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The Western Response to the Crisis in Zimbabwe

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The international response has been divided, overstated, under-implemented, and largely ineffectual....divisions have widened, not just between Africa and the West, but also increasingly within the West. The issue of Zimbabwe is dividing international organisations and creating embarrassing public debates over trivial issues, such as participation in a cricket championship, that deflect attention from the serious erosion occurring within the country.¹

Zimbabwe is currently facing a crisis of unimaginable proportions. An estimated 7 million people are threatened with starvation, the economy has basically collapsed with inflation reaching an estimated 400 percent in March 2003,² approximately 80% of the population lives below the poverty line, and unemployment is over 70%. Once the breadbasket of Southern African, Zimbabwe has become the basket case of the region.

The current crisis is a result of the misguided policies of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), implemented between 2000 and the present. Specifically, following the defeat of a referendum in February 2000 for a draft Constitution that would have, among other things, strengthened President Robert Mugabe’s presidential powers and allowed the government to expropriate white commercial farmland without compensation, the ZANU-PF government amended the Constitution to allow for land expropriation. In addition, it implemented a “fast-track” land resettlement program and called for the invasion of white commercial farms. The resultant government orchestrated violent upheaval resulted in the abrogation of the rule of law, interference in the judiciary, and major violations of human rights, including severe torture and death.

At the heart of the orchestrated violent upheaval was ZANU-PF’s fear that it could be defeated at the polls by a newly established political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC was created in 1999 as an outgrowth of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). In power since independence in 1980, Mugabe and ZANU-PF for the first time were seriously threatened with the possibility of being unseated at the polls by an opposition party. With the fast-track land resettlement program and a strategy to kill, torture, and intimidate the opposition, the ZANU-PF government reasoned that it could win both the parliamentary elections of 2000 and the presidential election of 2002.

The killing, especially of white farmers, solicited an adverse reaction from Western governments. The most outspoken governments were the United Kingdom and the United States. Smart sanctions were eventually imposed against the Mugabe regime by the European Union, the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Both the UK and the US have indicated that the only way forward for Zimbabwe is regime change.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to critically analyze the Western response to the current crisis in Zimbabwe. This will be done by first placing in perspective the Western response to (1) the land question in Zimbabwe from 1979 to 2001; and (2) the

atrocities committed by the Mugabe regime against black Zimbabweans from 1983 to 1999. This historical background is needed in order to understand why the West has not been seen as a credible broker in the crisis. While the immediate crisis in Zimbabwe was spearheaded by the Mugabe regime, a crisis of great magnitude had been in the making since the British-imposed Lancaster House Constitution brought the county to independence in 1980. This Constitution laid the foundation for the maintenance of white economic hegemony in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Although the objective is to analyze the entire Western response to the Zimbabwe crisis, a large percentage of the analysis will focus on the response of the UK and the US since they have been the most vocal critics of the Mugabe regime and are seen as the major Western countries determined to undermine the ZANU-PF government. The Western response will be examined within the context of three issues: (1) the obsession with violations against white commercial farmers; (2) the question of the inevitability of regime change; and (3) international sanctions and suspension from the Commonwealth.

There are four major arguments put forth in this paper. The first is that there are three primary actors responsible for the current crisis in Zimbabwe – Western governments, white commercial farmers, and the post-independence leaders of Zimbabwe. The Western governments allowed the white minority regime of Rhodesia to exist until the end of the twentieth century, insisted that white economy hegemony, including control over the most productive land in the country be maintained in the post-independence era, and then warned of dire consequences if post-independence agreements were abrogated. The white commercial farmers remained intransigent in their belief that they had no responsibility to share in the wealth of the land with the indigenous African population. And the post-independence leaders of Zimbabwe amassed wealth and neglected to fulfill the promises made to the indigenous African population to enhance their social-economic status and implement a land reform program that would remedy the injustices of the past.

The second argument is that by initially appearing to be solely concerned with the human and property rights violations of the white minority, the Western countries lost an opportunity to make a credible case against the reversal of the democratic process in Africa. The third argument is that by insisting on regime change only in Zimbabwe, and not in the Middle East, Asia, and other African countries where other despotic and anti-democratic regimes are well entrenched, the UK and the US opened themselves up for charges of double standards. Mugabe very astutely used the notion of regime change to warn his fellow African leaders that today it is regime change in Zimbabwe, tomorrow it will be regime change in your country.

Finally, it will be argued that those Western powers that insisted on regime change grossly underestimated the political astuteness of Robert Mugabe. Confident that Mugabe could not survive the crisis and win the 2002 presidential election, the projected new foreign policy of these governments was entirely based on a post-Mugabe era. With all avenues for diplomacy closed, these countries have no ability to have a moderating influencing on the Mugabe regime and therefore can only continue to threaten the regime with more punishing economic sanctions.

The Western Response to the Land Question, 1979 to 2001

The current crisis in Zimbabwe, like all crises, has historical roots. The historical roots in Zimbabwe can be traced to the European invasion of the country and the subsequent violent expropriation of the land from the indigenous population. Supported by Western governments, the white racist regime of Rhodesia was allowed to remain in power until 1980.³

The war for liberation against white-settler rule in Rhodesia was fought over the land. At independence in 1980, 6,000 white commercial farmers owned 15.5 million hectares of the best land in the country, while 700,000 black communal land farmers worked on 16.4 million hectares of the worst land. During the negotiations to end the war of liberation held at Lancaster House in England in 1979, Britain and the US insisted that white political and economic privilege be maintained.

The British-drafted Lancaster House Constitution stipulated that whites, who represented approximately 1 percent of the population, would retain 20 seats out of 100 in parliament, and would vote on a separate voting roll for seven years after independence. In addition, whites could not be fired from civil service positions for ten years. The most controversial provision was that related to the protection of private property. In addition to upholding the principle of private property, the Constitution stipulated that the government could only acquire land on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. Only underutilized land could be compulsory acquired. The government was required to pay the market value of the land in foreign currency. Such payments had to be made promptly. This provision of the Constitution was to remain in effect for 10 years.

Mugabe, along with Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU), refused to agree to the provision of the Constitution relating to the land until both Britain and the United States promised that money would be forthcoming for purchasing white commercial farms for land resettlement. For the majority of Africans, the notion of paying for land they had been violently dispossessed of during white settler rule was unimaginable.

Although it is argued that the British and Americans did not commit to a specific sum,⁴ Sam Moyo, noted expert on the land question in Zimbabwe, argues that informally the British committed 75 million pounds and the Americans US\$200 million for land reform.⁵ In the case of the US, the \$200 million was a far cry from the billion Henry Kissinger had pledged in the early 1970s “to provide for Governmental purchase and redistribution of large white owned holdings of fertile farmland, an essential component of national reconstruction in a country where whites, 4% of the population, occupied most of the commercially viable land.”⁶ The question of the international community’s commitment to providing major resources for land reform in Zimbabwe remains a very contentious issue. As Stephan Chan notes in his recent book on Zimbabwe,

...from the very first great push to resolve the Rhodesian issue in the mid-70s, under Henry Kissinger, the matter of compensation – subscribed to in hefty sums by the international community – was always an accepted principle. It was implicit in the Lancaster House talks, but Carrington ensured that, although he recognised that a future government (of Zimbabwe) would want to widen the ownership of land, it found no formal enunciation in the final agreement. Mugabe was asked why he had given way, at Lancaster House, on the land issue. ‘We had to. That is the

“giving way” that I talked of, having to compromise on certain fundamental principles, but only because there was a chance, in the future, to amend the position.’ That chance lay not only in the powers of a new government. There was always that characteristic British ‘nod and a wink’ that Britain would help see the land issue right. But...those who accept the nod and wink do so at their peril.⁷

In the end, the US government never gave money promised for land reform/distribution. Instead, money was given mainly for agricultural inputs (tractors, food security) into the communal areas. The US government argued that if these areas were developed, there would be no need for land redistribution.⁸

The British government, according to Moyo, in the post-independence period, “cornered land reform as if it was ‘theirs’.”⁹ However, the informal pledge of 75 million pounds was not forthcoming. Instead, the British government committed 44 million pounds¹⁰ to land reform in the 1980s, 3.5 million pounds of which was suspended in 1989 following questions about the government’s ability to implement the program effectively.¹¹ In particular, questions were raised about Zimbabwe’s elites, some of whom were Mugabe’s “cronies” being leased out 400,000 hectares, which represented just under 15 percent of white farmland allocated for redistribution.¹²

Nonetheless, by the end of the decade there was international agreement that the program had been a success, with one evaluator noting that “by comparison with other planned developments in Africa, [the programme] must rank as one of the most successful.”¹³ The British shared this sentiment.¹⁴ Between 1980 and 1989, 3.3 million hectares were redistributed to an estimated 54,000 families.

Although tremendous progress had been made in the area of land redistribution, the reality was that the Mugabe government only actively pursued land reform until 1986/87. In 1983/84, the government began aggressively evicting illegal squatters off the land, a policy that became more extensive between 1985 and 1993.¹⁵

Fundamentally, an “elite consensus” had developed between 1988 and 1990 that laid the foundation for the country being vulnerable to a major implosion. Those making up the “elite consensus” included ZANU-PF officials, the white commercial farmers, the international financial institutions (IFIs), and specific western governments. These entities all knew that the land question left unresolved would wreck havoc in Zimbabwe. It remained unresolved, however, in the interest of the maintenance of elite economic privilege and market reforms.

Land reform was not included in Zimbabwe’s 1991 Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP).¹⁶ Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya argue that by excluding land reform, promoting the willing-seller, willing-buyer principle, and making microcredit available “based on residual-colonial rural relations of production and reproduction, the World Bank and its local allies ensured that the land problem would not be resolved. It was only a matter of time before the contradictions in the countryside would make themselves felt in the society as a whole.”¹⁷

The Land Acquisition Act of 1992 amended the Constitution to allow the government to compulsorily acquire agriculture land that was not fully utilized. Compensation could be paid within a reasonable time frame, and it no longer had to be paid for in foreign currency.¹⁸ Part and parcel of land reform at this juncture was the *New National Land Policy* which, among other things, indicated that the resettlement sector would be increased by five million hectares (from 3.3 to 8.3 million) and the Large Scale

Commercial Farm (LSCF) sector would be reduced by five million hectares (from 11 to 6 million).¹⁹ In addition, the government announced that 80 percent of the 5 million hectares for the resettlement sector would be allocated to the poor and landless and 20 percent to middle class black farmers. The remaining 6 million LSCF hectares, according to the government, would be deracialized, which meant that black commercial farmers would be injected among white commercial farmers.²⁰

The international community responded negatively to the Land Acquisition Act of 1992. This response was partially orchestrated by white commercial farmers.²¹ Britain remained committed to the willing-seller, willing-buyer principle and therefore could not fathom providing resources for the compulsory acquisition of land. To do otherwise would mean having to deal with the political fallout from white commercial farmers and pressure groups in the UK.²² In the end Britain didn't have to deal with this issue. Although the Act had great potential for massive land redistribution, the Zimbabwe government also remained wedded to the willing-seller, willing-buyer principle²³ and therefore did not succeed in using the compulsory land acquisition principle to help solve the land question.²⁴

Between 1990 and 1996, "both the government and the donors procrastinated, seemingly oblivious of the pressure building for radical land reform and the consequences of failing to take concrete action."²⁵ During this period, according to Moyo, "for the most part, the international community neglected to deal with the land problem in Zimbabwe because it was deemed to be too political, especially with respect to the white commercial farmers. Many nationals, ZANU-PF and the government alleged a kith and kin racial bias."²⁶ Consequently, instead of providing resources for land reform, resources were provided for the development of soft targets such as schools, extension services, and health clinics. The rationale for this was that the market would sort out the economy and consequently the land problem.²⁷ Nonetheless, it became clear that the program of land redistribution could not move forward without donor funding.²⁸

Following his electoral victory in 1996, Mugabe's rhetoric over land redistribution became more radical with the pronouncement that

*We are going to take the land and we are not going to pay for the soil. This is our set policy. Our land was never bought (by the colonialists) and there is no way we could buy back the land. However, if Britain wants compensation they should give us money and we will pass it on to their children.*²⁹

In response to the above, one official from the newly elected government of Britain noted that "Britain didn't owe Zimbabwe money for land reform because, 'Colonisation is not something that people of my generation in Britain benefited from'."³⁰ The British government response to Mugabe, Chan notes, was Tony Blair's first mistake over Zimbabwe.³¹

Faced with increasing political dissent and economic decay, Mugabe, in October 1997, announced that white commercial farms would be seized and compensation would only be paid for improvements, not for the land. The announcement to acquire the land for resettlement came in the wake of the largest and most prolonged farm workers strike in the history of the country. During the strike, some commercial farmers were attacked and their lands were invaded amidst growing rural political activism for land reform. The Mugabe

government had long ignored the economic injustices committed against farm workers by white commercial farmers.

In an effort to resolve the conflict over land, the elite stakeholders in Zimbabwe agreed to an international donors' conference to raise money for land redistribution. At the conference, which was held in September 1998 in Harare, principles were adopted for governing the second phase of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme (LRRP II), "which included respect for a legal process, transparency, poverty reduction, affordability and consistency with Zimbabwe's wider economic interests."³² All the stakeholders at the conference agreed that during the first phase of resettlement, landless peasants would be settled on 118 white commercial farms. The exercise would take two years, after which more farms would be acquired, in an orderly and legal manner.

During 1997 and 1998, there were 15 major land invasions on prime land.³³ This new wave of land invasions continued without the government removing the invaders from the farms. The strategy of incremental land redistribution after almost 18 years of independence apparently was not going to arrest the determination on the part of the landless peasants and war veterans to take, if necessary, the land that had been promised to them.

Zimbabwe was clearly on the verge of imploding. In an April 22, 1999 letter to IMF Managing Director Michael Camdessus, World Bank President James Wolfensohn noted that "if the land reform programme does not deliver visible results during 1999, political pressure will mount to openly tolerate farm invasions. To deliver, the programme needs donor support."³⁴

In May 1999, the World Bank agreed to provide US\$5 million as a "Learning and Innovation Loan" to kick start "resettlement in community-initiated and market-assisted approaches."³⁵ This program was to be complemented with financial support from Britain for land acquisition, which was the only country who could provide funding for land purchase.³⁶

Following a May 1999 UK/EU mission to Zimbabwe to ascertain the case for UK/EU assistance for land reform under LRRP II, the consultants noted that since "the Zimbabwe government would go ahead with resettlement one way or another...[a] key argument, therefore, in favour of supporting the programme was that external influence could be brought to bear to prevent negative impacts and to obtain the fulfilment of the social, economic and environmental objectives listed in the IPFP" (Inception Phase Framework Plan). They also recounted "that the World Bank had reached a similar conclusion, when they argued that the risks of not releasing the money to Zimbabwe for land reform outweighed the risks of doing so."³⁷

Wedded to the policies of willing-seller, willing-buyer and land reform based on a strategy of elimination of poverty, in January 2000, the British government announced plans to allocate 5 million pounds for resettlement projects that had been proposed by the private sector and Non Governmental Organisations. This was not acceptable to the Zimbabwe government.³⁸ In what the government took as an insult, in the 1990s international donors had channeled funding to civil society organizations for land reform. This proved to be problematic because civil society has never been a movement that supports radical land reform because they didn't want to "rock the boat" of the status quo.³⁹

Needless to say, the UK did not provide the funds for land resettlement but indicated in May 2000 that

36 million (pounds) is now available for development, anti-poverty work, including land reform and a substantial proportion of it could go to a proper land reform programme. If the conditions which we put down were met, of the violence ending, the intimidation ending, the squatting ending and a proper land reform programme being in place, that money would be available. These conditions – which the Minister confirmed were based on the “willing buyer and willing seller principle” – were not met, and the money was not handed over.⁴⁰

A last ditch effort was made in Abuja, Nigeria on September 6, 2001 to end the impasse between Britain and other potential international donors regarding providing support for land redistribution in Zimbabwe. Sponsored by the Commonwealth countries, representatives of the Mugabe government agreed to end the illegal occupation of white farms, restore the rule of law, and put in place a system of orderly land reform based on the agreements reached at the 1998 Donors’ Conference. In return, Britain would agree to release funds for land reform.⁴¹ Although Zimbabwe government officials agreed to these principles, they were not implemented.

As this brief overview of the history of the land question indicates, the international community, white commercial farmers, and Zimbabwe government officials are all responsible for the current crisis in Zimbabwe. By 1999, however, the two primary actors, the British and Zimbabwean governments, had reached an impasse that was seemingly impossible to reconcile.

From the British perspective, the Zimbabwe government was perceived to be too corrupt to be entrusted with handling the second phase of land reform. This was most evident by the fact that at the end of the 1990s, according to the International Bar Association, some government acquired land had not been redistributed to the landless. In addition, the titles under the Commercial Farm Resettlement Scheme “had been allocated to public servants or politicians.”⁴² Seemingly the British government felt it had every right to insist that funds allocated for land redistribution should go toward the elimination of poverty (and such funds should by-pass government coffers) and such land should only be acquired on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis.

Two decades after independence, the government of Zimbabwe felt that the British continued to be wedded to the willing-seller, willing-buyer principle only to protect the best economic interest of the white commercial farmers. According to Moyo, these farmers, along with whites in general, were viewed “as descendants of illegal settlers who gained land through conquest.”⁴³ In principle it was difficult for many to imagine that the British would at the turn of the century hold on to an agreement that, according to the Lancaster House Constitution, was only to be in force the first ten years of independence.

The Zimbabwe government also felt that the British perspective on the land question in Zimbabwe was too simplistic. They didn’t see nor understand the internal conflict within ZANU-PF over land reform. With their insistence that land only be allocated to the poor, they radicalized the moderates within the government. In the meantime, leftist demands were ignored by most, including academics. In addition, the government of Zimbabwe felt that for the British land reform became a “development” project instead of a political settlement. In their effort to have total control over land reform

they micromanaged the process and seemed happy to go on a slow/delay process. In the 1990s they insisted that the government should focus on the poor to the neglect of developing black commercial farmers. From the government perspective, the development of black commercial farmers was very important for the future of the country in terms of racial balance and broadening the production base and peace. On the question of unallocated land, it totaled 120,000 hectares, according to the government. It remained unallocated until 1999/2000 because of disputes as to who should get the land.⁴⁴ In the final analysis, according to Moyo, “the British and donors danced around an almost insurmountable mix of conditions to fund land; the land conference’s vague agreement, economic stabilisation and ‘governance’ reforms.”⁴⁵

By February 2000, Mugabe and ZANU-PF had run out of time. In order to maintain their political hegemony over the country, they had no option but to take advantage of the one unresolved issue that could possibly save them – finally returning the land to the indigenous African population. This was to be done at all cost, including the economic and political stability of the country.

The Western Response to the Atrocities of the Mugabe Regime, 1983 to 1999

The violation of human rights in Zimbabwe and the abrogation of the rule of law were not a new phenomenon that began in 2000. For the West, however, such violations appeared to be inconsequential as long as they only affected the black majority.

Between 1983 and 1987, the government unleashed a wave of violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands that resulted in the massacre of an estimated 20,000 Zimbabweans. Orchestrated by the notorious North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, the massacres took place in the wake of allegations that members from the military wing of Nkomo’s PF ZAPU were planning a coup against the Mugabe government. The massacres ceased only when Nkomo agreed to merge PF ZAPU with ZANU-PF.

In response to the massacres, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Africa, Frank Wisner, before a House subcommittee hearing in 1984 acknowledged the fact that the government of Zimbabwe might have been involved in activities that the Reagan administration did not agree with. However, “he emphasized that Zimbabwe remained an important model for the rest of southern Africa, both politically and economically....Wisner contended that other states in the region could learn from Zimbabwe’s example...”⁴⁶. This was a view shared by the British government, who noted that,

*Internally, Zimbabwe was a functioning democracy, if not on the Western model of liberal democracy then better than some other African nations struggling to deal with the new demands of independence within borders which had been determined by the nineteenth-century rivalries of Europe’s colonial powers. While there was widespread international condemnation of mass killings of ZAPU supporters in Matabeleland, training of the Zimbabwean forces’ 5th Brigade by the North Koreans, harassment of political opponents, and election malpractices, on some of the key indicators of a fair society such as independence of the judiciary, active political opposition and the existence of a free press, Zimbabwe scored highly.*⁴⁷

Throughout the 1990s, the Mugabe government continued to use brutal force against opposition forces and workers protesting against low wages and increased prices of basic necessities.⁴⁸ According to Patrick Molutsi, “Different reports of the World Bank and the UNDP of the 1980s and early 1990s as well as those of bilateral donors were full of praise for the Zimbabwean government and its leadership until the land acquisition policy programme around 1998.”⁴⁹

The Western Response to the Crisis in Zimbabwe, 2000 to the Present

In this section, the Western response to the crisis in Zimbabwe is analyzed within the context of (1) the obsession with violations against white commercial farmers; (2) the question of the inevitability of regime change in Zimbabwe; and (3) international sanctions and suspension from the Commonwealth.

Obsession with Violations against White Commercial Farmers

Throughout Africa, the perception of many is that the Western response to the crisis in Zimbabwe stemmed from their concern, not with the killing, torture, and intimidation of black Zimbabweans, but of white commercial farmers and their families. In a report on the crisis in Zimbabwe by the UK Parliament published in July 2002, a determination is made that the UK’s Zimbabwe policy has been misrepresented in that it appears that its primary concern has been white farmers. According to journalist Feargal Keane,

One of the problems has been, and we in the media must take this on the chin as well, that we were seen to act and seen to be concerned when it was white farmers who were being attacked. Thus it became very easy for Robert Mugabe to portray this as a colonialist intervention by the British Government and to portray Western media interest as ethnocentric. In other words we cared, in Mugabe’s own famous phrase, because they were kith and kin. There was an unfortunate lack of public profile given both by the media to the true victims of what was happening and they are the Zimbabwean people on impoverished smallholdings, peasants who have to walk for miles to get maize, the people I talked to you about earlier. We misrepresented our concern.⁵⁰

In response to this criticism, the parliamentary report noted that “it lies within the power of the Government to counter misrepresentation of its motives,” and that “all steps must be taken to portray what truly motivates the United Kingdom to declaim on Zimbabwe and to seek to assist its people: a real concern for those abused, whatever their colour, and whatever their history.”⁵¹

Reinforcing the notion that the Western response to the Zimbabwe crisis primarily rests with concern about the status of white farmers, the highly respected International Crisis Group noted in a October 2002 report on Zimbabwe that “The international media’s over-concentration on the plight of white commercial farmers has given Mugabe’s liberation rhetoric greater resonance in many African quarters, reinforcing belief that the West cares about Zimbabwe only because whites suffer.”⁵²

There are indeed no shortages of examples of the suggestion that the concern of the West has been with the white commercial farmers. According to Stefan Mair, the Head of the Research Unit Middle East and Africa at the German Institute for International Security in Berlin, "...The perception that Zimbabwe only receives special attention from the US and Europe because it harbours a substantial European minority and because Mugabe does not let pass any chance to annoy and upset the donor community bears the potential for a deep-rooted and sustained alienation between African and European governments."⁵³

At the root of the perception is the reality that many in the West, as noted in the quote above by Mair, view the whites in Zimbabwe as the "European minority." This is most curious in light of the fact that many of the white commercial farmers claim their right to the land stems from generations of working it. The point here is that from the perspective of many in Africa, the US and European governments are not genuinely committed to democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe, and to the extent that the rhetoric suggests this, it is only because of the presence of what is perceived as the violation of the property rights of "Europeans."

As recent as March 17, 2003, J. Scott Carpenter, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy and Human Rights noted that "When Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, it had a model Constitution, an intact, respected judiciary which was functioning".⁵⁴ To Carpenter it was perhaps a model Constitution, because, according to Moyo, it

*secured for whites, unhindered citizenship rights; a bill of rights which precluded the expropriation of private property, secured freedom of expression, movement and dual citizenship; a restricted executive power, disproportionate white parliamentary representation and protection of white civil servants' employment and pensions. It provided a ten-year grace period during which the constitution could not be amended, while the independence of the judiciary was entrenched to guarantee white rights.*⁵⁵

As the same hearing Carpenter reminded his audience of the atrocities committed by the 5th Brigade in Matebeleland by the Mugabe regime (1983-87). One queries as to whether Carpenter was oblivious to the fact that following the massacre of an estimated 20,000 black Zimbabweans, the US government determined that Zimbabwe was a model country that should be emulated by other countries in Southern Africa.

This obsession, especially by the UK and the US, with the violations committed against whites in Zimbabwe after twenty years of ignoring the atrocities the Zimbabwe government had committed against black Zimbabweans, did not bode well for the West. Consequently, these countries did not have the credibility to have an influence on the Zimbabwe regime to stop the reversal of the democratic process as it indiscriminately continued to abuse the human rights of both blacks and whites with impunity. While the West was correct in challenging the Zimbabwe government with its human rights violations, including killing, rape, torture, and abrogation of the rule of law, unfortunately it was two decades too late to make a difference.

The Inevitability of Regime Change

The insistence by both Britain and the US that the only way forward for Zimbabwe was regime change totally alienated these governments from the Zimbabwe government, leaving them in a position of having no diplomatic contact. The members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) responded to the notion of the West orchestrating regime change in the region with anger. In response to the notion that “Mugabe must go,” the SADC member states have made it very clear that neither Bush nor Blair has any right to demand regime change in Zimbabwe. Mugabe has been able to use this notion of “regime change” to warn his fellow colleagues that today it is me, tomorrow Bush and Blair will call for regime change in your country.

The SADC member states feel that as a result of the arrogant stance the Bush and Blair governments have adopted towards the Mugabe government, they have made it very difficult for these states to implement regime change on their own. This, it is argued, is what the SADC members would have done had the West not intervened so aggressively in the crisis. While it is doubtful that the SADC member states would have actually orchestrated a regime change in Zimbabwe,⁵⁶ the arrogance of the West in this regard placed the SADC countries in a very precarious position. For example, whenever President Thabo Mbeki deviated from South Africa’s policy of “quiet diplomacy” and reprimanded the Zimbabwe regime for human rights violations, illegal land seizures, or the abrogation of the rule of law, the Zimbabwe regime would accuse Mbeki of assisting the West in the overthrow of his government. Mbeki would consequently have no option but to return to his “quiet diplomacy.”

Another issue regarding regime change is that some of the SADC member states raise questions about double standards in calling for regime change in Zimbabwe and not in other countries where you have anti-democratic brutal regimes. These include African countries as well as Pakistan and most of the Gulf states. Around the same time as the Zimbabwe presidential elections, there were flawed elections in Zambia and Congo/Brazzaville. These elections, however, were accepted by the West as legitimate. With respect to the question of double standards, on the question of Uganda and Rwanda, Mair warns that the close cooperation that the US and Europe maintain with these countries that are “both waging war in a neighbouring country, plundering and violating human rights there,” results in “the impression in Africa that the donors’ policy towards the continent is at least cynical.”⁵⁷

Finally, the perception in Southern Africa is that those governments that called for regime change did not anticipate the possibility that regime change would not be forthcoming. Consequently, all lines of communication have been severed with the Mugabe regime. Now totally isolated from the Zimbabwean government, diplomacy is not an option. Understanding this, the EU has decided to try to re-establish contact with the Mugabe regime through South Africa. South Africa is therefore now advising the EU on its policy toward the Mugabe regime. This is indeed ironic in light of the international criticism that the Mbeki government has received regarding its “quiet diplomacy.”

The call for regime change in Zimbabwe in response to the crisis has clearly been counterproductive. With no avenues for communicating with the regime, with the exception of a few countries, the West, especially the UK and US, has isolated itself, thus having no

ability to have a moderating influence on the Zimbabwe regime and the immediate future of the country.

International Sanctions and Suspension from the Commonwealth

Left politically impotent, in many respects by a long history of flawed policies, the West began imposing sanctions against the Zimbabwe regime. This was followed by what was perceived as an Australian-led movement to get Zimbabwe suspended from the Commonwealth.⁵⁸

With respect to sanctions, in February 2002, the US government imposed travel sanctions on certain political leaders. This was followed on March 7, 2003, by the imposition of an asset freeze on Mugabe and 76 other officials. According to the International Crisis Group, the delay in implementing the freeze “has diminished U.S. credibility and given time for all relevant assets to be moved out of Washington’s reach should the freeze eventually be implemented.”⁵⁹

Before the March 2002 presidential election in Zimbabwe, the EU imposed targeted travel and financial sanctions against Mugabe and specific senior government and ZANU-PF officials. The sanctions were renewed on February 11, 2003.⁶⁰ Prior to the February renewal, however, great divisions began to surface in the EU. France, for example, had plans to invite Mugabe to its February Franco-African summit in Paris and Portugal wanted Mugabe to attend the summit of the EU and its African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) partners under the Cotonou Agreement. The EU feared that if approval was not given for these invitations, France and Portugal, along with possibly Italy and Greece, would oppose the renewal of sanctions against the Zimbabwe regime.

While Mugabe did attend the summit in Paris, the EU-ACP summit scheduled for April 2003 in Lisbon was canceled. The stakes were too high: some African leaders threatened to boycott the summit if Mugabe was not allowed to attend, while the concern existed that the UK, Sweden, and Germany would boycott if Mugabe attended.⁶¹

In response to the EU sanctions against Zimbabwe, Tanzania’s President Benjamin Mkapa noted, “As you have heard about Zimbabwe and the EU’s decision to impose sanctions. It seems that they want to divide Africa in Brussels in 2002 just as they did in Berlin in 1884. Africa must be prepared to say no.”⁶² The African hostility toward the EU was further illustrated by President Sam Nujoma at the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, August-September 2002. He said, “I just want to make it categorically clear that if the EU does not lift the [targeted] sanctions against Zimbabwe, the whole African Union will also impose economic sanctions against Europe.”⁶³

Perhaps even more divisive than the EU and US sanctions against the Zimbabwe government has been the decision by the Commonwealth to maintain Zimbabwe’s suspension in its councils until the organization meets in December 2003. The initial suspension was implemented following the flawed presidential election in March 2002. The decision was based on the recommendation of a Troika established by the Commonwealth. The Troika includes President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia. Clearly angered by the response of representatives from some Commonwealth countries to the situation in

Zimbabwe at a March 2002 meeting in Australia, Mbeki argued “that talk of ostracizing Mugabe was ‘inspired by notions of white supremacy’ and that such moves were pursued because white political leaders apparently felt uneasy at their ‘repugnant position imposed by inferior blacks’.”⁶⁴ There was said to be a black/white divide within the Commonwealth over Zimbabwe.

In the end, Mbeki went along with the suspension for two reasons, according to an official from the South African government. The first was to send a message that it was unacceptable the way the Zimbabwe government was treating its people. The second was in hopes of facilitating a compromise between ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC that would result in the two parties establishing a dialogue in order to resolve the crisis.⁶⁵ Informed opinion, however, suggest that both Mbeki and Obasanjo were warned by certain Western governments that if they did not support Zimbabwe’s suspension from the Commonwealth, financial assistance for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) might not be forthcoming.

On March 19, 2003, the Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon issued a statement to the effect that Zimbabwe will remain suspended from the Commonwealth until the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in December 2003 in Abuja, Nigeria, at which time the matter will be discussed.⁶⁶ This decision was not supported by Mbeki or Obasanjo, who had lobbied hard to get the suspension removed. The decision, however, appears to have removed the racial divide within the Commonwealth, with some African leaders supporting the decision to maintain Zimbabwe’s suspension.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The crisis in Zimbabwe has raised some fundamental questions about the ability of the West to influence the policies of despotic regimes throughout the world, short of military intervention. This is largely a reflection of the history of flawed policies that have resulted in a lack of credibility on the part of the West to have a moderating influence on such regimes. While it is not disputable that the Mugabe regime is despotic and should be prevented from continuing to terrorize its people, it is unrealistic for the West to assume that after supporting a despotic regime for two decades that it would have any semblance of credibility to have a moderating influence at a point in which the regime stands to be unseated by opposition forces.

As a result of flawed West policies for over two decades, the Mugabe regime has been extremely successful in honing in on the contradictions of such policies, most noticeably the perception that the West only cares about Zimbabwe because of the presence of a significant number of whites, to divide not only African states, but the West and international organizations. Consequently, international economic sanctions and suspension from the Commonwealth have not had an impact on the Mugabe regime. In the final analysis, regime change will have to come from within the country. The suffering of the people of Zimbabwe will do more to undermine the regime than will international economic sanctions or megaphone diplomacy directed at the international isolation of the regime. Left with no avenue for diplomacy, many Western countries have no ability to have an impact on the changing dynamics currently taking place in Zimbabwe.

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¹ International Crisis Group, *Zimbabwe: Danger and Opportunity*, Africa Report No. 60, Harare/Brussels, March 10, 2003, p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1. Although the Zimbabwe government puts this figure at 208 percent, this is based on the price of goods at the official price, which is much lower than the real price. The International Crisis Group thus estimates that the figure of 400 percent inflation is more realistic.

³ For this history see Margaret C. Lee, "The Rise and Decline of the Settler Regimes of South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe," in Margaret C. Lee and Karen Colvard, (eds.), *Unfinished Business: The Land Crisis in Southern Africa* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa 2003), pp. 1-55.

⁴ International Crisis Group, Draft, *Land Reform in Southern Africa*, March 23, forthcoming, p. 35.

⁵ Phone interview with Sam Moyo, April 3, 2003. Moyo was in Harare, Zimbabwe and I was in Rockville, MD, USA.

⁶ Sam Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Books, 1995), p. 107.

⁷ Stephen Chan, *Robert Mugabe: a life of power and violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 112.

⁸ Interview with Moyo, April 3, 2003.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ According to Moyo, the Zimbabwe government argues that it only received 30 million pounds.

¹¹ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 36.

¹² Interview with Sam Moyo, April 3, 2003.

¹³ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 37.

¹⁴ Interview with Sam Moyo, April 3, 2003.

¹⁵ Sam Moyo, "The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe: Contradictions of Neoliberalism," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 321.

¹⁶ See International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 4; Moyo, "The Political Economy of Land Acquisition and Redistribution in Zimbabwe, 1990-1999," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 11; Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press; London: The Merlin Press, 2002), p. 51 and 55-56.

¹⁷ Bond and Manyanya, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ E-mail correspondence with Sam Moyo, April 9, 2003.

²¹ Chan, p. 75.

²² International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 42.

²³ Moyo, "The Political Economy of Land Acquisition," p. 12.

²⁴ Moyo, "The Land Occupation Movement," p. 12.

²⁵ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 37.

²⁶ Interview with Moyo, April 3, 2003.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 40.

²⁹ Chan, p. 111.

³⁰ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 44.

³¹ Chan, p. 111.

³² International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 45.

³³ Moyo, "The Political Economy of Land Acquisition," p. 11.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, Draft, p. 46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, footnote 65 and p. 48.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

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- ³⁹ Interview with Sam Moyo, April 3, 2003. See also Moyo, "The Land Occupation Movement," pp. 312-313.
- ⁴⁰ House of Commons, The United Kingdom Parliament, Foreign Affairs – Tenth Report, Session 2001-02, July 31, 2002, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmffaff/813/81304.htm>.
- ⁴¹ International Crisis Group, Draft, pp. 446-47; House of Commons.
- ⁴² Kenneth Good, "Dealing with Despotism: The People and the Presidents," in Henning Melber (ed.), *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002: Evidence, Lessons and Implications*, Discussion Paper 14, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002, pp. 12-13.
- ⁴³ Moyo, "The Political Economy of Land Acquisition," footnote 7, p. 6.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Moyo, April 3, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ E-mail correspondence with Moyo, April 9, 2003.
- ⁴⁶ Andrew De Roche, *Black, White & Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953-1998* (Trenton, New Jersey and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc. 2001, pp. 323-324.
- ⁴⁷ House of Commons,
- ⁴⁸ See Alois Mlambo, "The Ambiguities of Independence, Zimbabwe 1980-1990," in Lee and Colvard (eds.), pp. 57-95; Lloyd M. Sachikonye, "Between Authoritarianism and Democracy: Politics in Zimbabwe Since 1990," in Lee and Colvard (eds.), pp. 97-132; Chan, 2003.
- ⁴⁹ Patrick Molutsi, "Beyond the Zimbabwean Mist: Challenges and Prospects for Democracy in Africa," in Melber (ed.), footnote 2, p. 80.
- ⁵⁰ House of Commons.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² International Crisis Group Report No. 52, *Zimbabwe: The Politics of National Liberation and International Divisions*, October 17, 2002, p. 1.
- ⁵³ Stefan Mair, "Zimbabwe after the Elections: A German View," in Melber (ed.), p. 88.
- ⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, "On-the-Record Briefing: The Situation in Zimbabwe and Steps Toward Implementing U.S. Sanctions, March 17, 2003.
- ⁵⁵ Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*, pp. 106-107.
- ⁵⁶ This is the case for several reasons, including the fact that the SADC member states don't want to isolate Zimbabwe because all diplomatic channels to the regime would be closed; as the oldest liberation leader in the region, Mugabe continues to command a high level of respect among the other SADC leaders; Mbeki is said to be intimidated by Mugabe, who often reminds him that he is the young kid on the bloc; and some of the SADC leaders feel that if they force a regime change in Zimbabwe, the same fate could befall them for similar violations of human rights and abrogation of the rule of law.
- ⁵⁷ Mair, pp. 87-88.
- ⁵⁸ For a concise summary of the sanctions and the controversy over Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth, see International Crisis Group, *Zimbabwe: Danger and Opportunity*, pp. 10-13.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁶² Henning Melber, "Zimbabwe and 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness'," in Melber (ed.), p. 64.
- ⁶³ International Crisis Group, *Zimbabwe: The Politics of National Liberation and International Division*, footnote, 4, p. 2.
- ⁶⁴ Ian Taylor, "Zimbabwe's Debacle, Africa's Response and the Implications for the New Partnership for Africa's Development," in Melber (ed.), p. 70.
- ⁶⁵ Phone interview with Pandelani T. Mathoma, Chief Director: Southern Africa, South Africa Department of Foreign Affairs, April 7, 2003. Mathoma was in Pretoria, South Africa and I was in Rockville, MD.
- ⁶⁶ Commonwealth News and Information Service (London), "Commonwealth Statement on Zimbabwe," March 19, 2003.
- ⁶⁷ See for example, International Crisis Group, *Zimbabwe: Danger and Opportunity*, p. 11.