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## **SPEAKERS AND TOPIC**

### **The Legacy of President Thabo Mbeki's Foreign Policy**

#### **SPEAKER**

##### **DR CHRIS LANDSBERG**

Dr. Chris Landsberg is Professor in the Department of Politics at the University of Johannesburg and specializes in International Public Policy and Foreign Policy Analysis. His specialist fields of areas include South African Foreign Policy; African Public Policy; and Policy Studies. He was Director of the Centre for Policy Studies in Johannesburg from 2002-2007, and is a Co-founder of the Centre for Africa's International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was educated at RAU (now UJ), Rhodes University and Oxford University. He holds M. Phil and Ph. D degrees in International Relations from Oxford University, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar and a Chievening Scholar. During 1999-2000 he was a Hamburg Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Centre for International Security and Co-operation in California. He is a Visiting Professor at the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and works closely with the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa.

#### **RESPONDENT**

##### **PROF ROBERT SCHRIRE**

Prof Robert Schrire has completed a BCom (Economics) degree at UCT, a Masters degree from the School of International Service, American University, Washington DC, and a PHD from the University of California. He also completed graduate studies in Economics at Columbia University.

His research interests are in the fields of South African politics and international relations. His most recent publication is Theories of International Relations, World Encyclopedia of Knowledge, UNESCO, London. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in international organisation and rational choice theories.

#### **Introduction**

##### **Annamarie Wolpe:**

Welcome to all of you. We have a stunning evening planned for tonight. Adekeye Adebajo is coming from some other function to chair. We are short of money, so

I'd like to say thank you to Butlers for the pizzas we get from them. Regarding the topic, we couldn't have had better timing. It is with great pleasure that I am able to say that we have two people with opposing points of view on this issue. Both of them have been on radio and television. It should be an interesting and fascinating evening. You don't need their backgrounds, so lets just get going.

Chris Landsberg:

Three weeks ago I got a call from Annmarie asking what the topic for tonight should be. I said that we should do a topic on Mbeki's foreign policy legacy. Clearly I knew exactly what was going to happen. What I'd like to present tonight is a lecture on president Mbeki's foreign policy legacy. I want you to think about unfolding events. I want to start there and examine the foreign policy experience in which Mbeki was involved. Yesterday in New York, the chair of the AU was asked to respond to the dramatic developments which prevented his friend, Mbeki, from leaving the tarmac. When asked what he thinks of Mbeki, he said that Mbeki's resignation will be a setback for progress in Africa. He said that Mbeki is the man that brought the African Union the African renaissance. He also brought regulations and rules to the AU. I'm going to use that in my talk tonight.

Before that, I'd like to say something about the events in the last week. Mbeki and his former friend Obasanjo were instrumental in 1999 in introducing the doctrine of the yellow card and the red card into the OAU. If there is an unconstitutional change of government in Africa, we'll first wave the yellow card and ask those responsible for the *coup* to restore democratic rule. If they don't, we'll wave the red card. This results in punitive measures like economic sanctions.

Has Mbeki been a victim of unconstitutional action in South Africa? He has launched two cases in the Constitutional Court, one in his personal capacity and one in his presidential capacity, to test validity of judgment made week ago. Don't be surprised if another court comes to a different conclusion from Nicholson. If so, we're really in a mess. Given the events that unfolded after the judgment, there will be talk of a *coup d'etat*. There was an SMS that was sent out after the NEC meeting and that gave a detailed communication of how Mbeki was about to fall.

Dealing with Mbeki's foreign policy legacy, I'd like to talk about three things: firstly, his leadership style; secondly, his use of institutions; thirdly, I think that there has been a logic to Mbeki's foreign policy, to the way he went about executing it.

Quoting Kissinger, foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy and one begins where the other ends. I'd first like to compare the leadership styles of

Mandela and Mbeki. Mandela has said that Mbeki is an enigma. I, on the other hand, think he's one of most predictable politicians we've ever had. Mandela is more of an enigma. Mandela was treated like Jesus. You can't criticise him, especially not now. Mbeki behaved like Jesus. Mbeki suffered from a Jesus complex in foreign policy. He thought he could solve any problem. As a result, he over-extended himself and South Africa into Asia, the Middle East, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Bolivia, the Sudan and the DRC. He suffered from a Jesus complex. Mandela had charisma but Mbeki didn't, at least that is what is generally said. I want to portray a more nuanced and challenging picture. Firstly, I want to look at his political characteristics. He fits perfectly into the mould of Aristotle's political character - all he has ever known is politics. He was handed over by his parents to the liberation movement. He is the archetypal political animal. His entire life has been the struggle. For Mbeki, the ANC wasn't an end in itself but a means to an end. He behaved like the ANC belonged to him. What he wanted, everyone in the ANC should want.

I have a prediction: he'll use institutions to fight back. Look at the events of the last few days. Manuel ostensibly resigned. He had reassured the market that he wasn't going to leave. He had sent out a message to the markets that he would be staying, and the effect was to pump up the rand. However, as soon as Mbeki resigns, Manuel says he's going. As a result the rand plummets. An hour later he says he will stay and the rand then stabilises. When Manuel is re-appointed the rand will go up. So Manuel used institutions to send a powerful political message to Joburg. Mantashe has become a symbol of disunity in the ANC. Johannesburg has just created instability.

Mbeki's an institutions man. He used rules for political ends. He was comfortable with state-craft. He would use powers and resources even against opponents. He has not taken kindly to ill-discipline. He is not a dictator, he's a disciplinarian. He has said 'I have been a loyal member of the ANC for 50 years and will continue to be a member'. He did not say that he'll continue to be a loyal member. He wrote Tambo and Mandela's speeches, he also wrote his own speeches; the office helped, but he had his own personal stamp on all the speeches. Many describe Sunday's speech as a dignified speech. How do you resign and do so without any emotion? I haven't seen more pregnant speech. The media said that Mbeki said thank you and goodbye. He never said goodbye. He said thank you, but he definitely didn't say goodbye. He thinks he will make a spectacular comeback. That may never happen; they may dig for dirt on him. He may be crazy, but he believes that he will make a comeback. He is not a peoples' person, he is comfortable in elite circles. He didn't know how to connect with the people and that counted against him.

My challenge to the respondent is that I believe that there has been a foreign policy narrative. It is commonly said that Mbeki's was not a foreign policy driven

by principles. I agree that it is not underpinned by ethnic, moral or human rights principles, but it is still highly principled. Sometimes it is too dogmatic in trying to apply logic in all political situations. What is this logic? It is a foreign policy in search of redress and development and using the means of state-craft and diplomacy to promote peace first and foremost. It aimed to bring an end to deadly conflict and war. For example, remember the outcry about Mbeki's policy toward the leaders of Burma, Iran, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Mbeki sought to bring peace first. To end conflict in Burma, it was necessary to talk to a dictator. He brought the narrative that you talk to any enemy no matter what the political circumstances. First you bring peace, then you promote democracy and state-building, and then you can have development. On the other hand, Mandela in 1997 goes to a summit in Malawi and calls Mugabe a tyrant. That was the last time he spoke to Mugabe. I once attended a conference where Mbeki addressed diplomats. The question was asked when Mbeki would recognise that his policy regarding Zimbabwe had failed. Mbeki said, 'your government can deal with Mugabe as it wishes, but I'd like to say that he still returns my phone-calls'. He said that he would rather keep the door open to influence the matters and bring about a huge change, even if it takes time. Mandela used another tactic and that was the last time he and Mugabe talked.

For Mbeki, the link is between the state and the economy and between peace and development. Mbeki is leaving behind an ambitious foreign policy. It is the last time for a long time that SA punches so much out of step with our size and our resources. Here is a modern Neru – the man who brought us the South-South co-operation, the architect of the India-Brazil-SA forum. With Blair (who suffered same fate as him), Mbeki saw the party as a means to an end for their goals. Sarkozy said Mbeki was the one that pushed for the G8 to be the G14. Mothlantele will occupy that seat on the G14. Mbeki wanted promises from the West for aid and debt relief in exchange for Africa committing to human rights.

I leave you with this curious question: Could it be that the man that grew up in the struggle, the man that was a dove in the diplomatic settlement and the man that has just been kicked out of the party will make a spectacular comeback in SA political life? He thinks he will. When he got booted out on Saturday, the final comment he made was that he had made the most lethal political mistake of his life standing against Zuma in Polokwane. He helped to remake Zuma. It has been unbelievable to watch how Zuma has recovered from a position where he was politically dead and ridiculed. It was a mistake. He stood up and it backfired.

Robert Schrire

I have a different take on things. Firstly, I'd suggest that we must think of what questions we must ask: What is South Africa's national interest? How was South Africa's foreign policy made? Was it essentially derivative of the interests of

society or the dreams of Mbeki? I disagree with Chris on many of these questions. As a warning, I am struck by the power of group-think in SA. This is where something spreads and automatically becomes true. Newspapers make statements before delegates are even chosen. Group-think happens when things that are not true become true because they are said.

I wrote an article about Mbeki in which I predicted what would happen. I said that Mbeki is a weak man full of fear and has a dark side. I said that the Nixon model will be his future. Mbeki wrote to a leading magazine criticising the article and they didn't publish it. He then went to the HRC saying that Schrire is a racist because he said Mbeki has a 'dark side'. He then wrote a book accusing Schrire of assassinating Hani.

There is a myth that Mbeki is the great enforcer and an efficient leader. If you know Mbeki, you will know that he is totally inefficient. He is like the wizard of Oz, when you take away the cloaks, there is nothing there. He's broken – he's created the circumstances for the rise of Zuma. It didn't occur to him that the people wouldn't want an Mbeki clone as the president's successor. Zuma is probably one of the less corrupt leaders in the ANC. He just hasn't been very good at hiding his corruption. Ironically, he has gotten caught for a relatively small amount of money. How could a competent, ruthless president have not destroyed Zuma. Zuma offered to resign from government in 2002. Mbeki said 'please stay'.

Mbeki is a workaholic - this is not a good thing. He should not be a workaholic if he's doing his job. Presidents should make critical decisions and assign the best person for the job. Mbeki was a meddler.

What are South Africa's interests? How far did Mbeki go to realise those interests? There are two sets of national interests. The first is South Africa's interest in prosperity, prestige and security. The biggest threat to this interest is a failure of our neighbour. Such a failure will lead to thousands flooding into South Africa. People say that this has led to xenophobia, but it has not. It is not xenophobia but people making claims on scarce resources.

Having identified this as an interest, we must ask if there were options relating to how to deal with it. Were there other policies that would've worked? Did Mbeki serve SA's key national interests? The answer is mixed.

The second set of interests goes to the values that foreign policy serves broadly. These include human rights, redistribution and poverty alleviation. Did Mbeki deal with human rights? Mandela epitomized the human rights-based approach. It's important to note that the decisions Mandela made would've resulted in him being jailed in other countries. But we needed our president to be a geriatric and

not overly-ambitious. The values that the new SA hoped to epitomize were carried out by Mandela. Mbeki, on the other hand, has been against enlightened motions that have come before the UN – against the condemnation of Burma and making rape an international crime. He always gives convoluted intellectual reasons that don't make sense.

Mbeki is not an intellectual. This is a good thing. I am scared of intellectuals as leaders. We need simple-minded people in government. This is what's killing Obama, he is too nuanced. The other guy just says yes, no, maybe. Mbeki's foreign policy is emotionally driven. The Zimbabwe policy is a clear example of emotion overriding reason and rationality. Why has quiet diplomacy continued over time? In order to stop something, do I say 'stop doing that' or do I say 'I'm a mediator and will not get involved'. Mbeki had reports of violence and vote-rigging but suppressed them. One emotion he exhibits is a visceral hatred of the West. He likes being an Englishman but hates the West. This results in SA losing credibility. Mbeki is the Embodiment of power politics. Unless SA's values are represented in foreign policy, no matter how clever the policy is, we will have a failed president and a failed foreign policy.

Annmarie: I do take exception to your comments about Madiba. I'm not completely objective as a chair.

I've been asked by the main speaker if he can make a quick response.

Chris:

This is a serious debate. We have two contrasting views. Robert, I genuinely hope that the Foreign Policy scholarly community of this country will go back to doing research. That would mean that people like us won't come here and represent as fact all the things said about individuals in the media.

You've terrorised a foreign policy actor that's been rewarded by the EU with a strategic partnership agreement. SA is the only African state to be rewarded with such an agreement. You can't say that this is the workings of an emotional man. You have relegated him to the realm of Reagan. He has been a Bismark. But to say that he's had no achievements is wrong. If Mandela left values, it does not mean that he has left a foreign policy. We must not make the mistake of taking information in the Argus and repeating what is said about a foreign policy actor and think that we have just given the audience a foreign policy analysis.

Robert:

I'd like to start with an obvious first point. In making a case one draws up stickmen and attacks them – each of us have done that. The question is how to evaluate SA's foreign policy. Unlike Chris, who didn't bring in a theoretical framework, I argued that we must ask who makes foreign policy, Mbeki or

someone else? To discuss Mbeki's legacy we must look at what Mbeki has done and what other actors have done. We must look at what is possible, such as looking at what is possible in Zimbabwe. That kind of debate has not taken place and is probably not appropriate in this context. Serious debate would require two speakers looking chronologically at foreign policy and analysing it. We have to see this as a debate where both sides have exaggerated.

#### Questions:

1. I want to respond to Schrire: Reagan was a prejudiced man. He didn't believe that black people had intellectual capacity. Mbeki was not incompetent. On AIDS, yes, but on the other facts, he was the architect of the AU and NEPAD and was responsible for peacemaking in the DRC, Burundi and Zimbabwe. He built up the largest surplus in history. He is responsible for growth, even if it is inequitable. The statement that it is an understandable response for people to kill each other - killing foreigners is xenophobia. To say otherwise is to be irresponsible as an academic.
2. What impact will Mbeki's ousting have on the settlement in Zimbabwe? Will there be a Stalemate? Will it all collapse?
3. Chris, isn't what you said about his manipulation of rules a contradiction with what you said about his work in multilateral institutions? He spent a lot of his time trying to restructure those institutions. It is my feeling that our position in those institutions is weaker, not stronger. The 5 minutes that Mbeki spent as the president of the Security Council ruined our chances of any future repetition. Surely working in a bilateral way wouldn't have undermined our position in those structures?
4. You said that Mbeki was a predictable and man of rules and regulations, but didn't he didn't apply them consistently. Regarding Burma, Mbeki was more concerned that the UN Security Council was the place where Burma was discussed. Mbeki is very pan-Africanist. He wants African problem solved with African solutions. Even in Zimbabwe, he waited until there were many massacres before acting. The same applies to Al Bashir. These two men belong in the Hague. When the Dalai Lama came, China tried to stop Mbeki from meeting him. Mbeki stood up to it. The second time he came, Mbeki listened to China. Mbeki doesn't care about the plight of the people. He cares about other things.
5. Mbeki's legacy is mixed. It can't be confined to AIDs, Zimbabwe etc. Chris, regarding Mbeki the intellectual, critics say that he consults less and has just created enemies for himself. Regarding Mbeki and Mugabe's relationship, if Mbeki approaches him as a son, will Mugabe respond as a father?

6. Chris, you made a comment that the removal of Mbeki was an unconstitutional push. Please elaborate on the unconstitutional removal. Mbeki was deployed by the ANC where they saw fit. I think that saying that it is an unconstitutional push because there may be constitutional questions around Nicholson's judgments is not correct.

Answers:

Chris:

I'll start with the last question. In today's Star Newspaper, they asked if this is a coup. If the court in November rules in favour of Zuma, there'll be a permanent stay of prosecution. If that happens then it is over. No-one will be able to proceed with charges against Zuma. Regarding it being unconstitutional, I don't think this is an unconstitutional removal of Mbeki. One of two things could happen in the next three months: firstly, the NPA wins their appeal. This is a problem because Montashe said too much. He shouldn't have bought the court ruling into it so much. Mbeki can say that he was removed on basis of judgment that wrong. Secondly, if the NPA loses its appeal, but Mbeki wins his appeal regarding his political interference, then we will be in a monumental mess. The man removed on the basis of a judgment as was Zuma. If the courts reverse the judgment regarding Mbeki's interference, there will be consequences.

Robert, to prove that I used theory and you used none, I'd like to note that I introduced the notion of personality in foreign policy. That is foreign policy theory. The role of institutions is theory. The narrative is pursuing developmental redress by using institutions. You said he didn't pursue any goals.

The AU has introduced for first time an intervention doctrine that acts against gross violations of human rights, genocide or undemocratic changes of government. It is imbued with values. Schrire has turned Mandela's foreign policy into a superstar foreign policy. We must not change the foreign policy into the principles that Mandela stood for. He told the president of Malawi that he doesn't uphold human rights and he doesn't like it. They didn't talk again.

Mbeki's investments in peacekeeping are used as a means to bolster his chances of being elected to the Security Council. He's upset us on Burma. But SA will get the nod from all of the western powers including the US. The question is which other African states will get seats. But if Africa chooses who gets a seat, SA will lose to Egypt and Nigeria. Mbeki has struck a balance. There is logic there. What apart from shouting rights is Mandela's foreign policy strategy? Unlike Schrire, I believe that Mbeki had ambitious goals and went about achieving them systematically. We can show that there's a G 14. All positions Mbeki held after he left his foreign policy office are not the same as when he was

on foreign policy. I don't think that the ANC will ever open the books regarding who gave them money. Many dictators did, both when Mandela and Mbeki were there. Here is man that tried to operate in a realm of real world politics. The most intelligent thing Schrire has said is that Mbeki is a controversial person. His foreign policy is not neo-liberal or Marxist. It waivers between the two and depending on the issue he stresses either one of them. It seems like a foreign policy dealing with the real world and not value-filled fancy-free policy.

Regarding Mugabe and Mbeki, they do not have a father-son relationship, this is an overstatement. If you want to understand Mbeki's foreign policy in totality: Schrire said that the issue in Zimbabwe is that there is a human rights crisis and a dictator. Others say the crisis is economic and others say it is caused by colonisation. Others say that it is a governance crisis and others that it is a lack of peace. Mbeki has concluded a peace deal that identifies all of these as problems. He takes a broad view of problems and as a result he makes contradictions and mistakes but there is an underlying logic to it all. Mbeki introduced the right to protect and this was accepted by the AU as a value in Africa. Mbeki first gets a value on the book and then treats it as a process. He tried to engage Al Bashir to live up to it. His mission is to bring peace and believes that if you throw a dictator into jail you'll lose peace. What Mbeki did to Al Bashir, Mandela did to the white Afrikaner state. De Klerk has two pensions, one from the new South Africa and one from the old regime. Mbeki didn't fight them because if he had the white people would've taken everything. This man has done in SA to white people what Mbeki's done to Mugabe. Both were situations dealing with dictators. It shows that there is a pragmatism that's been applied both at home and in foreign policy.

Robert:

I'd like to make a few conceptual points: Firstly, I'm not saying that South African foreign policy should be only value-driven and not interest-driven. We agree that we need a realistic foreign policy that represents the country's interests. But policy is about choices regarding the allocation of scarce resources. Mbeki's choices achieved little. Look at South Africa's progress and the recognition of its importance as a player – this is not due to Mbeki. We are faced with a bunch of mirages. One example is the AU, but how is it an improvement on the OAU. It wasn't the rest of the world that destroyed Nepad. Look at the DRC and Zimbabwe, they are cases of high aspirations and low achievements. They are tragedies of what could've been and wasn't. Zimbabwe shows how Mbeki had a lack of compassion for people. I'm not saying that that foreign policy is based on compassion, but there are other factors beyond real politick. Mbeki was never able to communicate compassion.

A few more quick points: When I spoke of Reagan, I was referring to management style and not his views on race. I wasn't suggesting that he was a

good president. I was simply saying that delegation is good. Being a workaholic is not necessarily good.

Regarding xenophobia, in SA, poor people are trying to claim resources. You can understand that. I am not trying to condone violence and brutality; I'm saying that one can understand the nature of the frustrations leading to it.

Is settlement of Zimbabwe hurt or helped? It could be a good thing: the MDC has ties with Zuma so that's good. However, it may be a bad thing if Mbeki was the glue that holds things together and Zuma doesn't prioritise Zimbabwe.

I believe that Chris misunderstood the dynamic, because Mbeki can win every case he enters into, but there is still only one reality – when the chief executive loses the confidence of the party that's it, he won't come back from this. If they adhere to legal niceties, then that's all it is. Thank you and good night.

Questions:

7. Chris, regarding rules and regulations being central to Mbeki's views and Mbeki being unwilling to bend the rules – you claim this but you also claim that he is a Machiavelli that uses rules for power. Which one is it? It is a serious concern for SA that democratic institutions are under attack. I was wondering if a value-driven approach would not give more integrity to the way this is handled. South African's are picking up the Machiavellian abuse of institutions.
8. Our president was admired for his contribution in the African continent. He has been a father of nativism. Surely this just fosters xenophobia and has created animosity amongst Africans?
9. What relevance is the composition of the late president's Economic Advisory Council – they are all monopolistic capitalists. Regarding the meddling in the DRC, what is the legacy of mineral resources in DRC and who had their hands on those in the beginning and who has them now?
10. If we look at South Africa's investment on the continent we see that there has been an explosion of SA business on the continent. What is legacy of Mbeki's foreign policy on the business community?
11. Mbeki withdrew a lot following Polokwane. The only time he broke the ice on the African continent was following the xenophobia attacks. Did he foresee problems of the kind we see now after Polokwane and did he think it would affect his foreign policy negatively?

Chris:

Mbeki's character is not an 'either or'. You can call it a contradiction, but it's a point about understanding the man. The NPA is a good example; Mbeki was planning to sit on the bill for the removal of the scorpions – he was going to sit on it until he left office in April. It was the crowd coming in that wanted the Scorpions

out. He creates institutions and uses them lethally against his opponents. Mbeki the Renaissance Man was the Machiavelli, not only the manipulative and ruthless Mbeki. Cyril was one of the most vocal ones in asking him to go because of the way Mbeki had treated him in the past.

Regarding Advisory Councils, Schrire and I differ in our views. There's a view that Mbeki doesn't consult and that he doesn't take advice seriously. You just demonstrated that – he sets up an AIDS council with 50% dissidents and 50% medical doctors, it then influences policy and he takes the advice seriously. In fact, he takes it too seriously. The problem is not if he takes advice seriously or not, the problem is who he excludes from advisory councils and who he includes. For example, look at GEAR, he included those with his views.

Regarding the DRC, Mbeki believes in the developmental state project. COSATU will learn that the developmental state grows whether you're on the left or the right. Mbeki used the ANC to push through his ideology and has paid a heavy price. Business hasn't needed to steer foreign policy because in Mbeki's foreign policy business has a fundamental role to play. Did they exploit in the process and export apartheid? Yes they did.

Finally, Mbeki is passionately pro-sovereignty when it comes to the West telling African countries what to do. Race is at the forefront. He is a fiercely single-minded man that will stop at nothing to achieve his goal.

I didn't answer the question about Mbeki. Schrire failed to inform you that the ANC has already asked Mbeki to continue in the negotiating role in Zimbabwe. Schrire should've known that. Mbeki, by sending Manuel back, will now capture economic policy. Whose bluff will be called on economic policy? Blade and Vavi's bluff. Mbeki's foreign policy and domestic policies will live longer into future than we think. The prince is leaving the kitchen but the stew has been cooked already.

Schrire: I have one comment. The latest, 5 minutes ago, news is that there is debate regarding whether Mbeki will continue in his negotiating role. It is not cut and dried. The ANC will give him space, but Mbeki's own office said he was negotiating as the president. We can't just assume he'll continue. If Chris is right, Mbeki will be putting out fires in South Africa and will be too occupied for Zimbabwe..

Adebajo:

My own assessment is that no prophet is honoured in his own land. I think Schrire needs to travel in Africa and talk to Africans to learn a few things about them. Is Schrire an intellectual in Africa? 3 million people have died in the DRC, if South Africa can stop the violence, then they will be grateful. South Africa

has gone in and established peace. Let's see if it happens in Southern Africa. I think Schrire has seriously misunderstood Mbeki.