu-FNL accused South Africa of supporting the Burundi Armed Forces (BAF) with weapons and of being part of a conspiracy to kill their leader. These tensions were probably further exacerbated by conflicting foreign policy priorities between the Office of the President and DFA, whose priority was not Burundi. For example, it was only when the Office of the President decided that establishing an embassy in Burundi would be valuable, that the DFA began to take any notice. Furthermore, when the BAF did not welcome South African National Defence Force as part of the South Africa Protection Service in 2001, the DFA hardly provided diplomatic support.

1 Boshoff Henri, Waldemar Vrey and George Rautenbach. "The Burundi Peace Process, From Civil War to Conditional Peace", *ISS Monograph Series*, no 171 (2010), 14.

2 *Ibid.*, 13.

3 *Ibid.*, 20.

While South Africa was very active in the initial peace process through Mandela and eventually Zuma, the authors note that the diplomatic relationship became no more than “an exchange of good intentions without real substance, particularly on the part of South Africa.” Furthermore, the DFA showed a “lack of direction and coherence.”⁴ Without the full support and confidence of the DFA, South Africa's ability to influence the peace process in Burundi was undoubtedly limited.

South Africa's involvement in the peace process in Burundi eventually became a part of the agendas of the African Union and the United Nations. UN Resolution 1545 for the deployment of a UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB) came about in part due to a series of formal requests by the facilitation team led by Zuma, as well as the president of Burundi. Despite South Africa's sometimes ambivalent role in the negotiations, the authors argue that South Africa should continue supporting the peace process, particularly during the upcoming elections of 2010 in Burundi.⁵

4 Ibid., 42.

5 Abdellaoui, Jamila. “Another crossroad for Burundi: From the FNL to peaceful elections in 2010”, *Institute for Security Studies Situation Report* (2009):13. Available at [<http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/BURUNDI20NOV09.PDF>]