

The Theory of Mediation
And
The 1976 American Involvement in the Rhodesian Peace Process

Susan Nacey
MSc in International Politics
June 1, 1990

By analyzing the experiences of diplomats and other individuals who have been involved in negotiation, theoreticians have created hypotheses concerning the crucial elements for successful mediation. To evaluate the accomplishment of such academic writers, one may examine whether these theories may then be practically applied to actual cases of mediation. Consequently, this paper will first outline the broad tenets of mediation theory, then present a case study of Henry Kissinger's 1976 mediation attempt of the Rhodesian conflict, and finally relate the hypotheses to the actual occurrence of mediation to try to determine the theory's validity.

Mediation theory

Although there is no one theory of mediation, it is nonetheless possible to discover a general consensus among theoreticians. Thus, ostensibly "for the purpose of abating or resolving a conflict through negotiation,"¹ mediation is one form of third-party intervention which offers an alternative to direct negotiation.² Treading the middle ground in terms of both the extent of participation by the disputants and the degree of third-party coercion, mediation is distinguished primarily by the presence of the mediator. In changing the dyad

¹ I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, ed., International Mediation in Theory and Practice, Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO, p. 7.

² Negotiation is defined as "an attempt to explore and reconcile conflicting positions in order to reach an acceptable outcome." R.P. Barston, Modern Diplomacy, Longman Group UK Limited, Essex, 1988.

structure of negotiation to a triad structure by adding his own interests, preferences, and abilities into the equation, the mediator may transform a “dialogue of the deaf,”³ creating hope for a negotiated settlement where none before had existed.

There are several possible explanations as to why disputing parties would accept the intervention of a mediator, all of which illustrate the potential of mediation. First, mediation can be applied to any type of conflict, whether legal, political, ideological, or economic. Disputes between not only states, but also between states and other entities such as national liberation groups, may be mediated.⁴ Second, conditions that make it difficult to unilaterally concede (for example, when parties are highly accountable to their constituencies and cannot easily change their positions) encourage mediation. The presence of a mediator can lessen the risk that compromise entails. If, for instance, one party foresees the inevitability of giving way to the opponent’s demands, a mediator may be used as a scapegoat. A party may thus grant concessions without appearing to be too weak.⁵ Third, situations which discourage competitive behaviour (if one or both parties are firm in their positions, for instance) also create receptivity to mediation. A combination of the two previous conditions is tantamount to a deadlock, “a situation in which both parties are unwilling or unable to make further concessions.”⁶ Mediation offers one appropriate response to a deadlock, as it allows for the extra input and guidance of the mediator, yet allows the disputing parties to control the results. The sovereignty of the disputants is therefore not threatened. A time pressure may also add incentive for parties to begin

³ A.J.R. Groom, “Problem Solving in International Relations” in International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice, edited by Edward E. Azar and John W. Burton, Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex, 1986, p. 87.

⁴ Alain Brouillet, “Mediation as a Technique of Dispute Settlement: Appraisal and Prospects” in International Conflict Resolution edited by Ramesh Thakur, Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO, 1988, p. 170.

⁵ P.H. Gulliver, Disputes and Negotiations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, Academic Press, Inc. New York NY, 1979, p. 219 and Dean G. Pruitt, Negotiation Behaviour, Academic Press, Inc., New York NY, 1981, p. 202.

mediation.⁷ Fourth, parties might accept mediation with the belief that a mediator would help attain a more favourable settlement than would otherwise be achieved (or even any settlement at all).⁸ Such expectations may be raised especially if the potential mediator is particularly prestigious or wields influence over one or both parties. Lastly, as with negotiation, the object of mediation is not necessarily a solution to the conflict. Thus, a mediator is sometimes accepted to convince others of the validity of one's claim, to gain time to prepare for further fighting, or simply to improve relations with the mediator.⁹

Determination of success depends upon the reasons for which the parties agreed to mediation. If they did indeed expect it to end the conflict, then the most obvious measure of successful mediation would constitute the final resolution of the conflict and the reconciliation of the parties. Contribution towards a final agreement and the decrease of conflict or even the conclusion of an agreement promising the lessening of the conflict could also be measures of fruitful mediation.¹⁰ Moreover, the motives and goals of the mediator add a further complication to such a determination. Because of these ambiguities, the actual success of mediation must be determined on a case-to-case basis. Yet with the assumption that parties enter into mediation with the hope of resolving their conflict, one may examine two branches of theory that attempt to identify those factors that best contribute to such successful mediation. The first stresses the importance of various environmental components, whereas the second concentrates on the value of the mediator.

The first branch holds that one may determine if a conflict is ripe for mediation by examining various environmental elements of the situation. Four main interrelated categories may be identified: the nature of the disputing parties, the duration of the conflict,

⁶ Pruitt, op.cit., p. 202.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., p. 9.

⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

the existence of a stalemate, and the issues at stake. Thus, concerning the characteristics of the disputants, it is best to have a clear sense of the identity of each party. Such identification may prove especially demanding in the case of civil wars, as the organization of rebel groups is often readily recognizable. It may be difficult to even establish with whom one should negotiate if one or both parties are not explicitly defined. Furthermore, the same problem arises if the members of a party are divided in their views or objectives. Internal cohesion also implies stability in the party's power base, which allows the representatives both more flexibility to compromise and greater ability to actually follow through on any commitments reached. Although inner unity will not necessarily lead to resolution, the lack of such unity will retard progress. A further problem involving the mediation of civil wars is that the existing government may strongly oppose any dealings with a clearly defined insurgent; any type of negotiation could possibly be interpreted as conferring equal status upon the rebel group, thereby posing a further threat to that government's sovereignty. Additionally, if a dispute becomes personalized between the leaders of the opposing factions, mediation may not succeed simply because the result of personality conflict often tends to be intransigence. The dependency of the conflicting parties on outside sources, especially for the purpose of waging war, also plays an important role in mediation. Dependency promotes a sense of vulnerability arising from the fear that the support will cease, which could cause the prospect of a mediated settlement to appear more attractive.¹¹

Second, the duration of the conflict is also a vital environmental factor. In general, theoreticians hold that settlement by negotiation is only feasible if the conflict has lasted more than a certain minimum duration. Although the exact length of time is ambiguous and differs per situation, the point remains that the conflict must last long enough for each side

¹¹ Hizkias Assefa, Mediation of Civil Wars: Approaches and Strategies – The Sudan

to realize that a military victory is not an imminent prospect and for the attention of a third party to be attracted. Settlement is more likely when the military situation is tense, but not escalating, as escalation coincides with a tougher stance. It is also advantageous to begin mediation before the parties' positions have hardened, for it may prove difficult for the disputants to retract stated views. The element of duration therefore underlines the need for excellent timing by the mediator. Both sides must realize that military success is not forthcoming, and flexibility should remain.¹² According to a cost/benefit analysis, an opportune moment for mediation occurs when a party is confronted by the difficult choice of either military escalation or concession with the aim of concluding an agreement. Intervention at this juncture may strongly encourage the path towards concession as being the least costly means of achieving the party's goals.¹³ But because times such as "a certain minimum duration" and "before the parties' positions have hardened" are subjective and thus difficult to judge, one solution is for the mediator to intervene at the earliest possible moment, rather than try to decipher vague signs. In this way, mediation would be on-going when the moment finally is ripe.

Third, most academics argue that stalemate constitutes one of the most crucial preconditions for successful mediation, hence the concept of a "hurting stalemate," which is "...a situation that is very uncomfortable to both sides, and that appears likely to become very costly."¹⁴ Stalemate implies that party parity has been reached and tested, and the prospect of increasing cost provides incentive for mediation. The significance of good timing is again emphasized, for a mediator's intervention at the propitious moment immediately before huge expense has been incurred may influence a decision towards

Conflict, Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1987, pp 13-14.

¹² Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹³ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., p. 254.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

compromise and negotiation, rather than towards escalation.¹⁵ After such an expenditure, positions will most likely prove frozen; “once good money has been spent on a bad option, it is very difficult politically to give up that option.”¹⁶ Some recommend that potential mediators actually attempt to induce a stalemate where none yet exists through empowerment. Namely, where power is grossly asymmetrical, interventionists may need to help the weaker side before meaningful negotiation of settlement can occur.¹⁷ Similarly, parity at the negotiating table may also introduce problems. A nationalist group may lack sufficient resources or skills to present itself as a bargaining force equal to the government. This situation may produce lopsided consequences, which may actually intensify the conflict by creating doubts about the mediation process and its results.¹⁸ Therefore, a mediator may empower the less experienced side by providing services such as information concerning international procedures and norms.

Fourth, the nature of the issues at stake plays a role in the success or failure of mediation. Negotiation proves far more difficult when the parties regard the conflict as a zero-sum clash, meaning that a gain for one can only result at the expense of the other. Such conflicts usually involve core values, “in the sense of affecting an actor’s existence or identity,”¹⁹ which leave the disputants with the perception that there is no possible compromise. As long as the issues appear to be zero-sum, a negotiated settlement is unlikely to result. The mediator must thus try to transform the perception of a zero-sum clash into a positive-sum situation, which would leave each party better off than before.²⁰

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Groom, op.cit., p. 89.

¹⁷ Paul Wehr, Conflict Resolution, Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1979, p. 26.

¹⁸ Assefa, op.cit., p. 20.

¹⁹ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., p. 266.

²⁰ I. William Zartman and Maureen R. Berman, The Practical Negotiator, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1982, pp 12-13.

The second branch of mediation theory specifies that the mediator, rather than environmental determinants, provides the key to success or failure. To evaluate the chances for success, one should consequently examine the role, motives, and qualities of the mediator. First, there is actually no set pattern for a mediator to follow. Rather, one must avoid an "...assumption of the role of the mediator."²¹ The extent of the mediator's involvement may vary widely and includes the following possibilities:

- virtual passivity
- chairman (who keeps order and directs procedure)
- enunciator (who states the rules and norms relevant to the issues in negotiation)
- prompter (who clarifies information and encourages cooperation between the parties)
- leader (who directly injects his own personal opinion and recommendations and evaluates the parties' demands)
- virtual arbitrator.²²

Theoretically, mediators have no official ability to pronounce judgement or produce a binding decision. The basic function of the mediator is to present the cases of the parties to each other, while sometimes acting as a substitute for direct communication (in shuttle diplomacy, for example). Mediation is therefore especially appropriate in cases where the parties are unwilling to simply negotiate, something which is most common in violent conflicts.²³ In a more active role, the mediator may campaign to change the perceptions of the disputing parties from zero-sum to positive-sum. This alteration may actually involve a redefining of the issues so that a partial-win situation may seem feasible.²⁴

²¹ Gulliver, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

²² *Ibid.*, pp 220-222.

²³ John W. Burton, Conflict and Communication: The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1969, p. 155.

²⁴ Gulliver, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

Second, academics argue that a successful mediator must possess certain qualities and skills. Unfortunately, the many lists compiled concerning the “ideal” mediator inevitably differ from one another and no clear picture emerges. Nevertheless, a broad consensus regarding the characteristics of a mediator includes the following:

- Impartiality about the issues
- Independence from all parties
- Acceptability and respect of all protagonists
- Knowledge about the conflict
- Possession of the necessary physical resources, such as transportation and communication facilities²⁵
- International support for the mediator
- Leverage, meaning the possibility for the mediator to pressure one or both parties to accept the proposed settlement²⁶
- Sense of timing, i.e. being able to judge when a conflict is receptive to intervention
- Communication skills, tact, intelligence, perseverance, commitment, and empathy.²⁷

Controversy exists not only concerning the relative importance of each of these qualities, but also whether each of these characteristics is indeed necessary. For instance, a common assumption about mediators is that they are mainly desirous of finding a settlement to restore peace and stability to the disputing parties’ relations and to terminate the conflict. Academic writers consequently often emphasize the qualities of impartiality and disinterest in the outcome.²⁸ Yet although peacemaking is a legitimate goal, it does not constitute a sufficient explanation of intervention. A truly altruistic mediator who is indifferent to the

²⁵ Brouillet, *op.cit.*, p.170.

²⁶ Assefa, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

²⁷ Zartman and Touval, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

result is rare. At an individual level, a mediator may desire (unconsciously or not) an increased personal status and reputation, an elevation in career prospects, satisfaction in a job well done, or a boost to his own ego.²⁹ At the state level, a mediator may have defensive and/or offensive interests. First, the conflict may threaten a mediator's own concerns. For example, regional balance may be upset, thereby increasing the opportunity for a rival power to intervene. Second, the mediator may desire to extend influence in the area and develop closer relations with one or both of the conflicting parties. A mediator will thus try to ensure that the outcome conforms to his own interests, rather than be a completely neutral participant.³⁰ Furthermore, it is also possible for a mediator to enjoy benefits through the process of mediation. For example, mediation as a "lowest-common-denominator" strategy could help to cement together members of an international organization who are otherwise divided in their views. It therefore offers the third party with an alternative to choosing sides in a conflict.³¹ Yet the appearance of impartiality may be useful, for if the mediator blatantly favors one party, the other may refuse to participate in the mediation process.

The characteristic of leverage is also controversial. Views range from the one pole that the ability to coerce constitutes a major component contributing to success to the opposite that the lack of leverage might actually enhance the credibility of the mediator. But leverage exists in several forms. First, leverage is derived from "the parties' need for a solution that the mediator can provide."³² This source depends upon the mediator's skills in changing the perceptions of the parties about the costs and benefits of other possible

²⁸ C.R. Mitchell, "The Motives for Mediation" in New Approaches to International Mediation edited by C.R. Mitchell and K. Webb, Greenwood Press, Westport CT, 1988, pp 30-31.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁰ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., pp 8-9-

³¹ Mitchell, op.cit., p. 34.

³² Zartman and Touval, op.cit., p. 263.

outcomes. Towards this end, a mediator derives some influence simply from the respect accorded to him by the disputants; they would not want to jeopardize his involvement. The ability to mobilize international opinion could also prove important, particularly if one or both parties rely on outside support. Second, another source of leverage is “the parties’ susceptibility to shifting weight that the mediator can apply.”³³ Thus, the mediator who has the ability to create a deadlock by empowering the weaker opponent could induce the stronger to commence earnest negotiations. The mediator who possesses reward or coercion power may be more effective, especially if he enjoys closer relations with the force who is more obstinate or who must grant more concessions. Such leverage must be delicately applied because excessive use may undermine the appearance of a mediator’s neutrality, thereby causing one party to break off mediation. A very powerful mediator may also become an arbitrator, by virtually dictating the solution to the disputants. Yet opposing forces may not abide to such an arbitrated agreement if their needs and priorities are not accommodated.³⁴ Third, leverage may stem from the mediator’s ability to offer side-payments to the parties in the event of a solution. Yet despite all the varying forms, leverage is basically generated by the parties’ need for a solution which they cannot reach without the mediator’s aid. Although the mediator may strive to change perceptions, his efforts must nonetheless appear at such a time that they offer the parties a welcome opportunity rather than a mere distraction.³⁵

A Case Study: Rhodesia

In order to foster a strong understanding of the 1976 mediation process in Rhodesia, the background to the conflict as well as the identity and initial motives of the various

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Pruitt, op.cit., pp 216-217.

³⁵ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., pp 263-265.

participants will be examined in this section. Furthermore, certain key events which altered the perceptions and desires of the actors in the early 1970s will also be surveyed. Finally, this study will detail the actual mediation process between Kissinger and the southern African leaders.

For the first thirty-three years of Rhodesia's existence, from 1890 until 1923, Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company was entrusted to rule as it chose, bringing white civilization to a so-called primitive land. Following a 1923 vote in Southern Rhodesia, company rule was terminated, and Britain granted the country self-government. Although Britain retained certain powers, most importantly the right to veto legislation discriminating against Africans, the British remained passive in their ruling capacity. A system based on discrimination was allowed to flourish. The 1931 Land Apportionment Act, replaced in 1969 by the even more restrictive Land Tenure Act, was most symbolic of the problems blacks faced. By this act, all land was divided and reallocated between blacks and whites, with 49 million acres assigned to the 50,000 whites and only 29 million acres to the one million blacks. Black reserves were overcrowded, the land deteriorated, and expropriation of land became one of the most serious African grievances. Other laws were equally restrictive. For example, although Rhodesia's franchise was supposedly non-racial, the income qualification was so high that by 1948, only 258 blacks had the right to vote as compared with 47,000 whites.

The 1953 federation between (Southern) Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia), and Nyasaland (later Malawi) did allow a degree of black participation. But as the first Federal Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins commented, it was a "partnership between the horse and its rider."³⁶ Nevertheless, this limited political involvement caused the dual effect of a white conservative backlash and black disillusionment. Whites felt that the

blacks possessed too much power, whereas the blacks felt that they had been given only token participation. Nationalist activity grew in the 1950s, particularly with the 1957 founding of the African National Congress under Joshua Nkomo. A moderate organization with a program of non-racialism, it was nonetheless banned in February 1959, only to be replaced by the more radical National Democratic Party (NDP) which possessed the militant demand of one-man, one-vote.

Although the British had ostensibly been converted to the cause of majority rule following Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech in 1960, their primary goal was to disengage from Rhodesia, providing African advancement was established. This "advancement" took the form of the nationalists' receiving 15 out of 65 seats in parliament, which served to preserve white rule. With the agreement of the NDP under Nkomo secured, the British gave up their reserve powers, permitting Rhodesia to take one further step towards independence. Nkomo repudiated the agreed-upon new constitution almost immediately afterwards, but his original misjudgement of it, combined with his vacillation, only created disarray and violence within the NDP. Such violence led to the banning of the NDP in December 1961. One week later, Nkomo then formed the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU), which had identical goals as the NDP. Conflict increased, and ZAPU was itself banned in September 1962.³⁷

The formation of the Rhodesian Front (RF) in March 1962 resulted from white reaction to black violence. With a policy of no partnership and no appeasement, the RF offered a moral justification to white rule. Portraying the nationalists as fanatics, the party asserted that most blacks were better off under white rule and needed to be controlled for their own benefit. The RF gained political control of Rhodesia in 1964 with Ian Smith as Prime

³⁶ Martin Meredith, The Past is Another Country: Rhodesia 1890-1979, Andre Deutsch, London, 1979, p. 24.

³⁷ Idem.

Minister, and it continued to win every election for Rhodesia's fifty-seat parliament until 1980. The whites thus maintained a seemingly united front throughout the conflict. "Good old Smithy" himself soon became a Rhodesian folk hero. His image was one of a homespun and taciturn World War II veteran who was battling to save Rhodesia from the communist grip of black rule. He felt that whites had given the Africans the benefits of Western civilization and that Rhodesia was a pillar in upholding the tenets of Christianity, justice, and democracy.³⁸ Armed with this moralistic view, Smith was also a shrewd and stubborn negotiator, which prompted Henry Kissinger to tell him in 1976, "Your reputation as a devious and lying twister is even worse than mine. But let me warn you not to try any funny stuff with me because this time you will have met your match."³⁹ Assured of support within Rhodesia, Smith was able to disregard British demands for limited African advancement in return for independence. The Smith regime, which advocated independence without conditions, proclaimed Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on November 11, 1965.

In reply, British Prime Minister Wilson applied sanctions rather than military action. Although the long-term implications were serious, the application of sanctions actually contributed to a hardening in Rhodesian resolve to outwit the British. Additionally, both Mozambique (then under Portuguese rule) and South Africa continued trading with Rhodesia. Zambia, a major partner with Rhodesia, was able to reduce its trading dependence only very slowly. Actual benefits of sanctions included Rhodesia's defaulting on loans in London, the development of new industries within the country, and the diversification of products by Rhodesian farmers. Nevertheless, no foreign government

³⁸ Herbert M. Howe, (Acting Chairman, African Studies Program, Georgetown University, Washington DC), Dancing on Cobwebs: The 1976 American Diplomatic Participation in the Rhodesian Peace Process, (Unpublished), p. 3 and Meredith, op.cit. pp 46-48.

³⁹ Meredith, op.cit., p. 50.

would recognize the Smith government, something that was vital for Rhodesia to gain access to international financial markets.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, those nationalist parties that would later prove to be the major actors in Geneva began to form. In 1963, Nkomo became convinced that the nationalist campaign should be established in exile, as any new party inside Rhodesia would be banned. The first main division in the nationalist movement apparently occurred over this issue (in reality, personality disputes played a key role) when Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole launched the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in August 1963. Nkomo responded by founding the People's Caretaker Council (PCC), which continued to be known as ZAPU. The differences between the two were negligible at first, but a violent rivalry soon developed, giving whites supposed evidence that black rule would be disastrous.⁴¹ The RF banned both ZANU and ZAPU in August 1964, and those members who escaped detention in Rhodesia began to concentrate on organizing guerrilla war from abroad.⁴² Despite similar objectives, methods, and pressure from the heads of various African states, the parties would not collaborate.

A third party, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI) formed in 1971 by the few members of ZANU and ZAPU who were prepared to work together.⁴³ Finally, the African National Council (ANC) was created within Rhodesia under Bishop Abel Muzorewa, specifically to oppose the Hume-Smith agreement, whereby a constitution largely favourable to whites would have been instituted. Partially resulting from the ANC's efforts, and partially from Britain's Pearce Commission which determined that most blacks

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 56-59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp 39-40.

⁴² John Day, "The divisions of the Rhodesian African nationalist movement," *The World Today*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, October 1977, Volume 33, No. 10, p. 38.

⁴³ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 386.

did not favor the constitution, the agreement was defeated.⁴⁴ The ANC remained the only nationalist party not banned in Rhodesia. Opposition to guerrilla warfare as a means of achieving its goal separated the ANC from FROLIZI, ZANU, and ZAPU, and gave it a degree of Rhodesian toleration.⁴⁵

In December 1974, these four factions finally agreed to unite under the leadership of Muzorewa in a new, expanded ANC. This cooperation resulted from the joint efforts of the governments of Zambia and South Africa, but was short-lived because the old tensions between ZANU and ZAPU continued. In September 1975, Nkomo split from Muzorewa to form his own organization.⁴⁶ Additionally, Sithole's leadership of ZANU had been previously cast in doubt by the 1970 "prison coup," when Robert Mugabe was elected chairman of ZANU. Both Sithole and Mugabe broke away from the ANC to form their own separate parties. Yet a fifth group consisted of the guerrillas themselves as led by Rex Nhongo in Mozambique. Of the political leaders, only Mugabe had ties with this last faction.⁴⁷

There was little in the way of substance which distinguished these parties from one another. Indeed, the nationalist leaders were united in their objective of majority rule, and were never willing to settle for anything less.⁴⁸ The main difference was between those leaders who favored a negotiated settlement and those who felt that majority rule could be obtained solely through war. Only Mugabe single-mindedly believed that conflict alone would remove whites from power. Nkomo, by contrast, wavered from one position to another. Sithole, upon his release from prison in 1974, failed to gain the support which he felt he deserved from the guerrillas. Rather, his release coincided with a violent era in

⁴⁴ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Day, *op.cit.*, p. 386.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁴⁷ Van Smiley, "Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, and the Rise of Robert Mugabe," *Foreign Affairs*, Council on Foreign Relations, Summer 1980, Volume 58, No. 5, p. 1062.

ZANU's history, which culminated in the 1975 murder of Herbert Chitepo, the director of guerrilla operations in Lusaka.⁴⁹ Because of Zambia's crackdown following the assassination, ZANU moved entirely to Mozambique where members were able to more easily penetrate into Rhodesia.⁵⁰ Muzorewa did not even support guerrilla warfare until after December 1974, but as undisputed leader as the head of ANC in 1974, he probably commanded much guerrilla allegiance.⁵¹ Thus, the differences in views between the four main leaders were slight. Divisions arose primarily due to their mutual contempt for each other's leadership and due to their own ambitions for power.

Yet another vital role in the 1976 mediation process was played by the front-line states of Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana, and (later) Mozambique. Because they provided the nationalists with essential support and sanctuary, these states wielded influence and potential leverage. Yet Zambia, for example, was severely hurt by the sanctions against Rhodesia. President Kenneth Kaunda's dedication to the cause of black rule was nevertheless so strong that Smith commented, "I believe that the present British government will forever stand condemned because of its policy of fighting the war of sanctions to the last Zambian."⁵² The 1973 border closure greatly added to Zambia's economic difficulties, problems which were mirrored in the other countries. Moreover, Kaunda rapidly grew disgusted with the squabbling and brutality between the nationalist factions,⁵³ and feared an eruption of violence throughout southern Africa. Both this disgust and fear were echoed by the feelings of the other presidents of the front-line states.⁵⁴ Although none of them would

⁴⁸ Day, *op.cit.*, pp 387-388.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁵⁰ Miles Hudson, *Triumph or Tragedy?*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1981. p. 108.

⁵¹ Day, *op.cit.*, p. 301.

⁵² Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

⁵³ As early as 1965, Kaunda commented, "I have grown tired of talking to these gentlemen who are so fond of chicken-in-the-basket (a Lusaka hotel specialty). You call them nationalists. I call them stupid idiots." *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

concede to anything other than majority rule in Rhodesia, they all fervently desired and sought an end to the conflict.

South Africa's role in the Rhodesian conflict changed over the years. Smith always felt that South Africa would be forced to support Rhodesia because of the popularity of UDI with the South African electorate. Yet Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd was less than pleased with the declaration, saying "I have offered advice to three Rhodesian premiers. The first two were wise enough to take it."⁵⁵ Although Verwoerd remained concerned about both South Africa's international respectability and the effects of normalization of relations with other African nations, South Africa did not apply sanctions against Rhodesia. First, it was in South Africa's interest that sanctions anywhere fail, to emphasize to the international community the futility of trying to apply sanctions against South Africa itself. Second, the emotional ties between the Rhodesian and South African whites were such that the government would not have retained the support of its own electorate if it strongly pressured Smith.⁵⁶ A collapse of white rule in Rhodesia would have had obvious implications for white rule in South Africa.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Rhodesia, along with the Portuguese-ruled Angola and Mozambique, offered a military and psychological buffer to world criticism. South Africa therefore continued to channel much of Rhodesia's international trade, thereby severely undermining the effects of the sanctions. Starting in 1967, South Africa began to supply Rhodesia with security personnel. This aid expanded in 1974 with the importation into Rhodesia of strategic military goods.⁵⁸ Although Prime Minister John Vorster (Verwoerd was assassinated in 1966) was anxious to resolve the Rhodesian dispute and establish better relations particularly with Zambia, he viewed South

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁶ John Barratt, "A South African View," *Foreign Affairs*, Council on Foreign Relations, October 1976, Volume 55, No. 1, p. 155.

⁵⁷ Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

⁵⁸ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

Africa's front-line as the Zambezi River rather than the Limpopo. Thus, with the 1973 outbreak of war in Rhodesia, Vorster's primary goal became that of strengthening Rhodesia's defences.⁵⁹ Rhodesia's increasing economic and military dependence therefore placed South Africa in a unique position to ensure either the success or failure of UDI.

The final major actor involved in the 1976 mediation, the United States, traditionally paid little attention to Africa. Indeed, the Americans were content with following the British lead of sanctions, despite doubts about their effectiveness. According to one senior State Department official, Rhodesia was "just a little mess the British had on their hands."⁶⁰ After Richard Nixon became president on 1968, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger ordered a review of American foreign policy concerning Africa. The results of this study, National Security Study Memorandum No. 39 (NSSM-39), presented five possible options ranging from strong support of the whites to strong support of the nationalists. Kissinger recommended and Nixon chose Option 2, of simultaneously relaxing US measures against white southern Africa and increasing economic aid to the neighboring black states. The reasoning behind the choice was that because political change was unlikely in the near future, US interest dictated encouraging rapprochement through trade, investment, and political contacts. The State Department, which had favored Option 3 of continuing to protect US interests in both black and white Africa, labelled Kissinger's approach the "Tar Baby" option and pointed to the probable difficulties which the US would face if it ever decided to stop support of white minority rule.⁶¹ The main result of this change in policy for Rhodesia was the November 1971 Byrd Amendment, which permitted the US to break sanctions by importing chrome, ferrochrome, and nickel from Rhodesia. This act not only

⁵⁹ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

⁶⁰ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

⁶¹ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 216-217, Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 6, and Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

helped Rhodesia economically, but it also bolstered Smith's position by allowing him to claim evidence of American support.⁶²

It was not until the April 1974 military coup in Portugal that the entire strategic situation in southern Africa changed, providing a catalyst for the 1976 mediation process. First, by September 1974, FRELIMO controlled the government in Mozambique. With close links existing between FRELIMO and ZANU, the dangers to Rhodesia became evident. Rhodesia's entire eastern flank of 764 miles was opened for incursion. Indeed, from a military standpoint, it was easier to infiltrate Rhodesia from Mozambique, as both the Zambezi River and Lake Kariba posed formidable obstacles for guerrillas entering from Zambia.⁶³

For the United States, particularly in Kissinger's view, Angola presented the main threat. Because of the impending November 1975 Portuguese withdrawal, a power struggle developed between three nationalist groups: the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the two western-supported National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Kissinger foresaw the possibility of superpower rivalry in what he considered to be a zero-sum situation. Convinced that Moscow was determined to carve a new sphere of influence in southern Africa by beginning with Angola, Kissinger covertly channelled aid to the FNLA and UNITA. As this aid was insufficient to defeat the MPLA, Kissinger encouraged Vorster to send in troops, which caused the MPLA to ask for Cuban assistance. With the conflict becoming increasingly internationalised, the US Congress in December 1975 refused to authorize funds for the two pro-western factions. Kissinger therefore lost the ability to help South Africa. Vorster, feeling betrayed, was forced to withdraw from

⁶² Hudson, *op.cit.*, p.120.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Angola. The Angolan debacle thus resulted in a humiliating defeat for Kissinger, the international isolation of South Africa, and a Soviet triumph in Angola.⁶⁴

The events in Angola forced Kissinger, by then Secretary of State, to reconsider NSSM-39. The US reputation had been seriously damaged. Other nations which looked towards the US for protection became uncertain about American resolve, there was domestic condemnation of the US role in Angola, and the Rhodesian nationalists had been given proof that the Soviets were both willing and able to help.⁶⁵ Furthermore, as 1976 was an election year, Kissinger felt that to win the black vote, it would be important to be seen as helping the black nationalists in Rhodesia, especially after the alignment with South Africa in Angola. A negotiated settlement in Rhodesia, something that had defied all previous attempts, would also have comprised an immense diplomatic coup for Kissinger. Finally, if Rhodesia were to fall under Soviet influence, the threat to South Africa might have become great enough to warrant military intervention to protect US access to South Africa's strategic minerals and to the Cape shipping route.⁶⁶ Believing that the Rhodesian government was doomed in the long term and that the proven inability of Britain, South Africa, and the front-line states to reach a peace settlement further radicalised the nationalists, Kissinger felt another powerful force was needed to mediate the conflict.⁶⁷ In April 1976, he embarked on a 7-nation tour of Africa to demonstrate a more positive American role. Most importantly, in his April 27 speech in Lusaka, Kissinger pledged American support for majority rule in Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa, unrelenting US opposition to the Smith regime until a negotiated settlement was reached, renewed efforts to repeal the Byrd Amendment, economic assistance to countries suffering from economic

⁶⁴ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 150 and 219-220, and Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

⁶⁵ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 220-221.

⁶⁶ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ *Idem.*

sanctions, and attempts to have South Africa pressure Smith to reach a settlement.⁶⁸ Although Kissinger's sudden involvement arose primarily from his concern of superpower rivalry in southern Africa rather than from any serious concern for Rhodesia,⁶⁹ his proclaimed objectives encouraged the support of African leaders. Indeed, Kissinger relied on the presidents of the front-line states to exert pressure on the nationalists to enter the negotiation process. Sceptical of Kissinger's motives and commitment to southern Africa, the presidents nonetheless believed that his involvement could make the crucial difference.⁷⁰

The effects of the Portuguese coup d'état also forced Vorster to reassess his priorities. No longer could Angola or Mozambique be considered part of an insulating cordon sanitaire. The front-line had shifted away from Rhodesia, directly to South Africa's borders. Vorster felt that white rule in Rhodesia was ill-fated, that Smith's intransigence could provoke Soviet and Cuban intervention, and that South Africa's economic and military commitment to Rhodesia was untenable in the long run. He also feared an expansion of the conflict into his country. A stable black government in Rhodesia, especially a moderate one, would be better than an unstable white government. Vorster also foresaw other advantages from cooperation with the US effort, especially regarding US opposition to sanctions against South Africa. Consequently, the best solution in Rhodesia for Vorster would have consisted of a negotiated settlement which safeguarded white interests, brought an end to war, and installed a moderate black government. Because of Rhodesian dependence upon South Africa, Vorster had always possessed the means to force Smith to settle, but he still had to contend with his own electorate which supported the

⁶⁸ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

⁶⁹ Anthony Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe*, Jonathon Cape Ltd., London, 1986, p. 188.

⁷⁰ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 246-247.

Rhodesian whites.⁷¹ For Vorster, there existed no connection between South Africa's policies towards Rhodesia and those concerning white supremacy at home. Political reality dictated protecting South Africa's borders.⁷² Nonetheless, if Kissinger applied pressure, Vorster could possibly shift some of the blame for this seemingly hypocritical change of policy.⁷³

Smith also faced increased pressure. In 1976, Rhodesia faced guerrilla incursions along three borders: Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique. By mid-1976, the war had spread away from the border region. The government was forced to institute measures extending national service requirements and restricting citizens' rights to travel abroad. Commerce and industry were severely hurt and emigration sharply increased.⁷⁴ Moreover, Mozambique closed its border with Rhodesia in March and began to prepare for war. Not only was Rhodesia economically hurt by this move, but the Smith regime became even more dependent on Vorster's government for international trade.⁷⁵ Smith also faced political opposition within the right-wing RF because of minor concessions he had made concerning black representation in the Cabinet.⁷⁶

In addition, the Rhodesian military position appeared to be weakening. In the mid-winter months, when water and vegetation were scarce, government troops had the advantage. Even so, twenty thousand men were needed to combat 1200 guerrillas. Rhodesian intelligence estimated that 6000 more guerrillas were training in Mozambique, and that Rhodesian forces would not be able to contain them during the next rainy season incursion. Such fears prompted Smith to permit "hot pursuit" of guerrillas into

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁷² J.E. Spence, "Detente in Southern Africa: An Interim Judgement," *International Affairs*, January 1977, Volume 53, No. 1, p. 4.

⁷³ Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

⁷⁴ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 229-230.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁷⁶ Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

Mozambique, as well as raids against guerrilla bases there. One of the most militarily successful of these raids was in August at Nyadzonya on the Pungwe River. According to ZANU, 1200 people were killed; the infiltration rate from Mozambique dropped during the next two months. But politically, this raid was a disaster. Vorster, who had opposed the idea by saying it would “bring every Cuban in sight to Rhodesia’s borders,”⁷⁷ was furious that Smith had escalated the war, thereby threatening to engulf all of southern Africa in conflict without any political settlement even on the horizon. Absolutely determined to cooperate with Kissinger, Vorster immediately terminated Operation Polo, thus causing fifty South African helicopter pilots, gunners, and Air Force officers to leave Rhodesia. Rhodesia’s air strike capacity was halved.⁷⁸ Three days after the Pungwe raid, Vorster declared support for majority rule in Rhodesia. He also ensured that delays in South Africa’s trade routes to and from Rhodesia increased. By the end of August, crisis proportions were reached not only for Rhodesia’s commerce and industry but also for the war effort as arms, ammunition, and oil began to run low.⁷⁹

Yet despite all these setbacks, Smith remained convinced that the US would support Rhodesia in its fight against communism. A rapid handover to black rule would only be to the communist advantage, as events in Angola had certified.⁸⁰ Consequently, Smith was still prepared to support his view which had caused all previous negotiations to fail: “But I don’t believe in majority rule, ever in Rhodesia, not in a thousand years.”⁸¹

By deliberately restraining war materials, Vorster was exerting one of the most powerful weapons he possessed against Smith. Indeed, when Kissinger and Vorster had met in Bavaria in June, the two had devised a carrot-stick approach. Vorster would wield the

⁷⁷ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 238.

⁷⁸ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Meredith, *op.cit.*, pp 237-242.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 243-244.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

threat of restricting trade while Kissinger would offer incentive such as financial guarantees in the form of a billion dollar development fund from the international community to reassure whites of their future in Rhodesia.⁸² With the war in Rhodesia proceeding poorly for the white regime, with no possibility of US aid, and with South African pressure, Kissinger gambled that Smith would remove what had presented the main stumbling block in past negotiations: his refusal to accept majority rule.⁸³ Afterwards, Kissinger believed that sufficient momentum would be created to lead to a solution based on the British proposal made in March. This proposal included four points:

1. Majority rule
2. No independence before majority rule
3. No unnecessarily prolonged negotiations
4. Elections within the next two years.⁸⁴

The one major missing ingredient was unity among the nationalists. This disunity had been a significant cause for the failure of the 1975 Victoria Falls conference, as neither Smith nor Vorster could possibly have been assured of an orderly transition. The chaotic collapse of white rule in Angola allowed Smith to point to the “inherent” dangers of black rule and to appeal to the South African electorate for support.⁸⁵ It was apparent by 1976 that the Zimbabwe People’s Army (ZIPA), which was theoretically a merger of the forces of ZANU and ZAPU, had fallen apart. Both Muzorewa’s and Sithole’s claims of being leader of the nationalist movement were rejected by the guerrillas in Mozambique and Tanzania. Nkomo’s position as head of ZAPU went unchallenged, but his reputation had been damaged by his talks with Smith in 1975. Only Mugabe, who had been working in

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁸³ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸⁵ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p, 194.

camps in Mozambique since April 1975, seemed an acceptable leader to the bulk of ZANU and ZAPU, yet he seemed to Marxist for most whites to accept.⁸⁶

Thus, the atmosphere surrounding Kissinger's September mediation attempt was one of pessimism. The front-line presidents doubted Kissinger's intent. The nationalists were divided with no sign of uniting, and most guerrillas were anxious to continue fighting especially during the upcoming rainy season. Kissinger relied on Vorster to exert pressure against Smith, yet was unsure of the extent of Vorster's ability. The British were sceptical of Kissinger's ability of outmanoeuvre Smith.⁸⁷ The Soviets claimed that Kissinger was trying to subvert the African nationalist movement and extend western capitalism. President Ford was extremely cautious in public, to deflect responsibility for any failure.⁸⁸ Progress did not seem likely.

Kissinger first met with Vorster in Zurich, where Vorster confirmed that he was prepared to force Smith to agree, provided white rights and an orderly transition were guaranteed. Continuing on to Dar-es-Salaam, Kissinger next met with President Nyerere of Tanzania. Kissinger, who had already formulated a plan for an interim government, discussed only generalities due to the fear that disagreement over specifics with Nyerere would jeopardize the entire mission.⁸⁹ Afterwards, Kissinger met with Kaunda in Lusaka. Kaunda, while not as pessimistic as Nyerere, nonetheless impressed upon Kissinger that the result of a failed mission would be an immediately intensified war.⁹⁰

On September 17, Kissinger flew to Pretoria. There Vorster advised him to meet with Smith that weekend, saying that Smith could not possibly convince his Cabinet to accept any deal unless that US had itself offered it. Smith flew to Pretoria the next day, ostensibly

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 245-247.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 251-252.

⁸⁸ Howe, *op.cit.*, pp 26-27.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 252.

to attend a rugby match between New Zealand and South Africa. But his true purpose was to engage Kissinger in discussion.

The actual talks between the two began on Sunday morning, September 19th. Smith defended his government's position, declaring that Rhodesia deserved US aid, not pressure, in its fight against communism. In return, he was willing to offer a plan allowing more Africans in the government, which could lead to racial parity in the Cabinet. Kissinger, not swayed by Smith's argument, forcefully gave his own assessment of Rhodesia's situation. Without reference to notes, he accurately detailed Rhodesia's military position, sector and field deployments, logistical lines, financial difficulties, and the Cuban threat. He predicted that Rhodesia would not be able to contain future guerrilla incursions from Mozambique and Zambia, whereas the guerrillas could rely on more Soviet aid. The Soviets were likely to intervene further in southern Africa after their success in Angola, and the US would never help the Smith government against any communist onslaught. Kissinger estimated that Rhodesia was doomed to collapse in no more than three months unless a negotiated solution was reached.

With that prediction, Kissinger offered a list of five points that had been developed by the US and the UK after consultation with Kaunda and Nyerere. He also gave Smith an economic memorandum, which offered encouragement for whites to remain in Rhodesia. According to Smith, both were offered on an all-or-nothing basis.

The five points included the following:

1. Rhodesia agreeing to black majority rule within the next two years
2. Rhodesia agreeing to meeting with the nationalists to organize an interim government leading to majority rule

3. A Council of Ministers that would have a majority of Africans with an African Chief Minister, and a Council of State, half white and half black, to draft a new constitution for majority rule
4. Legislation enabling British authority
5. The ending of sanctions and hostilities upon the installation of the interim government.

Smith, whose immediate reaction after reading the first point was “You want me to sign my own suicide note,” withdrew to consult with his delegation. Finally realizing that American and South African support against the nationalists would never be forthcoming, Smith was paced in a precarious position. Yet he was quick to perceive possible advantages to the agreement. With a few changes, a more hopeful version emerged. First, Smith wanted the wording of “black majority rule” altered to “responsible majority rule.” Second, he wanted a white to head the Council of State. Third, he wanted a Rhodesian to retain the portfolios of Defence and Law and Order, and Finance in the transitional government.

Thus, if Rhodesia agreed to majority rule and entered into an interim government, the whites would keep control of security and could strongly influence the new constitution. The Rhodesian economy would strengthen without sanctions and hostilities. And with Rhodesian encouragement, the divisions between the black nationalists could undermine the new government. In this case, the whites would either have to resume direct rule or allow a moderate black government to govern. The West would have to acknowledge Rhodesian compliance.

Kissinger, jubilant that Smith would agree to majority rule, was amenable to the concessions for which Smith asked. Wording was changed simply to the ambiguous “majority rule,” the reference to a white head of the Council of State was bracketed to indicate it was still under consideration, but the reference to the security portfolios could

not be added until after consultations with Kaunda and Nyerere. Although Kissinger desired an immediate announcement of the agreement, Smith returned to Rhodesia to consult with his Cabinet. He planned to make a nation-wide announcement in the next Friday radio speech if the package was approved in Salisbury.

Kissinger had therefore solved what he believed the core of the Rhodesian conflict. A solution seemed close, but his victory was short-lived. At a meeting with Nkomo in Lusaka, the nationalist noted that Kissinger had exceeded his authority by actually negotiating with Smith. Moreover, Nkomo held that the form of the transitional government could only be decided by a constitutional conference led by Britain as the colonial authority. The front-line presidents had the same view, but objected even more forcefully to white control of the security portfolios. Agreement on this plan was most definitely not forthcoming.

Kissinger obviously had a problem. He felt that Smith's announcement endorsing majority rule would transform the conflict. The psychological blow to the whites would be great enough to cause a momentum leading to a settlement. But Smith would never accept a modified plan. Kissinger therefore resorted once again to what was later termed as "tactical ambiguity." He had previously used this tactic when he had led Smith to believe that the front-line presidents had already accepted the five points on behalf of the nationalists. Now he employed it in cabling Smith that the front-line chairman, Nyerere, found the plan "an acceptable basis for the settlement of the Rhodesian question."⁹¹ He added that the chairman of the Council of State could be white. Finally, Kissinger included "We also believe on the basis of our discussion in Lusaka and Dar-es-Salaam that...for the

⁹¹ Howe, *op.cit.* p.35. Details of the actual negotiation.

period of the interim government, the Ministers of Defence and of Law and Order would be white.”⁹²

With these rather ambiguous assurances, Smith was able to announce the agreement to his nation on September 24th. Rhodesian whites were shocked that Smith “had shrunk ‘not a thousand years’ to two years in a matter of seven months.”⁹³ Yet the majority maintained confidence in Smith’s ability to outwit his opposition. Indeed, it soon became clear that Kissinger had not cleared the specific proposals with the front-line states, who quickly denounced the agreement. They claimed that any interim government should be decided by a conference of legitimate representatives of Zimbabwe and called upon Britain, as the colonial authority, to convene such a conference.⁹⁴ Kissinger himself exited from the scene, alleging that his task was finished because Smith had accepted the principle of majority rule.⁹⁵

Smith found himself in an excellent position. If the package succeeded, then the transitional government would be dominated by the white minority in key positions, which would allow the whites to shape the future of the country. If the deal failed, then Smith could use the rejection as a an excuse to abandon commitment to majority rule while claiming that he had done all he could by agreeing with Kissinger. Vorster, for example, permitted South Africa’s railways to “decongest” themselves because he believed that Smith had abided by the package.⁹⁶ It is possible that Smith only agreed to majority rule because he realized that the Africans would never agree to a plan that allowed for white control over the transitional government.

⁹² Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 259 and Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

⁹³ Verrier, *op.cit.*, p. 196.

⁹⁴ Elaine Windrich, “Rhodesia: The road from Luanda to Geneva,” *The World Today*, March 1977, Volume 33, No. 3, p. 109.

⁹⁵ Verrier, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

⁹⁶ Howe, *op.cit.*, pp 35-36.

The British, faced with the choice of either convening a constitutional conference which they suspected would fail or abandoning any progress on majority rule simply by default, organized the Geneva Conference to begin on October 28th. British Foreign Secretary Crosland appointed UN Ambassador Ivor Richard as chairman, thereby avoiding the responsibility himself. The delegates consisted of Nkomo and Mugabe (united in the Patriotic Front due to the pressure of the front-line states), Muzorewa, Sithole (after some deliberation), and Smith.⁹⁷

The conference stalemated almost immediately. Smith maintained that the package was nonnegotiable, whereas the still divided African nationalists insisted that Kissinger's five points served merely as a basis for negotiation. No middle ground existed. As one aide to Mugabe observed, "This conference is pure crap."⁹⁸ Yet neither side seriously considered walking out, mainly for fear of criticism from the West and possible retribution from their patrons. After seven weeks, everyone agreed that no agreement was possible. The conference ended on December 14th, with a declaration of intent to resume talks in the future. But it was not until two and a half more years of war and shuttle diplomacy (mainly by the British) that a settlement in Rhodesia was achieved.⁹⁹

Theory and Practice

Kissinger's attempt to mediate the Rhodesian war was unsuccessful, in that the conflict was not resolved. Both the bloodshed and the negotiations continued until the 1979 Lancaster House agreement. Yet an examination of the background to the crisis and the actual mediation process in Rhodesia is nevertheless useful. Specifically, by comparing this practical example of mediation with mediation theory, it is possible to identify not only

⁹⁷ Windrich, op.cit., p. 110.

⁹⁸ Howe, op.cit., p. 39.

⁹⁹ Windrich, op.cit., p. 110.

those factors which worked in Kissinger's favor, but also those which effectively doomed to failure his endeavor of obtaining a settlement. Moreover, one may also recognize the benefits which Kissinger's attempt did provide, thus underlining the potential significance of the mediation process.

According to Zartman and Touval, the optimal conditions for mediation involve two perceptions:

1. A turn of events which threatens the interest of the mediator
2. The mediator's discernment of flexibility in the parties' attitudes.¹⁰⁰

In 1976, the existence of the first condition was readily recognizable. Kissinger's attempt at mediation was primarily a function of his own worries. Changing conditions in southern Africa due to the Portuguese coup led him to fear Soviet expansionism in the region. Believing white rule to be doomed, he hoped for the installation of a moderate black government. Therefore, only reasons of self-interest compelled Kissinger to mediate. Indeed, this fact supports the theory that mediators will only intervene when a conflict threatens their own interests or when they perceive an opportunity to advance their own concerns. That the US remained relatively uninvolved in Rhodesian affairs from the declaration of UDI until 1976 is indicative that some stimulation (the collapse of Portuguese rule and the Soviet success in Angola) was needed. Altruism played no role.

Importantly, no one asked Kissinger to mediate. The initiative was one of his own connivance. The attitudes of the disputants had not softened by 1976, which points to perhaps the most crucial element which was lacking at that time. No "hurting stalemate" existed. Both the Rhodesians and the nationalists felt that, given time, they could wear down the other side, despite pressure from their respective patrons. The Rhodesians still showed resiliency; they enjoyed a 12:1 kill ratio and were aware and capable of exploiting

¹⁰⁰ Zartman and Touval, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

black divisions. The nationalists experienced a strengthening of their forces in both number and infiltration ability.¹⁰¹ Thus, neither party felt a need to negotiate, and agreed to mediation mainly to placate their patrons. A final settlement could not be reached until both the blacks and whites of Rhodesia calculated that they had more to lose than to gain by continuing the war.

Moreover, the principle issue at stake was zero-sum. The Rhodesians viewed the nationalists' goal of political power as threatening the very existence of the whites. Therefore, the perceived root of the conflict in 1976 was one of core values. No compromise became possible until later, when the issues of white power and white security were separated. Once Smith abandoned his insistence on maintaining control of the government, the whites could detach their conditions of life from their political power, and the conflict became positive-sum. At that point, white demands could be met with an adequate constitution to ensure their rights and safety. But by 1976, the whites had not yet reached the point where they were willing to take a chance with a new constitution rather than continue the war. They only agreed to mediation because it was less harmful to accept than to reject it, something which became particularly true after South Africa changed its policies. The nationalists were interested in mediation solely as a means to achieve their goals, not to seek any type of accommodation. This case shows that Zartman and Touval's second condition of perceived flexibility in the parties' attitudes should not merely be one of two optimal conditions. Rather, unless one party has established its superiority and can dictate the results to the weaker, willingness to compromise should be a necessary condition. Such willingness will most probably not exist unless the disputants have the incentive that a recognized stalemate would provide.

¹⁰¹ Howe, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

Consequently, one of Kissinger's primary tasks as mediator should have been to try to change the parties' perceptions of the issues. Although he skillfully manoeuvred each party to the negotiating table, he never attempted to address the fundamental conflict, and perhaps did not truly understand the situation. Kissinger believed that the crux of the problem was to have Smith accept the principle of majority rule, which would break the logjam and create momentum for resolution. To obtain Smith's agreement, Kissinger consequently considered his "tactical ambiguity" of misleading the front-line presidents and Smith to be worthwhile. Yet "although he had achieved the conceptual breakthrough, by ignoring the complexities of the conflict he had ensured the eventual failure of the mission."¹⁰²

As mediator, Kissinger needed to find a formula for settlement and have it accepted by the parties (assuming that the goal of his attempt was indeed the resolution of the conflict). Yet his five points, with Smith's additions, were acceptable to the disputants only as long as they remained unclear. In effect, the offer gave Smith everything he needed to retain power. The blacks would have had the illusion of power, while the whites would have actually kept it. By deliberately giving different versions of the same exchanges to different people in different places, Kissinger consigned his efforts to achieve resolution to failure. The Geneva Conference concentrated on the most contentious issue of the conflict: the organization of the interim government, which would determine which party would achieve power. But because Kissinger allowed Smith to believe that the package had already been approved by the front-line states, Smith could insist that the deal was nonnegotiable. The front-line presidents, who had not previously been informed of the full content, insisted that the package serve only as the basis for negotiation. When Kissinger departed from the scene and Crosland did not even chair the conference, pessimism concerning the

¹⁰² Meredith, *op.cit.*, p. 256.

workability of the deal heightened. To some extent, it is within the mediator's prerogative to mislead the disputants. Yet at some point, the parties must accept the same agreement and any deception will be uncovered. Kissinger cleverly drove the parties to some sort of agreement, but it was bound to fall apart as soon as it was fully examined. His assumption that the primary necessary breakthrough was Smith's acceptance of majority rule was unfounded.

Another major facet was that of US leverage in mediation, for "without leverage, the mediator is left not merely to his own wits, but worse, to the mercy of the pressures of the conflict."¹⁰³ Kissinger did possess some advantages in this regard. First his personal prestige and reputation carried much weight with the participants. As Nyerere commented, "We want the two greatest sources of power on our side: God and Kissinger."¹⁰⁴ Second, the US was not alone in seeking peace in the region. South Africa and the front-line states strongly desired a solution before the war further escalated. Third, US entry after the failure of so many other attempts to resolve the crisis raised new hopes. Fourth, all sides (except Rhodesia) agreed on a definition of the problem: namely, an "intransigent white minority rule which by causing regional destruction would invite internationalisation of the conflict."¹⁰⁵ Fifth, neither side believed Kissinger would be impartial. Rather, each thought the US was partial to the other side. The nationalists, for example, could remember the NSSM-39 and the Byrd Amendment, which invoked a suspicion of the US harbouring Rhodesian sympathies. Although such misgivings may have hindered cooperation, they also encouraged acquiescence to mediation because each party thought the US could induce the other side to make concessions through sanctions or other political and financial

¹⁰³ Zartman and Touval, op.cit., p 263.

¹⁰⁴ Howe, op.cit., p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

incentives.¹⁰⁶ For instance, Kissinger offered a side-payment of economic aid to white settlers. The mediator's theoretical ideal attributes of trustworthiness, empathy, and rapport played little role in inducing the parties to agree to mediation in this case.

Overall though, the US lacked leverage with the major actors. First, American ignorance about Rhodesia due to past deference to Britain and the absence of a Soviet regional threat impeded progress. The US lacked knowledge of or personal connection with many of the participants, particularly the nationalists. Second, the absence of a stalemate and the subsequent lack of need on the part of the disputants for a settlement also lowered US leverage. Third, the question of American commitment existed, due to domestic pressure within the US. President Ford expected a challenge from Ronald Reagan, who catered to the conservative support of the Rhodesians. Yet because of the predicted closeness of the election, the black vote was also crucial. Thus, Kissinger's involvement needed to mollify both the blacks and the conservatives, which limited both Washington's ability and desire to prompt a negotiated settlement. Moreover, because of the upcoming US election, Kissinger faced a deadline which was not applicable to the other participants. The Africans could also view US diplomacy as lameduckery, not binding on a new administration. Fourth, the US hoped to employ the help of the combatants' patrons, but the patrons themselves faced political pressures which curtailed their leverage. Vorster needed to satisfy his own electorate and the front-line state presidents had to cope with antipathy towards dealing with South Africa and Rhodesia.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, that Kissinger was able to persuade Vorster and the front-line state leaders to pressure the disputants to agree to mediation presents a good example of the "shifting weight" that a mediator must sometimes apply. Unfortunately, such pressure was never strong enough to convince either

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Low, "The Zimbabwe Settlement, 1976-1979," in International Mediation in Theory and Practice, edited by I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO, 1985, p. 97.

side that a “hurting stalemate” existed, and that a negotiated settlement would be preferable to continued fighting.

Yet another element which hindered the mediation process was the nationalist divisions between Muzorewa, Sithole, Nkomo, and Mugabe. Because there existed no one clearly defined party with which to negotiate, the position of the nationalists was severely undermined. Such disunity heightened Smith’s intransigence, for it allowed him to point to “inherent” dangers of the chaos of black rule. This argument carried much weight not only with the white Rhodesians, but also with the white South Africans, thereby increasing pressure on Vorster. The front-line state presidents, recognizing the need for unity among the nationalists, encouraged the formation of the Patriotic Front between Nkomo and Mugabe. Even so, disputes between the two leaders continued, and Muzorewa and Sithole continued to present alternative leadership.

Despite the ostensible failure of the mediation attempt, there were nonetheless positive benefits to the 1976 process. The Geneva Conference gave the nationalists a degree of international attention and a political forum which they might otherwise have not received. Mugabe in particular, who had consistently held that armed struggle remained the sole means to obtain nationalist goals, gained from the process. With his alliance with Nkomo, Mugabe realized that his main rival was Muzorewa, which was to affect ZANU strategy in the years to come.¹⁰⁸ The Kissinger mediation was also somewhat unusual in that one of the parties made a major concession relatively early. Smith’s acceptance of the principle of majority rule marked the beginning of the end for the white population’s formal control of government. Although the momentum leading to resolution was not created by this change as Kissinger had hoped, it did remove a primary obstacle and allow the substance of mediation to advance other issues.

¹⁰⁷ Howe, *op.cit.*, pp 11-15.

Furthermore, timing is crucial according to mediation theory. There is a crucial juncture at which settlement becomes possible, but because it is so difficult to judge when this point will happen (or even to identify when it actually exists), mediation should begin as soon as possible and continue throughout the conflict.¹⁰⁹ Although the propitious moment did not exist in 1976, Kissinger did start a mediation process which endured for the remainder of the conflict, reintroduced the British to the scene, and ultimately resulted in the 1979 settlement. The 1976 mediation was a function of Kissinger's interest, rather than a function of the conflict. But by the time the increasing toll of sanctions and the war created conditions amenable to settlement through negotiation, the mediation framework already existed. Therefore, if one defines successful mediation as a process that contributes to resolution in some way, then Kissinger's endeavor may judged as such.

In conclusion, the theory of mediation does indeed provide valuable insights into actual experience. Perhaps because much of the groundwork is based on real-life examples of mediation, the theory has not become so esoteric as to divorce itself from any practical application. By examining Kissinger's attempts in Rhodesia through a framework established by the theory of mediation, both faults and triumphs may be detected, promoting lessons to be applied in future mediation. In the theory, a dichotomy may be drawn between the importance of environmental components and of the mediator. The case of Rhodesia points out that in reality, no such division should be made. Both factors are highly interwoven and serve to clarify an explanation of the final result of the process. Moreover, although it is tempting to conclude that the outcome of the 1976 process could have been predicted beforehand by simply comparing the participants and environment with the theory, such a conclusion is difficult to substantiate. Hindsight distorts one's

¹⁰⁸ Verrier, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

perceptions; it is easy to predict the outcome if one already knows the results. In this case, certain elements of mediation theory, such as the lack of a stalemate and the nature of the issues at stake, figured more prominently in the mediation process. Others, such as the fear a government might have of negotiating with a rebel group, played little or no role. The theory of mediation, which tries to encompass all possible situations, must therefore be selectively applied, for not all facets of the theory fit all conditions of actual mediation. Nevertheless, as exemplified by the case of American involvement in the Rhodesian peace process, mediation theory illuminates the practice of mediation, and is consequently a valuable theoretical tool in international relations.

¹⁰⁹ Low, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

Bibliography

Assefa, Hizkias. Mediation of Civil Wars: Approaches and Strategies – The Sudan Conflict: (Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1987).

Barratt, John. “A South African View.” Foreign Affairs: (Council on Foreign Relations, October 1976, Volume 55, No. 1), pp 147-168.

Barston, R.P.. Modern Diplomacy: (Longman Group UK Limited, Essex, 1988).

Bell, Carol. The Diplomacy of Détente: The Kissinger Era: (Martin Robertson and Company Ltd., London, 1977).

Brouillet, Alain. “Mediation as a Technique of Dispute Settlement: Appraisal and Prospects” in International Conflict Resolution, edited by Ramesh Thakur (Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO, 1988), pp 165-173.

Burton, John W.. Conflict and Communication: The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations: (Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1969).

Day, John. “The divisions of the Rhodesian African nationalist movement.” The World Today: (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, October 1977, Volume 33, No. 10), pp 385-394.

Gann, Lewis H. and Henriksen, Thomas H.. The Struggle for Zimbabwe: Battle in the Bush: (Praeger Publishers, New York NY, 1981).

Groom, A.J.R.. “Problem Solving in International Relations” in International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice, edited by Edward E. Azar and John W. Burton (Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex, 1986), pp 85-91.

Gulliver, P.H.. Disputes and Negotiations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective: (Academic Press, Inc., New York NY, 1979).

Howe, Herbert M. (Acting Chairman, African Studies Program, Georgetown University, Washington DC). Dancing on Cobwebs: The 1976 American Diplomatic Participation in the Rhodesian Peace Process: (Unpublished).

Hudson, Miles. Triumph or Tragedy?: (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1981).

Kissinger, Henry. American Foreign Policy: Three Essays, Third Edition: (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York NY, 1977).

Low, Stephen. "The Zimbabwe Settlement, 1976-1979" in International Mediation in Theory and Practice, edited by I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval (Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO 1985), pp 91-109.

Meredith, Martin. The Past is Another Country: Rhodesia 1890-1979: (Andre Deutsch, London, 1979).

Mitchell, C.R.. "The Motives for Mediation" in New Approaches to International Mediation, edited by C.R. Mitchell and K. Webb (Greenwood Press, Westport CT, 1988), pp 29-51.

Nyerere, Julius K.. "America and Southern Africa." Foreign Affairs: (Council on Foreign Affairs, July 1977, Volume 55, No. 4), pp 671-684.

Pruitt, Dean G.. Negotiation Behaviour: (Academic Press, Inc., New York NY, 1981).

Serfaty, Simon. "The Kissinger Legacy: Old Obsession and New Look." The World Today: (March 1977, Volume 33, No. 3), pp 81-89.

Smiley, Van. "Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and the Rise of Robert Mugabe." Foreign Affairs: (Council on Foreign Relations, Summer 1980, Volume 58, no. 5), pp 1060-1083.

Smith, David and Simpson, Colin and Davies, Ian. Mugabe: (Sphere Books Ltd., London, 1981).

Smith, Ian. "Prime Minister's Address to the Nation: Friday, 24th September 1976." For the Record: (No. 38, 6895 [205]).

Spence, J.E.. "Détente in Southern Africa: An Interim Judgement." International Affairs: (January 1977, Volume 53, No. 1), pp 1-16.

Verrier, Anthony. The Road to Zimbabwe: (Jonathon Cape Ltd., London, 1986).

Wehr, Paul. Conflict Regulation: (Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1979).

Windrich, Elaine. "Rhodesia: the road from Luanda to Geneva." The World Today: (March 1977, Volume 33, No. 3), pp 101-111.

Zartman, I. William and Berman, Maureen R.. The Practical Negotiator: (Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1982).

Zartman, I. William and Touval, Saadia, ed.. International Mediation in Theory and Practice: (Westview Press, Inc., Boulder CO, 1985).