

ADDRESS BY THABO MBEKI AT THE FIFTH AL JAZEERA ANNUAL FORUM: DOHA, QATAR: MAY 24, 2010.

***Talking to the Enemy:
the South African Experience.***

In October 1989 I led a delegation of our liberation movement, the ANC, to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Our presence presented our host, the Government of Malaysia, with the small problem of where to accommodate us. The Government had reserved rooms for us at the same hotel where the then British Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher, would stay.

The Malaysian officials informed us that the famous Iron Lady objected to this arrangement as she could not imagine herself sharing a hotel with terrorists. This meant that we had to be relocated to another hotel which, as it happened, was quite some distance away from where the Iron Lady was accommodated.

Nevertheless, to be fair to the then British government, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and later Prime Minister, John Major, agreed to meet us, despite our rather low standing in the eyes of his principal.

Earlier still, in 1987, the then well-known spokesperson of Prime Minister Thatcher, Bernard Ingham, had said: "The ANC is a typical terrorist organisation... Anyone who thinks it is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land".

Similarly in 1986, then US Congressman, and later Vice President to George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, voted against a House of Representatives resolution calling for the release of Nelson Mandela and recognition of the African National Congress.

Many years later, as the Republican Party Vice Presidential candidate, Mr Cheney defended his vote and said: "The ANC was then viewed as a terrorist organisation...I don't have any problems at all with the vote I cast 20 years ago."

On August 15, 1985, the year before Dick Cheney cast his NO vote, the people of South Africa and the rest of the world held their breath as they awaited the delivery of what was billed as the "Rubicon speech" by the then President of apartheid South Africa, P.W. Botha.

South Africa was sinking into an ever deeper crisis owing to the intense struggle within the country, the growing financial unaffordability of the maintenance of white minority rule, and the impact of international sanctions.

In the light of all this it was expected that President P.W. Botha would make some dramatic announcements committing his party and government to ending the apartheid system, possibly including an offer to talk to the principal enemy of the apartheid regime, the ANC.

However this was not to be. Botha steadfastly refused to cross the promised Rubicon.

Among other things he said:

"I know for a fact that most leaders in their own right in South Africa and reasonable South Africans will not accept the principle of one-man-one-vote in a unitary system. That would lead to chaos. Consequently, I reject it as a solution...

"I am not prepared to lead White South Africans and other minority groups on a road to abdication and suicide. Destroy White South Africa and our influence, and this country will drift into factional strife, chaos and poverty...

"I stated in Parliament...that if Mr Mandela gives a commitment that he will not make himself guilty of planning, instigating or committing acts of violence for the furtherance of political objectives, I will, in principle, be prepared to consider his release...

"The violence of our enemies is a warning to us. We, who are committed to peaceful negotiation, also have a warning to them...Don't push us too far in your own interests...

"The tragedy is that hostile pressure and agitation from abroad have acted as an encouragement to the militant revolutionaries in South Africa to continue with their violence and intimidation...

"Look what (the revolutionaries) have done to Africa, a continent that is dying at present...I have the facts and I am not going to hand South Africa over to these revolutionaries to do the same to this lovely country."

In 1984 some white Afrikaner academics indicated interest in meeting the ANC outside South Africa. Botha prohibited these academics from undertaking this mission, saying: "I will not let you talk to murderers!"

Thus apartheid President Botha was categorical that his regime:

- was opposed to the transformation of South Africa into a normal non-racial democracy;
- would not abandon the hegemony of the white minority;
- was not willing to release Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners;
- would not engage the ANC in negotiations;
- would only 'negotiate' with its paid placemen in the Bantustan system; and,
- was ready to use maximum force to maintain itself in power.

Despite all this, strangely, the then US National Security Adviser, Robert McFarlane, described Botha's speech as an "important statement" which he said the US administration was studying carefully.

To disguise the obvious meaning and intent of the speech, the then US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, suggested that Botha's remarks were "written in a code language of a polarized society and are not easily interpreted."

Earlier, in 1981, Chester Crocker had informed Ministers of the apartheid regime that "the top priority (of the Reagan administration) is to stop Soviet encroachment in Africa". In this context he said that the US should work "to end South Africa's polecat status in the world, and seek to restore its place as a legitimate and important regional actor with whom we can cooperate pragmatically."

Two years earlier in 1979, in an article in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Crocker had said:

“By its nature and history South Africa is a part of the Western experience and an integral part of the Western economic system. In addition, the exigencies of U.S. domestic politics rule out disengagement, (i.e. the isolation of the apartheid regime).”

In 1980 he told a South Africa journalist that “all Reagan knows about southern Africa is that he's on the side of the whites.”

To confirm the racist prejudices that informed much of the thinking about South Africa – the domestic US exigencies to which Chester Crocker had referred – on March 14, 1986, the conservative US magazine, *National Review*, posed the question: “To what extent is the vast majority of South African blacks intellectually and practically prepared to assume the social, economic, and political leadership in a highly industrialized country?”

The then President of the ANC, the late Oliver Tambo, met the then US Secretary of State, George Schultz, at the State Department in Washington D.C. in February 1987, this being the first official contact between the ANC and the US government.

In a meeting in London to prepare for this meeting Chester Crocker bluntly told the ANC delegation that the meeting would take place because our armed actions had begun to claim the lives of white South Africans, and thus obliged the US government to talk to us.

On another occasion, in his usually blunt manner, he said that – South Africa was too important to be left to the South Africans!

The burden of the story we have been seeking to tell is that less than five years before we began our formal talks with the apartheid regime, the reality was that:

- that enemy, the apartheid regime, felt that it still disposed of sufficient strength to enable it to perpetuate its rule by force;
- it was therefore confident that it could both defeat the all-round struggle waged by our broad movement for national liberation and withstand the impact of international sanctions;

- it felt that it could divide the black oppressed and use some leaders it recognised and kept on its payroll to persuade significant sections of the oppressed to cooperate with the regime, and thus turn their backs on the liberation movement, communicating the canard that black and white had concluded an agreement providing for peaceful coexistence between black and white;
- the major Western powers viewed the apartheid regime as their strategic partner in their Cold War struggle to isolate the Soviet Union from independent Africa, and therefore did what they could at least not to weaken it and at best to support it; and,
- accordingly, they adopted the same posture as the apartheid regime towards its principal enemy, the ANC, ready to join the regime in denouncing and isolating our movement as a terrorist organisation and an instrument of Moscow.

It is a mark of how deeply entrenched this view had become that even as late as 1989, when the apartheid regime had already accepted that it had to talk to the ANC, Prime Minister Thatcher still found it unacceptable that she could so much as stay in the same hotel with members of the ANC!

Indeed, Prime Minister Thatcher refused to the end, to respond positively to requests in the House of Commons to make a statement supporting a non-racial democracy in SA. However, sometime in 1989 when the inevitability of negotiations increasingly became evident, Mrs Thatcher privately offered herself and the then British High Commissioner to South Africa as “mediators”.

The lessons we should draw from what I have said are that when the enemy felt that it had the means to defeat its opponents, and knew that it could count on the support of powerful allies in the Western world, it was not possible even to think of negotiations as a realistic option.

The obvious conclusion from this is that for a peaceful resolution of the South African conflict to be possible, it was necessary:

- further to weaken the apartheid regime, forcing it to realise that its very attempt to perpetuate itself in power planted the seeds for its defeat; and,

- to weaken or neutralise its international support base, obliging the regime to understand that it had been placed in an untenable situation of permanent strategic international isolation.

As Botha had indicated, the apartheid regime was not ready and willing to negotiate itself out of power. The question must surely arise – was the liberation movement, for its part, ready and willing to attain its goals through a process of negotiations!

In this regard the historical reality is that from its very foundation in 1912, the ANC had preferred a negotiated resolution of the South African conflict. Even when it decided to engage in armed struggle in 1961, and onwards, it remained committed to such a negotiated resolution of the South African conflict.

As an aside, it is important to note that at all times the organisation insisted that the armed struggle should be secondary to the mass political struggle. Accordingly, the armed formation was strictly subordinate to the political leadership and could take no positions acting as an autonomous political institution, depending on the 'mother body' to serve as its political leader, voice and representative.

The ANC was banned in 1960 and decided to engage in armed struggle in 1961. And yet during the same 1961, the ANC formally wrote to the head of the then triumphant apartheid regime, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, proposing a negotiated resolution of the South African conflict.

In a 20 April 1961 letter to the Prime Minister, Nelson Mandela wrote:

"I am directed by the All-In African National Action Council to address your Government in the following terms...:

"Conference carefully considered the grave political situation facing the African people today...and pointed to numerous facts and incidents which indicate the rapid manner in which race relations are deteriorating in this country.

"It was the earnest opinion of Conference that this dangerous situation could be averted only by the calling of a sovereign National

Convention representative of all South Africans, to draw up a new non-racial and democratic Constitution. Such a convention would discuss our national problems in a sane and sober manner, and would work out solutions which sought to preserve and safeguard the interests of all sections of the population.

“Conference unanimously decided to call upon your Government to summon such a convention before 31 May (1961).”

In a second letter to Prime Minister Verwoerd, on June 26, 1961, given that the latter had not even so much as acknowledged receipt of the first, Nelson Mandela said:

“The Conference Resolution which was attached to my letter indicated that if your Government did not call this Convention by the specific date, country-wide demonstrations would be staged to mark our protest against the White Republic forcibly imposed on us by a minority. The Resolution further indicated that in addition to the demonstrations, the African people would be called upon not to cooperate with the Republican Government, or with any Government based on force...

“We know that your Government will once again unleash all its fury and barbarity to persecute the African people. But as the result of the last strike has proved, no power on earth can stop an oppressed people, determined to win their freedom. History punishes those who resort to force and fraud to suppress the claims and legitimate aspirations of the majority of the country's citizens.”

On May 23, 1961 Nelson Mandela had written another letter to the Leader of the Opposition in the white parliament, Sir de Villiers Graff, in which he said:

“We realise that aspects of our proposal (for a National Convention) raise complicated problems. What shall be the basis of representation at the Convention? How shall the representatives be elected? But these are not the issues now at stake. The issue now is a simple one. Are all groups to be consulted before a constitutional change is made? Or only the White minority? A decision on this matter cannot be delayed. Once that decision is taken, then all other matters, of how, when and where, can be discussed, and agreement on them can be reached. On our part the door to such discussion has always been

open. We have approached you and your Party before, and suggested that matters of difference be discussed. To date we have had no reply: Nevertheless we still hold the door open. But the need now is not for debate about differences of detail, but for clarity of principle and purpose. (Are you) For a National Convention of all races? Or (are you) against?"

As it happens, that National Convention was finally held just over 30 years later, on December 20 and 21, 1991, when the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) met in Johannesburg, among those present being the delegations of the apartheid National Party and government, and the ANC, the historical enemies that had occupied opposing trenches for many decades.

The 'complicated problems' to which Nelson Mandela had referred in 1961, about - What shall be the basis of representation at the Convention? How shall the representatives be elected? - did indeed arise, and were resolved.

As he had foreseen, "Once that decision (to hold the National Convention) is taken, then all other matters, of how, when and where, can be discussed, and agreement on them can be reached."

But what had happened which brought South Africa to the historic turning point of the convening of CODESA?

There are three essential points we would like to make in this regard.

One is that, as we have indicated, our all-round struggle inside the country succeeded to weaken the apartheid regime, forcing it to accept that it could not defeat the liberation movement and, in addition, could not both resist fundamental change and guarantee the long-term security of the white population.

Thus it came to understand that it was the very perpetuation of the apartheid system which constituted a threat to the security of the population it represented.

The second is that it came to realise that it could not rely on the support of the Western governments and corporations since these could not disrespect the powerful anti-apartheid movements that had developed in their countries, which represented a strong and

sustained anti-apartheid sentiment among the electorate and therefore also the domestic customers of the relevant corporations.

Equally, it came to realise that its international campaign to demonise the ANC and its leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, had failed. It therefore understood that the harder it tried to maintain its posture in this regard, the more it alienated itself from the Western world which it considered an important partner and ally.

The third is that as the economy contracted, accompanied by the drying up of inflows of foreign capital., This reduced the resources it needed to fight the liberation movement inside the country, to wage war against, and destabilise, the countries of Southern Africa as well as maintain its colonial hold on Namibia, and to bribe especially the black population in the country by belatedly increasing the budget allocations to address the pressing needs of the majority of the people.

Thus apartheid became unaffordable as its perpetuation would have meant the diversion of resources away from the white population, provoking its disaffection, and had already resulted in a high and increasing budget deficit which would inevitably push the country into a debt trap.

For our part we understood that the regime had no choice but to negotiate. We therefore prepared for this eventuality, knowing that this outcome constituted an important victory of our struggle, on which we had to build to achieve our strategic goal of the liberation of all our people from apartheid rule by the most peaceful means possible.

In this regard we also sought to minimise the loss of life among the oppressed, who would have been the major victims of any process of intensified repression, on which the regime would inevitably embark if it felt truly cornered, with no escape routes.

An important element in the weakening of the regime was the abandonment by significant sections of the upper echelons of Afrikaner and white society of the posture that white minority rule had to be defended at all costs.

Thus, even as the regime continued to oppose all contact with the ANC, members of these upper echelons met directly with us. Objectively what happened is that even before the negotiations started, a broad consensus had developed between the liberation movement and relatively large sections of the broad white leadership around the need and the possibility to build a non-racial democracy, which would not constitute a threat to the security of the white population.

Thus, in its own interest, the enemy had to act to avoid the contagion in white society that would arise if the sections of the white leadership which were talking to the ANC were allowed the time themselves to interact with larger sections of the white population, and therefore convince more white people to embrace the vision of a post-apartheid South Africa.

Since repression had failed to stop the interaction between the ANC and white South Africa, it was surely in the interest of the regime to insert itself as the sole interlocutor with the ANC and therefore the only channel of communication between the liberation movement and the white population as a whole.

To achieve this goal, it had no choice but to talk to the ANC.

None of the foregoing meant that we had defeated the apartheid regime, in much the same way that the regime had not defeated the liberation movement.

However it would be wrong to argue that a stalemate had arisen represented by the inability of both sides to continue the offensive, one to defeat the other. There was no such stalemate.

The apartheid regime had immense capacity to continue its violent resistance. However it understood that even if it continued to resist change, ultimately it would be defeated. Thus it would then be obliged to confront a humiliating surrender, with incalculable consequences.

Rather than surrender in such circumstances, it saw the negotiations as the only way through which it could bargain for the sharing of power, so that it could sacrifice something in order, in return, to avoid losing everything.

Similarly, the liberation movement also had immense capacity further to intensify its offensive. However, even as it understood that its struggle had succeeded to oblige the regime to negotiate, it was also aware of the capacity of its enemy to impose a high cost on the people by killing large numbers among the oppressed.

We were therefore cognisant of the fact that the process of negotiations would oblige us to enter into compromises to take on board the interests, fears and aspirations of the oppressor population. However, we were determined that through the negotiations we should achieve the central goal of the formation of a democratically elected government.

Thus we too were prepared to forego certain gains in order to achieve the strategic goal of the peaceful transfer of political power to the people as a whole.

In this regard we must also make the point that whereas the apartheid regime did not have time on its side, because it would lose power, the liberation movement had the advantage that it could bide its time with regard to the realisation of all its goals, because it was confident that it would win power through democratic elections.

This means that the liberation movement understood that however long it took to defeat the enemy, it was bound to emerge as the victor, whereas the apartheid regime knew that regardless of how long it could postpone its demise, in the end it would be the loser.

This created the challenging situation that the liberation movement, being morally and strategically the stronger force, had to take the lead in creating the space to ensure that as much as possible, the outcome of the negotiations should address both black aspirations and white fears.

It was in this context that we proposed that among other things, the negotiations should result in the formation of a Government of National Unity. By this means we sought to ensure that the party of apartheid should not abruptly lose all power, but that it should have the possibility to be represented in the executive that would be formed after our country's first democratic elections.

In this way the erstwhile ruling party would have a stake in the future, which would discourage it from seeking to reintroduce or cling to the past by resort to counter-revolution, simply because it had lost all power.

Thus we also sought to position our erstwhile enemy so that it had the capacity to bring its constituency into the democratic settlement, relating especially to the security forces, the civil service and the business community. All these had been formed during the colonial and apartheid period, and largely served as an integral part of the system of apartheid.

Having obliged the enemy to accept that it had to surrender its absolute power, we had to put ourselves in the shoes of the oppressor, to use a popular saying. This meant that however much we might disagree with these, we had to respect the demands tabled by the oppressor, and address them honestly, but in a manner that would not undermine the realisation of the goals of the democratic revolution.

It was as a result of this strategic posture that, among other things, we agreed not to retrench the old order civil servants and also agreed that the national Constitution should include a section providing for the exercise of the right to self-determination.

We agreed to the latter because the fear of democratic rule led significant numbers among the Afrikaner population to demand the right to sovereign statehood within a territory to be defined, in which they could enjoy some form of self-government as well as an untrammelled right to their language, culture and religion.

In this regard we calculated that the fact of winning this Constitutional right to self-determination would give these white people, petrified by the future, the assurance that the democratic order would address their fears and aspirations, and therefore that it was in their interest to support and be part of the process of peaceful democratic change.

Naturally it was not only white concerns that we had to address. We also had to respond to serious concerns in our own ranks, to ensure that at all times we sustained the greatest possible unity of both our movement and the oppressed people as a whole.

Of particular importance within our ranks was the disbelief among many that the enemy was serious about the intention actually to negotiate an end to the apartheid system. This resulted in deep misgivings about the wisdom of surrendering such forms of resistance as the armed struggle and sanctions in a situation in which victory had not yet been achieved.

Fears in this regard were reinforced by the violence against the masses represented by our movement, which took place throughout the period of negotiations, perpetrated by unidentified groups which we characterised as a "third force" secretly put in place and activated by the same regime with which we were negotiating.

Twice we suspended the negotiations because of this violence. But in the end we decided that it was a strategic mistake to allow those intent to resorting to violence to determine whether the negotiations should proceed or not.

In the end we came to the view that the only way to end the violence would be the formation of a democratically elected government and therefore that it was in our interest to conclude the negotiations as quickly as possible, refusing to be deterred by the continuing violence.

To return to the issue we raised earlier, we succeeded to maintain the unity of both the broad democratic movement and the masses of our people throughout the process of negotiations, essentially because of the organised strength of the political movement led by the ANC, which enabled us to provide the necessary political leadership.

In this context we must also mention the fact that as part of the objective to achieve this unity, we worked to bring into a United Front all the political formations that had a base among the black oppressed, with mixed results.

I must also mention that, by mutual agreement among the contending forces, the South African negotiations were conducted without any external mediation.

The ANC feared that such external mediation would bring in strong Western forces which would seek to promote their interests and those of the white minority, obliging the liberation movement to compromise its goals.

For its part, the apartheid regime feared that such external mediation would bring in international forces which had, over the years, defined themselves as opponents of apartheid and therefore supporters of the objectives of the liberation movement.

At the same time both the ANC and the National Party/apartheid regime believed that they understood the South African challenges better than any external force could, and had the capacity, on their own, to find the delicately balanced settlement that would be needed to resolve the South African conflict.

Driven in part by its concern to 'domesticate' the process of negotiations, and thus avoid the imposition of an externally-generated plan, in 1989 the ANC elaborated a document on the South African negotiations, known as The Harare Declaration, which was formally adopted by the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement and the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Among other things, this Declaration recognised and accepted the sovereign right of the people of South Africa to conduct the process of negotiations on their own.

As adopted by the UN General Assembly, repeating what the original had said, the Declaration said:

"We would therefore encourage the people of South Africa, as part of their legitimate struggle, to join together to negotiate an end to the apartheid system and agree on all the measures that are necessary to transform their country into a non-racial democracy."

In this regard we insisted that the possibility for us to negotiate a settlement on our own, was a necessary expression of the struggle we had waged for many decades to exercise the right to determine our future, the right to self-determination.

The open process of negotiations, of talking to the enemy, took almost 4 years, from 1990 to 1994. It proved to be a complex process but which in the end proved to be unstoppable.

As I have already indicated, during the negotiations we made the proposal to the enemy that the final agreement should include a so-called 'sunset clause' which, among others, would provide that the apartheid National Party would form part of a governing coalition during the first five years of our democracy.

This led to the formation of the Government of National Unity.

I mention this once again because of its critical importance in the process of persuading the party of apartheid to enter into an agreement that would end white minority rule.

Before and during the process of negotiations, the apartheid regime had consistently put forward the notion of 'power-sharing', proposing formulae that were obviously completely unacceptable to the liberation movement.

However, in time it became clear to us that what was blocking speedy movement forward in the negotiations was the regime's fear of loss of power.

Even though over the years the leaders of this regime had come to understand the aims, objectives and nature of the ANC better, they nevertheless continued to harbour significant mistrust about our intentions.

In this regard they had clearly fallen prisoner to their own propaganda of many years, as a result of which they continued to entertain the suspicion that the ANC was quite possibly a perfidious and cunning communist front which, once it acceded to power, would impose on the country some disastrous 'communist' project, including the nationalisation of all white-owned property.

At the same time, of course, it viewed the forthcoming democratic elections as a zero-sum game which would result in the establishment of black power, which would, overnight, replace white power.

On December 21, 1990, like the other parties to the negotiations, the ruling apartheid National Party signed the CODESA Declaration of Intent. The apartheid regime also signed to commit itself to the Declaration.

Among other things, the Declaration committed all signatories to negotiate a Constitution which would "ensure that South Africa will be a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist state in which sovereign authority is exercised over the whole of its territory...(and in which) there will be a multi-party democracy..."

However, despite the fact that it had signed the Declaration, the regime was determined that when the democratic elections took place, these should not result in its total loss of power, even if it lost the elections – hence its insistence that the new Constitution should include a provision for the implementation of its version of 'power-sharing'.

When we 'put ourselves in the shoes' of the enemy, we accepted the rationality of its fear, within its conceptual paradigm, of the total loss of power, and understood that fully to commit the regime to the negotiations, we had to find ways of addressing this fear rather than just rejecting it out of hand.

I believe that it was when we presented the regime with our own version of power-sharing that finally we cleared the way to the conclusion of the negotiations which gave birth to a democratic South Africa.

Looked at with the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that during the negotiations the party of apartheid would necessarily focus specifically on the issue of power for itself.

To the contrary, the ANC knew that it had the advantage of numbers in terms of what would constitute the electorate, and was therefore virtually assured of being elected to power. Accordingly all we needed to do was to insist that any government that would be formed should emerge from elections conducted on the basis of the principle and practice of one-person-one-vote, and therefore argue that all we were saying was that – the people shall govern!

For its part, the apartheid National Party knew that it had a very narrow electoral base, constituting less than 20 percent of the South African population. Naturally, given our country's history, it sought to ensure that ways were found that this minority should also participate in the exercise of power in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The undertaking by the liberation movement that it would ensure that this happened, in the form of the Government of National Unity, which was ultimately enshrined in the Interim Constitution, created the possibility for the regime finally to accept to complete the process leading to the conclusion of the Interim Democratic Constitution.

When we consulted the various governments in Southern Africa as we prepared the Harare Declaration, one of the leaders in the region, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, advised us that we should integrate into our planning the fact that as much as the apartheid regime had not defeated us, neither had we defeated it.

In plain language he said – do not seek to defeat in the negotiations an enemy you have not defeated on the battlefield! But also do not allow the enemy to defeat you in the negotiations, whereas it had failed to defeat you on the battlefield!

He warned that any other posture would result in a failure of the process of negotiations, which would create an immensely difficult strategic situation for the liberation movement, because it would be difficult to remobilise both the domestic and international forces to resume the offensive which had forced the apartheid regime into retreat.

The CODESA Declaration of Intent and the Government of National Unity were born of this advice.

With regard to the Declaration, Mwalimu Nyerere had advised that since correctly we insisted that the new democratic Constitution should be drafted and adopted by a democratically elected Constituent Assembly, we should, before hand, to persuade the enemy to accept the proposal about an elected Assembly, negotiate Constitutional Principles with the enemy, which would be binding on the elected Constituent Assembly, which he said would obviously have an overwhelming ANC majority.

Indeed the Declaration detailed 6 (six) provisions that would have to be reflected in the new Constitution, which commitment was indeed fully honoured by the elected Constitutional Assembly.

Al Jazeera invited us to address this Forum on the topic - Talking to the Enemy: the South African Experience.

We should perhaps conclude with some of the most important lessons specific to this experience.

One of these is that the path to the negotiations became possible once the dominant ruling power in our country realised that it could not achieve its objectives by any other means, including by continuing resort to the considerable means of repression it had at its disposal.

This realisation was not based on any refusal by the apartheid security forces to carry out their commands, but on the understanding by the political leadership that:

- the process of repression only served to draw ever larger numbers of people into the liberation struggle, indicating that this repression, however brutal, would not defeat the liberation movement;
- the regime was losing the support of the leading echelons among the Afrikaner and white population, opening up the prospect of a fatal division of the white population and the desertion of the black client formations;
- the national economy had entered into decline and was getting into the position that it could not generate the resources the regime needed to maintain itself in power;
- the situation had evolved that, with the loss of the support of the major Western powers, its international isolation would be complete, whereas its enemy, our liberation movement, would gain universal acceptance and support: in this regard the regime also had to take into account the reality that it had lost its war to subjugate Angola, and had had to agree to the independence of Namibia, which brought its 'outer defence perimeter' to the very borders of South Africa.

- it needed to engage in negotiations before it was defeated – while it remained the governing authority – to secure as much power for itself as possible, taking into account the changed balance of forces.

The second is that because the liberation movement had always preferred the strategic option of a negotiated settlement, it was not difficult for this movement to agree to and engage in negotiations once it was convinced that the struggle it had waged had obliged the enemy to negotiate.

The third is that the negotiations became possible once, from the beginning, there was agreement on the fundamental objective pursued by the liberation movement from its foundation, and therefore a necessary outcome of the negotiations process – the creation of a democratic and non-racial South Africa.

The fourth is that the negotiations were facilitated by the fact that despite the participation of 19 separate political entities in the negotiations, in reality there were two dominant forces – the ANC and the National Party/apartheid regime: ultimately the negotiating parties agreed that when these two reached an agreement this would be accepted as representing an agreement by what was categorised as “sufficient consensus”.

This meant that outside of these two formations there would not emerge other forces with sufficient strength and support to derail the process of negotiations. And indeed the two principal belligerents took the necessary steps to obviate this possibility.

The fifth is that the liberation movement understood that it was strategically the leading force in the negotiations, had most to gain from the process, and therefore had the principal obligation to ensure the success of the negotiations: for this reason it accepted that it would have to enter into some compromises favouring its enemy, and thus avoid seeking a winner-take-all outcome, to encourage the regime to accept the fundamental political goal of the liberation movement of the formation of a democratically elected government.

The sixth is that because of the absence of any external mediator, the negotiating parties could focus on the real issues that would bring

their constituencies into the settlement, without having to proceed in a manner that would have to take into account whatever might have been the views and interests of international interlocutors acting as mediators: this also meant that the negotiating parties had to take full ownership of the outcomes of the negotiations, with no possibility to renege on the basis that external mediators had obliged them to accept propositions with which they were not comfortable.

The seventh and last of these lessons was that effectively the Soviet Union had collapsed. This deprived the regime of the possibility to secure the support of the major Western governments on the basis that it was their ally in the struggle to defeat 'Soviet domination' first of South Africa and of Africa as a whole. In this context we must also mention the decision taken by the Government of Zimbabwe to postpone any action to resolve the land question in their country. The leadership of independent Zimbabwe understood that radical land reform in their country would have alarmed the apartheid regime, encouraging it to oppose the negotiations, on the basis that the ANC would follow the Zimbabwe example and dispossess the South African whites of their land and property.

In a spirit of 'glasnost', of transparency, we must report that Al Jazeera originally asked us to address this Forum on the relevance or otherwise of the South African experience of 'talking to the enemy' to the struggle to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Informed by the principle that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread' we chose to be an angel and declined this offer, agreeing only to give an account of the South African experience, conscious as we are of the complexity of the critically important and urgent challenge of resolving the Palestine-Israel conflict and the larger regional Arab-Israel conflict.

We therefore leave it to this important Forum to draw the relevant conclusions from what we have said concerning the South African experience.

However, if I may, I would like to say that it would seem to me that some of the elements that differentiate the two situations, namely the South African and the Palestine-Israel conflicts, are that:

- though there appears to be an agreement that the negotiations should result in a 'two-state solution', there is in fact no agreement on this fundamental issue, as the current government of Israel has not agreed to respect the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem serving as the capital of independent Palestine: The so-called security wall Israel has built on the West Bank and the settlements it has and is building objectively create new facts on the ground that militate against its recognition of the 1967 borders. Thus while the South African belligerents could and did agree on what was most fundamental regarding the future of the country, this has not been achieved in the Israel-Palestine context;
- The peace movement Israel is not strong enough to present an effective challenge to the broad Israeli political and security establishment. Thus, whereas the South African liberation offensive grew to present such a challenge, obliging the then ruling establishment to accept the need for fundamental change, this has not happened in the case of Israel;
- thirdly, the Israeli political and security establishment seems to be more at ease with and finds it more comfortable to confront a violent threat rather than a concerted political-diplomatic offensive. I would hazard the guess that this is because it has absolute confidence in the power and effectiveness of its security organs loyally supported by the military establishment in most Western countries, despite the 2006 debacle in Lebanon and the political complications that have arisen as a result of its punitive 2008 military offensive in Gaza, and therefore prefers a confrontation in the area in which it is strongest and believes it is assured of victory. To the contrary, with regard to the political-diplomatic sphere, she knows that she would find it very difficult to argue against the justice of the passionate plea that President Obama made in Cairo last year, lamenting the desperate plight that has confronted the Palestinian people for 60 years, and therefore prefers not to engage a contest with the international community based on what President Obama said. (See below);
- fourth, the people of Palestine are faced with the challenge that they have not achieved the unity and cohesion that the oppressed in South Africa largely did: This creates the possibility, which, despite the deadly violence that did occur, we largely avoided, of a fratricidal conflict that weakens and detracts from united action to

achieve the common strategic goal, in this case the birth of a viable and independent State of Palestine;

- fifth, the establishment of such a state is a matter of urgent necessity for the people of Palestine, while the majority of the Israelis seem convinced that this outcome can be postponed indefinitely, given that their strategic objective, the establishment of the State of Israel is an accomplished fact, with their principal strategic task being the defence of this State: Thus they believe that time is on their side, and can afford to use it so to change the facts on the ground that any future process of negotiations would not oblige them to enter into any meaningful compromises. Thus it views the negotiations as a zero-sum game, aimed at them dictating a solution to the Palestinians, rather than a process that should secure the amicable outcome of a secure, peaceful and successful State of Israel and a secure, peaceful and successful State of Palestine, both capable of and willing to cooperate with each other for mutual benefit;
- sixth, Israel, itself a small state entity, enjoys major international support on the basis of a perspective it has elaborated and marketed in the rest of the world: This gives it the assurance that whatever it does, it will never face the danger of international isolation, especially by the major world powers, and will therefore always ensure that regardless of the rhetoric, its interests and aspirations will always occupy the first place in the strategic considerations of the major world powers, with those of the Palestinians being dealt with as a peripheral irritation which, nevertheless, but within the context of an immutable strategic paradigm, cannot be ignored. Therefore there would always be much publicised diplomatic activity targeted at resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, which would give hope to the Palestinians, while putting the Israelis at ease because of the certainty that this activity would produce no result to which they are opposed, communicating the message that the activity is itself the result;
- seventh, contrary to the South African situation, historical circumstance has dictated that necessarily the peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict should be achieved with the direct involvement of external mediators, especially the United States, and this has been accepted by the two sides. All negotiations require that the negotiating parties should accept and believe

genuinely that the mediator is an honest, neutral and disinterested broker, ready to facilitate a balanced outcome that accommodates the fundamental interests of the opposed belligerent parties. Without this, it is not possible for the mediator to facilitate a lasting agreement, lasting because of the genuine willingness of the negotiating parties fully to own the outcome, and therefore take responsibility for its implementation. If unfortunately this is not the case, this imposes an obligation on the negotiating parties each to engage in a second and continuous task to participate in a contest to persuade the mediator to lean more towards their side rather than towards the other. Historically, successive US administrations have dealt with Israel as a strategic partner. However, President Barak Obama has, in addition, and as you know, said clearly that the equitable resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict is equally a matter of strategic interest to the United States, saying when he spoke at Cairo University on June 4th last year, that "America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own...For peace to come, it is time for (the Israelis and the Palestinians) - and all of us - to live up to our responsibilities." Thus did the mediator of the Israel-Palestine conflict commit himself and his government to act as an honest broker, to facilitate an agreement which both the Palestinians and the Israelis will accept as their own, because it will have addressed the aspirations and the fears of the contending parties concerned, as the South Africans did when they voluntarily took ownership of the agreement they had negotiated without a mediator, and therefore accepted that it was their common responsibility successfully to implement the agreement.

It is up to this Forum to assess the correctness or otherwise of the observations we have dared to make relating to the comparison between the South African and the Israel-Palestine experiences, perhaps thus, like a fool, rushing in where angels fear to tread.

If the South African experience, when placed in a matrix relating to the Palestine-Israel situation, has even a glancing relevance to the latter, it will be up to the Forum to decide whether the negotiations about this extremely important matter are likely to succeed or not.

If the latter seems to be the most likely outcome, bearing in mind the lessons of the South African success story, the Forum might find it

appropriate to consider what then should be done to ensure the success of the Israel-Palestine negotiations, and as speedily as possible, hopefully during President Obama's term of office.

In this regard I would like to agree with President Obama when he said in Cairo:

"...it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people – Muslims and Christians – have suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than 60 years they've endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighbouring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead...So let there be no doubt: the situation of the Palestinian people is intolerable...

"Too many tears have been shed. Too much blood has been shed. All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when the mothers of Israelis and Palestinians can see their children grow up without fear; when the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims, and a place for all the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together as in the story of Isra, when Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, peace be upon them, joined in prayer."

Part of the common tragedy is that almost a year after President Obama made this passionate and moving appeal, yet more tears and more blood have been shed, because a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict has not been achieved and is evidently not yet in sight.

Surely, as President Obama suggested, those of us who are neither Israeli nor Palestinian have an obligation honestly to ask ourselves the question and act on the answer to that question, about what we should do to help create the conditions for the earliest possible success of the vital process of mediating the resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict!

Like many Palestinians who dream of the realisation of the vision of which President Obama spoke, I too belong to a liberation movement and as such, have had the privilege to interact with many leaders of the people of Palestine, including the late Yassir Arafat, Mahmoud

Abbas, and through envoys, Khaled Meshal, and indeed with some of the leaders of the Israeli people, including Ariel Sharon, Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert and Tsipi Livni.

Thus do I, too, share the dream for the birth of a viable, prosperous and independent State of Palestine.

During our lifetime, some prominent representatives of a world power made bold to say that – “Anyone who thinks (the ANC) is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land.” Through their efforts, during our lifetime, the people of South Africa made the statement that these soothsayers of doom were wrong.

Therefore I say to those who persist in the fight for the birth of a viable, prosperous and independent State of Palestine – the struggle continues, and victory is certain!

Thank you.