9 ZIMBABWE: AN AFRICAN TRAGEDY

By Kurt Bassuener, 2008; revised and updated 2010 and 2013; researched by Britt Lake and Taya Weiss, 2007-2008

Nota Bene: At the time of publication, Zimbabwe had just completed a general election. The official results gave President Robert Mugabe and his ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) a resounding victory over the opposition MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, in both presidential and parliamentary elections. The results were immediately contested by the MDC, which charged systematic electoral manipulation. Independent domestic observers pointed to irregularities which may have disenfranchised up to a million predominantly urban voters. Democratic governments in the West, but also in Africa, Botswana in particular, cited serious misgivings with the electoral process. There are signs that the country, after a few years of relative peace, might return to violence. It remains unclear what the legal contest of the results and potential unrest will mean for the economic gains and tentative print media freedom which returned under the unity government. The country is likely to remain a continuing crisis point for the world's democracies, which will need to decide how to calibrate their polices to best assist Zimbabweans back into the democratic fold.

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's precipitous decline from peaceful breadbasket to malnourished autocracy has become one of Africa's most notorious stories of post-colonial state failure. The situation was not always grim; far from it. Upon transition from white-ruled Rhodesia in 1979, the country's future appeared bright. With plentiful natural resources, a booming agricultural sector, a strong pool of educated human capital and solid government administration, Zimbabwe appeared destined for success. The government of the new Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, regarded as a liberation hero for his role in armed struggle against white supremacist rule, was racially inclusive. Mugabe also projected moderation in his language and choice of personnel. The

new regime in Harare was embraced worldwide — on both sides in the Cold War, by the group of non-aligned developing states and Mugabe's wartime patron, China.

That moment of optimism was followed by an accelerating decline, blamed by many observers almost entirely on Mugabe's misrule, which has led to the crippling of a vibrant agricultural economy, repression of political dissent and violent land seizure. Others note the effect of rosy assessments early on and easy money in the 1980s, followed by the social destabilization of structural readjustments in the 1990s. As conditions in Zimbabwe began growing steadily worse in the 1990s, and as President Mugabe grew more adversarial, the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, among others, became ever more critical of his methods, seeking to isolate him while supporting a second track of outreach from Zimbabwe's regional neighbours.

But among Zimbabwe's neighbours in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Mugabe's casting of Western powers as neo-colonialist meddlers carried considerable weight with politicians and a public attuned to the language of liberation struggle. For some time, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and other SADC leaders eschewed open criticism of Mugabe in favour of attempts at engagement and mediation. But the 2008-2009 power-sharing arrangement between President Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was fraught from the beginning and barely functioned, despite the fact it allowed for economic stabilization and a reduction of political violence. As the violence employed by Mugabe and his party increased, criticism of his rule sharpened, even among his immediate neighbours. The Mugabe regime bequeathed Zimbabwe's people with what was the world's fastest contracting economy and one of the lowest life expectancies in the world. While a slow recovery has been in progress for Zimbabwe, the devastated economy will take years to rebuild; it has fallen far from its previous standing as one of Africa's most developed states. Political uncertainty remains a major handicap. Zimbabwean society is in dire need of reconciliation to heal the scars of political violence. Millions of Zimbabweans have left their country to survive; three to four million have emigrated to neighbouring South Africa alone. In addition, the issue of land distribution at the heart of Zimbabwean conflict for decades remains divisive, even as productivity of the land already seized has plummeted. There has also been little or no accountability for the numerous crimes committed in the past 13 years. The tasks ahead will likely require technical capacity from a government that has largely eroded and needs robust reinforcement from the donor community.

Roots of Conflict

The history of Zimbabwe's independence from British colonialism and white supremacist rule continues to play a significant role in political discourse. Southern Rhodesia, as it was formerly known, was settled by whites beginning in the late nineteenth century. In 1930, the Land Apportionment Act restricted black access to land and forced many would-be farmers into wage labour.

In 1965, Prime Minister Ian Smith, fearing that the "wind of change" sweeping over Africa in the wake of decolonization would ultimately produce majority rule in Rhodesia, unilaterally declared independence from Britain of his white-minority regime. The international community declared Rhodesia an outlaw state and imposed strict sanctions. It was recognized only by apartheid South Africa.

Liberation groups — the predominantly majority Shona and Chinese-backed Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the predominantly minority Ndebele and Soviet-backed Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) — intensified their guerilla campaign against white rule, eventually leading Smith to submit to negotiations. British-brokered talks at Lancaster House in the UK led to British-supervised elections in 1980, won by independence leader Robert Mugabe's ZANU party. Mugabe became prime minister and has remained leader of the country ever since, changing the constitution to become president in 1987.

Post-colonial Violence

In 1982, Prime Minister Mugabe feared rebellion by his political rival and cabinet member Joshua Nkomo and had him fired. Mugabe then sent the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, a unit subordinate directly to him and outside the military chain of command, into Matabeleland in an operation known as Gukurahundi (in Mashona, this means "the early rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains"). Fearing for his own life, Nkomo fled to London in 1983, accusing the brigade of killing three people in his home, calling the unit a "political army" and denying that the main issue was tribal, but rather one of political control. The killings that took place over the next few years are widely referred to as a massacre, with estimates of the number killed as high as 20,000.

Diplomats in Harare conveyed the reports of massacres to their governments, but authorities at home, not eager to call into question such a recent success and fearful of further regional instability, chose not to confront Mugabe's evident intolerance for dissent. Then British Ambassador Sir Martin Ewans later wrote that "It wasn't pleasant and people were being killed but…I don't think anything was to be gained by protesting to Mugabe about it…I think the advice [from London] was to steer clear of it in the interests of doing our best positively to help Zimbabwe build itself up as a nation" (cited in Barclay, 2010). In the words of British diplomat Philip Barclay (2010), who served more than two decades later, the experience was instructive to Mugabe: "he can kill to retain power and the world will do no more than watch."

It remains a searing memory for Ndebeles and a lingering social divide in the country. A commission established to investigate the campaign drafted a report that was never publicly released. Fear of accountability or retribution for the campaign is reputed to be among the reasons Mugabe fears losing power. Mugabe eventually succeeded in bringing ZAPU to heel, signing an accord with Nkomo to merge ZAPU into ZANU in 1987, and amending the constitution to create an executive presidency. In 1987, ZAPU and ZANU formed ZANU-PF (Patriotic Front), in what was seen by

some as a move toward the one-party state Mugabe had been advocating. The first decade of his rule saw a strong drive to centralize power in his own hands.

Hope and Disappointment: The 1990s

There was a glimmer of hope for anchoring multi-party democracy in 1990, when Mugabe's post-election attempt at constitutional change to establish a one-party state failed (his party and loyal security forces continued their de facto one-party rule, and Mugabe was re-elected in 1996). In 1991, hope continued to predominate among Western diplomats as Mugabe hosted the Commonwealth Summit, during which he held a garden party with Queen Elizabeth II. With his support, the Commonwealth adopted the Harare Declaration, committing member states to protect "democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government; [and] fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief." Mugabe's "constructive neutrality" was instrumental in overcoming objections from a number of autocrats: Kenya's Daniel arap Moi, Malaysia's Mahathir bin Mohamad and Uganda's still-ruling Yoweri Museveni among them.

In the early 1990s, the land distribution issue came to the fore as Mugabe seized four large white-owned farms and denied any right of appeal. He dismissed the objections of Harare-based diplomats and isolated those who protested vigorously, such as Canada's High Commissioner Charles Bassett, from government contact. The sense emanating from President Mugabe that he was embattled by foreign opponents began to dominate his public statements from this time.

Through the 1990s, Mugabe increasingly relied upon party and loyal security forces, which included the feared Central Intelligence Organization. In 1996, after being re-elected, Mugabe stated that land would be expropriated without compensation, which would be deferred until later. With infusions from IFIs drying up, both due to larger global trends and to misuse by the government, Zimbabwe sought alternative sources of income. Wealth from timber and mining concessions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where his armed forces participated in what became a regional war, went directly to military and party leaders. The relationships with Libya and China grew closer as the West became more estranged and less tolerant of Mugabe's authoritarian tendencies.

In Britain in 1997, John Major's Conservative government was defeated at the polls by the Labour Party under its new leader, Tony Blair. Blair's first meeting with Mugabe at the Commonwealth Summit in Edinburgh was mostly consumed by Mugabe's monologue on land compensation. The Mugabe government claimed that Britain reneged on a commitment by Blair's predecessor, John Major, to support land redistribution efforts. Britain's position was that it would support "willing seller" land purchases, along with other donors, so long as it was integrated in a wider land reform and poverty reduction policy. Earlier efforts were assessed to have benefitted ZANU-PF officials rather than the intended recipients. Mugabe never agreed to these

stipulations. According to British High Commissioner Brian Donnelly, "The great Mugabe myth is that it has been lack of money that has precluded land reform. There would always have been money if he had been prepared to accept a transparent and equitable process" (cited in Kinsman, 2008). In Mugabe's worldview, this was an injustice. Perhaps more importantly, war veterans were becoming an increasingly demanding and resentful constituency that could turn against Mugabe were they not placated. A one-time payment of Z$50,000 per person was made, driving inflation, but once paid from the public purse, their demands grew. The largest repository of Zimbabwean assets rests in the commercial farming sector; this naturally became the till to which Mugabe and the ZANU-PF gravitated.

By late 1999, a government-appointed commission on drafting a new constitution recommended that Mugabe's powers be curbed and limited to two terms in office. At that point, the constitution had been amended 15 times to increase executive power. Dissenting opinions on the committee criticized the draft for leaving Mugabe too much authority. Mugabe then proposed a constitution to increase his powers, put it forward in a referendum in February 2000, and lost. A civic movement, the National Constitutional Accord met, despite official vilification, to discuss a constitution that could be accepted by a majority of Zimbabweans.

Land Seizure and Opposition Politics: Becoming a Pariah

In 2000, forcible seizures of white-owned land by ZANU-PF "war veterans" (now often party thugs too young to have fought in the wars of independence) began to seriously destabilize Zimbabwe's economy. The victims of this policy were overwhelmingly black, with over a million made homeless since 1998, 400,000 of them prematurely dead as a result. In the words of British diplomat Philip Barclay (2010), "I would fault white farmers for their Canute-like perseverance in managing their enterprises on such traditional lines. Had they educated and trained several thousand farm managers — a rural black middle class engaged in farming — it would have been much harder for ZANU-PF to argue that white agriculture had it in for the black man." Barclay notes that while donor funds were readily available in the 1980s for land redistribution and training schemes, much went unused; Mugabe seemed uninterested. "Land became a policy focus only when Mugabe began to run out of steam and saw the potential to link it to the politically explosive topics of race and colonial history. Land also became a useful, though quickly exhausted, medium for political patronage" (ibid.). It had the added benefit of hitting his political opponents while motivating his own supporters.

The 2000 Parliamentary elections saw a ZANU-PF victory over the newly formed opposition MDC, led by trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai, but Mugabe's party lost its margin to change the constitution. MDC's first electoral showing was impressive, with the party taking nearly half — 57 of 120 — of contested seats. The election results helped drive Mugabe to ever more aggressive and violent methods to maintain power.

In 2002, Mugabe won the presidency, but the lack of freedom and fairness of the vote was condemned by Commonwealth and Western powers alike. Brussels called off a planned EU observer mission due to obstacles from the Mugabe government, despite the advice of EU ambassadors in Harare that criticism of what was already an unfair electoral process would be undermined by not having observers on the ground. Norway, however, did field an observer mission and strongly criticized the electoral process. The Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe, citing high levels of violence in the election, which was the beginning of ongoing sanctions by the EU, US, Australia and New Zealand. South Africa, fearful of state collapse on its border, endorsed the poll, as did the rest of SADC members. The divergence between the Western democracies' views and those of most in the region widened from here. That same year, the Zimbabwean Supreme Court struck down the legislation allowing non-consensual land acquisition. Mugabe forced many judges from the bench in response.

Zimbabwe suffers from periodic droughts, and the combination of natural conditions and the chaos surrounding the country's agricultural land combined in 2002-2003 to require rapidly escalating external food assistance — received most generously from the countries most vilified by Mugabe. The economic and social ripple effect from high rates of HIV/AIDS infection also began to take their toll. Zimbabwe's agricultural productivity and economy in general began to nosedive. The government response to this popular hardship has been callous, sometimes in the extreme. As Zimbabwe depopulated, Minister of Lands Didymus Mutasa said that "We would be better off with only six million people [from 14 million in 2000]…our own people who supported the liberation struggle. We don't want all these people" (cited in Barclay, 2010).

In 2004, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was tried for treason on trumped-up evidence and acquitted. Violence against MDC supporters would only escalate. The following year, the United States ramped up its anti-Mugabe rhetoric, declaring Zimbabwe one of six world "outposts of tyranny." Perhaps both threatened and emboldened by his pariah status, Mugabe authorized Operation Marambatsvina ("take out the trash"), targeting concentrations of his urban opponents. In the months leading up to another flawed election, hundreds of thousands of urban slum dwellers were forcibly displaced and their homes destroyed; hundreds of thousands of eligible citizens were unable to vote where they were registered. ZANU-PF won at the polls in the wake of this brutality. The next few years, leading up to the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections, were marked by further sanctions, escalating rhetoric on all sides and increasing economic woes, especially for Zimbabwe's poor.

Agricultural production and distribution fell to a point where at least half of Zimbabwe's population was at risk of hunger. Inflation reached astronomical dimensions. The flow of refugees across the border to South Africa grew unabated, as Zimbabweans fled in search of jobs, food and safety from political persecution. MDC leaders and activists such as Women of Zimbabwe Arise came under increasing attack, often physical, by the government and ZANU-PF's own youth militia. At a

major demonstration in March 2007, the security forces publicly beat a number of prominent opposition figures, including Tsvangirai himself. His skull was fractured in beatings while in police custody; photos of his swollen and bruised face made front pages worldwide.

The Western and African leaders' different approaches to the crisis would grow ever more divergent, with increasing isolation and condemnation by the former, contrasting to what the international press dubbed "quiet diplomacy" led by South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki — though Mbeki's passiveness following the March 29, 2008 election was increasingly contested by other SADC leaders, including Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete and Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa, as well as in South Africa itself. The failure of these two schools of thought to find more common policy ground on at least the shared interest in change became a subject of heated argument on both sides.

The March 2008 elections showed how deeply Mugabe and his party's popularity had fallen. Violence attended the initial campaign, but it was seen by observers to have been less than in the previous three elections. Even optimistic predictions by some foreign diplomats on the ground predicted the MDC would win only about a third of the seats, based on the simple assumption that while Mugabe might not be popular in the cities, he was in the countryside. ZANU-PF and MDC were in a race to the bottom, feeling internal resource pressures during the campaign. Locally tallied results, communicated among opposition officials and voters themselves, showed that the MDC had indeed been dominant in the cities, but also performed strongly in the rural areas. The Zimbabwe Election Commission drip-fed the parliamentary results over a course of days, delaying the (more easily tallied) presidential results for five weeks. The main, Tsvangirai-led faction of the MDC won two more seats (99) than the ZANU-PF. The smaller Mutambara MDC faction (based in Matebeleland) also won 10; had the parties remained united, there would have been 18 more seats (for a total of 117) added to a unified MDC's tally. The MDC claimed outright presidential victory early on, drawing the ire (and treason charges) of the government. Their estimate was later revised down to a bare majority, which hurt their credibility and bolstered a reputation for exaggeration. An independent network estimated the vote at 49 percent for Tsvangirai, 43 percent for Mugabe, with +/- two percent margin of error. Five weeks after the election, the Election Commission finally released the official results: 47.9 percent for Tsvangirai, 43.2 percent for Mugabe and 8.3 percent for ZANU-PF challenger Simba Makoni. Electoral rules were changed to allow the runoff to be held 90 days after the initial election, giving ZANU-PF more time to plot its response.

These results were a massive challenge to Mugabe, who reportedly considered accepting the result in early April (a month before it was made official), stung by the rebuke of a nation he believed owed him perpetual gratitude. But those in the inner circle, particularly in the security apparatus, had no intention of accepting the results, fearing prosecution for their numerous misdeeds. In April, the Joint Operations Centre (JOC), composed of hardline senior military officers, effectively took control

of the situation while Mugabe was deliberating on his next move. Their conclusion was simple. According to Philip Barclay (2010), "the spirit of the people and the opposition they had shown to Mugabe on March 29 would have to be broken." The JOC also worked to wind Mugabe back up by showing him films of white resistance to farm evictions. These men saw no distinction between the ZANU-PF and the state. Mugabe's loss was unacceptable, whatever the citizens wanted.

To ensure a more favourable result in the presidential runoff, intimidation and horrific violence were unleashed on a massive scale — without regard to the long-term damage to Zimbabwe's social fabric. In the words of British diplomat Philip Barclay (2010), "ZANU's readiness when under pressure to resort to violence and target educated people shows its Maoist origins." Youths were recruited from ZANU-PF's Mashonaland redoubt (though MDC made inroads there too) for mobile teams led by security officials, briefed that the revolution was under threat by traitors, and that radical measures were required. Such measures included beatings, rape, murder (including burning perceived opponents alive) and the specific targeting of polling station officials, who frequently happened to be teachers. A teacher in the town of Zaka reported receiving a text message threatening her and her colleagues with death should the town come out in favour of Tsvangirai once again. Mass arrests of teachers were reported. The frequent use of rape as a political weapon, usually by youths plied with free beer, carried with it the potential of death, given the high incidence of AIDS in Zimbabwe. Village chiefs were also frequently recruited or press-ganged into roles as enforcers of election turnout — and results.

Mugabe won the June 27, 2008 runoff election, which Tsvangirai boycotted, stating that the election was a "violent sham" and that no free election was feasible under conditions where opposition supporters' lives were threatened. The country was devastated by the continued violence. Mugabe quickly held a defiant inaugural ceremony and then jetted off to an African Union summit. No African leaders present questioned his legitimacy openly, yet, in its election report, the SADC stated that the result did not reflect the popular will, noting state-sponsored violence, one-sided media coverage and impediments to the MDC's ability to campaign. South Africa's Thabo Mbeki continued to straddle, stating Mugabe was willing to talk to the MDC. In contrast, Botswana's Foreign Minister, Phandu Skelemani, stated baldly that "He can't pretend to act as if he won an election because he didn't," and that "SADC have failed the people of Zimbabwe…Too many in the leadership of SADC feel some kind of obligation towards Mugabe" (cited in Barclay, 2010). Efforts led by the US and UK to apply new sanctions to the Mugabe regime were rejected in the UN Security Council by China and Russia, but EU members added new sanctions on business transactions with the regime and connected individuals in August 2008.

Tsvangirai and the MDC faced a brutal choice: enter talks to share power with the regime or be condemned to irrelevance and perhaps total oblivion. The grassroots party, which had borne the brunt of government violence, was against such a deal. Provincial MDC MPs and members felt abandoned in the paroxysm of carnage that followed the runoff announcement. International opprobrium didn't lead to

Mugabe's forced ouster, as many had hoped. Tsvangirai swallowed the bitter pill. Reminiscent of the model that followed Kenya's fractious election and its bloody aftermath, Mugabe and Tsvangirai entered power-sharing talks in August 2008, which ultimately led to a deal — the Global Political Agreement in September. The implementation of the deal was stalled for months, however, over the distribution of key ministries, especially those pertaining to public security (notably the Ministry of Interior), where Mugabe's ZANU-PF insisted on a monopoly. Meanwhile, a cholera outbreak brought on by the collapse of once-enviable public health infrastructure, along with rapidly accelerating inflation (well over two million percent annualized), sent ever-greater streams of refugees to South Africa. In December, Mugabe denied there was any more cholera, a statement that shocked even his supporters, given the ugly reality. The government declared a national health emergency the same month. South Africa announced it would withhold aid until Zimbabwe had a representative government. Unpaid troops rioted in November 2008.

SADC leaders were becoming impatient with the limbo and increasingly saw Tsvangirai as the one to blame. At a meeting in late January 2009 in the exclusive Sandton district of Johannesburg, SADC leaders met with Mugabe, with Tsvangirai outside the room — yet another humiliation. Despite having planned to drive a hard bargain at the SADC meeting, Tsvangirai negotiated the right to appoint five governors and accepted the power-sharing arrangement: Mugabe would remain president, Tsvangirai would become prime minister; the next month, he was sworn in as prime minister. Foreign currencies (primarily the US dollar) were legalized to stem the hyperinflationary spiral (a Z$100 trillion note had entered circulation), allowing consumer prices to fall, but the IMF refused the new government a loan until its US$1 billion in debt was settled. China granted the country a US$950 million loan in July.

Talks between Mugabe and Tsvangirai on the shape of a new constitution resumed in July 2009, but went nowhere. In late August 2009, Mugabe railed against the West in a public rally, claiming that after opening up to the West as friends "you want to be masters."

The MDC's frustration at its separation from real levers of power grew, and attacks on its members in the capital and the hinterland continued apace. South African President Jacob Zuma came in an attempt to mediate between Mugabe and Tsvangirai to seek full implementation of the Global Political Agreement in order to "create confidence." The MDC accused hardline ZANU-PF supporters in the security forces of attempting to derail the deal. Soon after, the IMF loaned Zimbabwe US$400 million to bolster its foreign currency reserves without conditions, but placed an additional US$100 million in escrow until the country cleared its arrears. The parties differed on how the funds should be used, with ZANU-PF pushing for immediate disbursement to farmers and companies (many of which are party-linked).

The EU also sent a delegation to Zimbabwe in September 2009 to meet both Mugabe and Tsvangirai to press for progress that would allow fully normalized ties. Swedish Prime Minister (and chair of the EU Presidency at the time)

Fredrik Reinfeldt said that a curtailment of the personal sanctions was not on the agenda. "It is not the restrictions that are creating problems in Zimbabwe, it is the mismanagement [and] not respecting of human rights." The MDC wanted lifting of these sanctions to be conditional on full implementation of the Global Political Agreement, while Mugabe wanted these lifted immediately. Mugabe noted that the talks "went well…Obviously they thought the Global Political Agreement was not working well." He went on to claim that ZANU-PF had done "everything" required under the Agreement. In a speech before his meeting with the delegation, Tsvangirai said "I am not going to stand by while ZANU-PF continues to violate the law, persecutes our members, spreads the language of hate, invades our productive farms [and] ignores our international treaties. We want partners who are going to commit themselves to good governance principles. We cannot have partners of looters." Then European Commissioner for Development Karel De Gucht said "They do not have the same reading of the same document. They have a different reading on how this should be done and at what speed." Despite the positive characterization of the visit by President Mugabe, Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa accused the EU of buying into the MDC's arguments "hook, line and sinker. They seem to want to undermine the inclusive government."

Prime Minister Tsvangirai began to boycott government meetings in October as a result of the prosecution of deputy Minister of Agriculture-designate, former coffee farmer and MDC member Roy Bennett, for terrorism, insurgency, sabotage and banditry. Bennett had been arrested earlier in February on the day government ministers were sworn in. The case drew criticism from Western capitals, including Washington and London, for having been politically motivated. Tsvangirai vowed not to go to his office until the case against Bennett was "resolved."

While shops in Harare and Bulawayo may have finally been stocked and more citizens were able to afford basic necessities, fear continued to grip the countryside. White farmers, who once had 4,000 farms and were now down to a few score nationwide, told the BBC that "anarchy and lawlessness" remained the norm well after the power-sharing deal. Former British diplomat Philip Barclay (2010) opined "I think people now realize that what the [farm evictions] policy has really been about is the transfer of land from an arrogant white elite that was at least productive to an arrogant black elite that is totally unproductive. So it's really hard to see this empowering the ordinary Zimbabweans in any way. The people who own the land now are a very small number of Mugabe's cronies." Including the Mugabes themselves, he might have added. Mugabe's wife, Grace, now owns an expropriated farm that had been selling to Nestlé, before the negative publicity compelled the corporation to end the arrangement.

Grace Mugabe also has other profit centres. In December 2010, she sued Wikileaks over allegations in leaked diplomatic cables that she was enriched by illegal diamond sales. Official diamond sales were resumed in August 2010; two of the Marenge diamond fields were approved by the Kimberley Process for sale in November 2011. This funding stream has proven a lifeline for Mugabe and ZANU-PF in general, and

has led some observers to worry that "the resource curse" will allow Mugabe and company greater latitude to maintain control. Additionally, the government from March 2010 began requiring foreign-owned companies to sell majority stakes to local partners — hardly a welcome mat for foreign investment.

A teacher in West Mashonaland noted that all teachers were suspected by ZANU-PF officials, war veterans and young toughs to be MDC supporters, and were regularly harassed, intimidated or attacked. The MDC asserted that the ZANU-PF was creating militia bases in the countryside and militarizing state institutions in preparation for future elections. Military and security officials were even emplaced in the state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC).

But while ZANU-PF still holds most of the high cards, the tenuous political arrangement took its toll on party unity. Mugabe himself stated at a party congress in December 2009 that "The party is eating itself up. The more intense the internal fighting is, the greater opportunity we give the opposition to thrive." Complaints about lack of pluralism in the party became more audible than before, as members looked to the inevitable post-Mugabe future. "We must win [elections] resoundingly and regain the constituents we lost," Mugabe told the 10,000 members assembled. How ZANU-PF might get out the vote might not be from the democratic retail politics playbook either.

But in March 2010, South African President Zuma mediated between President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai to arrive at a deal to allow the government to move forward. The package of measures apparently included some senior appointments for the MDC that had long been on hold, including a new head of the Central Bank, Attorney General and provincial governors. Soon after, a Human Rights Commission and Electoral Commission were inaugurated by Mugabe and also applauded by the MDC. The former is headed by Reginald Austin, former head of the Commonwealth's legal affairs division; the latter is headed by Simpson Mutambanengwe, a former judge on the Zimbabwean Supreme Court and acting chief justice in Namibia. Of the Election Commission, Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara (from an MDC splinter party) said "The Commission will go a long way in creating conditions for free and fair elections in our country." President Zuma also made a point of meeting with Deputy Agriculture Minister designate Roy Bennett, who was still on trial. In May, Bennett was acquitted by Zimbabwe's High Court, as the judge found insufficient evidence of the charges. The government (the Justice Ministry is held by ZANU-PF) vowed to appeal the verdict. An Attorney General's office spokesman said the High Court judge had taken a "piecemeal approach. He should have considered the merits of the case and the facts which pointed to the accused." The MDC's spokesman denounced the appeal, stating "This has nothing to do with the law, but something to do with politics."

In a rare show of unity, Prime Minister Tsvangirai invited President Mugabe and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara to join him at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where all three encouraged investment in Zimbabwe. Finance Minister and General Secretary of the MDC Tendai Biti is seen by Barclay (2010) to have

"more direct power [than Tsvangirai]. At least he gets to control the budget. And given the difficulties he's faced getting public servants back to work, he's achieved a tremendous amount."

Foreign governments recognized a need to assist forward movement, however shaky. In the United States, then Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry said in a press conference with Tsvangirai that the new joint government has made "real progress in stabilizing runaway inflation and trying to begin to create the conditions for democracy…I believe that we should explore our options to increase assistance for reform. Failure to act now may squander this opportunity for change, and the greatest beneficiaries will be Robert Mugabe and the other architects of Zimbabwe's destruction" (cited in Rhee, 2009).

The Zimbabwean media landscape opened more in May 2010 with the new Zimbabwe Media Commission's (ZMC) licensing of four private dailies, including the *Daily News*, which had been shut down in 2003 and whose restart was delayed since 2008. "We are here to allow Zimbabweans access to media," said the ZMC's chairman, Godfrey Majonga. A new daily, *NewsDay*, was launched. Despite these hopeful signs of some greater openness in the printed press, radio reigns supreme in Zimbabwe, and government efforts to maintain total control of broadcast media have expanded to attempts to control receivers in the hands of private citizens. Radios capable of picking up shortwave broadcasts have been seized, as well as mobile telephones. "A lot of people were taken to the police station and…warned that those…with the radios [in the future] will disappear," one villager east of Harare told the BBC in late March 2013 (Hungwe, 2013). Police said the radios, including many wind-up radios that need no batteries or external electrical power, would be used to receive "hate speech" from abroad. An MDC spokesman said that the seizure of radios was done in order to force citizens to listen to the state-run/ZANU-PF-controlled ZBC. A presidential spokesman accused foreign embassies of "smuggling" radios into Zimbabwe.

Efforts to draft a new constitution, a process begun in summer 2009, led to recriminations between Prime Minister Tsvangirai and President Mugabe, with the former alleging in September 2010 that violence was employed against MDC supporters at public consultations. Mugabe was once again nominated to run for the presidency by ZANU-PF at the end of the year.

2011 was also an indecisive year. The EU removed 35 regime officials and ZANU-PF leaders from its asset freeze list in February. The following month, Prime Minister Tsvangirai said the unity government was moribund due to ZANU-PF violence and unwillingness to hold up its end of the bargain. General Solomon Mujuru, a senior player believed to have pressured Mugabe to leave politics, died in an unexplained house fire in August. Mugabe ended the year by claiming he would indeed run again. Yet Wikileaks cables exposed speculation that he suffered from cancer, as well as exposing senior ZANU-PF figures and army officers speaking to foreign diplomats about his need to step aside. At the same time, seasoned observers of Zimbabwe noticed improvement in the material standard of infrastructure and

noticed increased foreign traffic in Harare, drawn by the lure of the diamond trade. "There is a feeling that the Gods of Commerce, rather like Zimbabwe's eternal potential, and the diamonds sprouting in the east, attract more friends than critical journalists," Zimbabwean journalist and filmmaker Farai Sevenzo (2011) wrote for the BBC. He noted a widening income gap, and observed that "the MDC has seamlessly become part of the ruling class, in their official vehicles and trappings of power."

The EU lifted yet more targeted sanctions in February 2012, this time travel bans on a number of senior figures, but not Mugabe himself. In the same month, the Constitutional Select Committee tabled a draft constitution, the details of which were disputed by ZANU-PF and MDC. That spring, reports of political violence increased; the MDC claimed rallies had been cleared. By autumn 2012, human rights activists claimed to see telltale signs of the reactivation of the structures of repression and intimidation employed in the summer 2008 violence. Prime Minister Tsvangirai threatened to withdraw from the unity government in October over attacks on MDC members.

Despite all these frictions and ominous developments, 2013 began on a positive note, with Mugabe and Tsvangirai agreeing on the constitutional draft. Its provisions allow future presidents (i.e., those elected later this year) to hold office for two five-year terms — which would allow Mugabe to hold office once again. The draft constitution was overwhelmingly supported in a March 2013 referendum. In response, the EU suspended sanctions against 81 officials and eight firms. "The EU congratulates the people of Zimbabwe on a peaceful, successful and credible vote to approve a new constitution," a statement read, noting the referendum was a "significant step" toward credible general elections later in the year (Torello and Norman, 2013). Nonetheless, 10 "key decision makers," including Mugabe himself, and two firms, remain under EU sanctions (ibid.).

Following the referendum, journalists heard from ordinary citizens' accounts of life becoming more normal and hopes for the future. "Things have been difficult here for many years but we are starting to see a change. I now have hope that our country will be back to normal someday soon…I am able to plan my day now and budget for groceries. I don't worry about whether shops will still be open tomorrow or how much things will cost or even if I'll have a job to go to tomorrow," a female Harare cab driver told a BBC correspondent (BBC News Africa, 2013a). Businessmen said they could now operate — "we now have a normal business model where the price of goods and services is set by demand and supply," noted one (ibid.).

The government remains prone to ructions as elections approach in July, and there is no clear common governing agenda for the elements of the power-sharing government, short of trying to attract foreign investment to Zimbabwe. Barclay (2010) opined that the achievements of the unity government were more "results of inertia rather than of activism." There were worrying signs that the senior leadership of MDC, Tsvangiari included, enjoyed the perquisites of office — cars, good pay, expense accounts, travel — too much to rock the boat.

Nothing fundamental in the imbalance of power has changed in the years of the unity government and in advance of the July 31, 2013 election. The situation was described as a "temporary absence of violence" rather than peace (ibid.). Despite welcome signs of economic revitalization, Zimbabwe's agricultural sector — crucial for food self-sufficiency, livelihoods and export earnings — is nowhere near recovery.

The July 2013 general elections, for both the presidency and parliamentary assembly, were relatively peaceful. Official results reported Mugabe the winner of a seventh term as president by 61 percent, and his ZANU-PF won 158 seats in Parliament to the MDC's 49 — a three-quarters majority. But on the day of the poll and immediately following, fears of electoral manipulation appear to have been borne out. On August 1, Irene Petersen from the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a domestic monitoring group, stated that the "election was seriously compromised by a systematic effort to disenfranchise urban voters — up to a million voters" (BBC News Africa, 2013b). Zimbabwe Election Commission member Mkhululi Nyathi resigned on August 3, stating "While throughout the whole process I retained some measure of hope that the integrity of the whole process could be salvaged along the way, this was not to be" (ibid.). African Union monitors, 70 in all, led by former Nigerian President Olesegun Obasanjo, found the poll "free and credible." SADC found the election "free and peaceful," but has not opined on the fairness of the process (ibid.). At issue is the inclusiveness of voter lists; many voters were reportedly turned away at the polling stations.There were also reports of "assisted voting" at some rural polling stations, where voters were intimidated into having their votes cast by others (BBC News Africa, 2013c).

The opposition MDC and Tsvangirai have decried the results, vowing to challenge them before the Constitutional Court, which Tsvangirai must do within seven days of the announcement of the results. At the time of writing, this deadline has not passed. The Court then has two weeks to rule. If it rules in Mugabe's favour, he will be sworn in within 48 hours. Already, the MDC claims its members have been attacked by ZANU-PF supporters in the capital and in Mashonaland, being told to pack and leave (BBC News Africa, 2013b). MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett told BBC Newshour that there was a "seething anger simmering across the length and breadth of Zimbabwe... for the fact that they have had their rights stolen," adding that the ZANU-PF are "a bunch of kleptocratic geriatrics who should have retired a long time ago."

International reactions have been mixed. South African President Zuma delivered his "profound congratulations." The US, UK and EU have expressed their concern with the reports of irregularities. On August 2, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton issued a statement that "The EU is concerned about alleged irregularities and reports of incomplete participation, as well as identified weaknesses in the electoral process and a lack of transparency" (UPI, 2013). British Foreign Secretary William Hague expressed "grave concerns" about the process, noting that the voter rolls were not made available to all political parties as stipulated by law, which he identified as "a critical flaw." He added that large numbers of voters were turned away, especially

in urban areas, that a "very high" number of extra ballots were printed and that extra polling stations were added on the day of the election. "The irregularities in the lead up to the elections and on election day itself, reported by the observer mission and in contravention of SADC's guidelines, call into serious question the credibility of the election" (BBC News Africa, 2013d). US Secretary of State John Kerry (2013) said that the elections were the "culmination of a deeply flawed process." Interestingly, both London and Washington cited the AU and SADC missions, as well as domestic monitors, as there were no Western monitors accredited. Following a long history of breaking ranks with the SADC mainstream, Botswana called for an independent audit of the electoral process. A government statement on August 5 included the following assessment: "various incidents and circumstances were revealed that call into question whether the entire electoral process, and thus its final result, can be recognized as having been fair, transparent and credible in the context of the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections within the Community. That is why the [electoral observation mission] described the elections as 'free and peaceful' as opposed to 'free and fair,' the latter being the criteria for credible elections."

Given reports of government/ZANU-PF preparation for violence as far back as 2012, reports in the immediate aftermath of attacks on MDC supporters and the MDC's own warnings that it might not be able to control its outraged supporters, the relative peace of the unity government period may be coming to an end.

DIPLOMATIC ASSETS

Diplomats have supported the quest for democratic rule in Zimbabwe since the country's early days of independence. The assets available, however, have varied largely depending on factors including historical legacy, membership in regional organizations such as the SADC and international ones such as the Commonwealth, and whether or not the diplomat's home country is in Zimbabwe's neighbourhood.

The legacy of colonialism and the power of the liberation struggle still make for strong domestic politics in Zimbabwe, and ZANU-PF has traditionally exploited its roots in the independence movement. Robert Mugabe has specifically vilified Britain, revelling in caricatured criticism of Tony Blair during his tenure as prime minister and referring to any diplomatic actions taken by British diplomats as plotting by "colonizers." After US President George W. Bush openly advocated regime change in Iraq and invaded that country in 2003, Mugabe was able to invoke the US as bogeyman, and scapegoat US sanctions for Zimbabwe's economic crisis. The dynamic created by Zimbabwe's colonial legacy has limited diplomatic assets available to many embassies. By linking diplomatic actions taken by Western countries with colonialism, the Zimbabwean government limits the **influence** that these diplomats can have. But the sense that there was a golden age of mutual understanding may be illusory. According to UK High Commissioner Brian Donnelly, "I am not sure that Mugabe ever would have been receptive to advice on democracy. Moreover, he was never very accessible to diplomats…even in the

'good' years" (cited in Kinsman, 2008). This point seems to be bolstered by the treatment meted out to outgoing Swedish Ambassador Sten Rylander in the pro-government press upon his departure in June 2010. Rylander had served throughout southern Africa, and noted Sweden's support for the liberation struggle when making criticisms over child detention, media freedoms and other matters. He was pilloried in the pro-ZANU-PF press as a simple cheerleader for the opposition and agent of "British capitalist-inspired change."

Furthermore, **immunity**, traditionally one of the greatest assets afforded to diplomats, has been called into question as Mugabe has threatened and intimidated many Western diplomats along with journalists and other critics of his government. Mugabe has grown increasingly outspoken and brazen in his actions. Security services have used violent tactics against two Canadian High Commissioners.

On March 20, 2007, President Mugabe threatened to expel Western diplomats, accusing them of meddling in Zimbabwe's domestic affairs. This warning to Western diplomats — against supporting or interacting with opposition leaders — was thought to have been aimed at scaring Zimbabweans from interaction with Western diplomats, and more specifically British Ambassador Andrew Pocock and US Ambassador Christopher Dell. Ambassador Dell walked out of the meeting in protest. In 2008, a joint team of British and Dutch diplomats was harassed and intimidated when visiting the countryside and attempting to meet an imprisoned MDC activist. "You are just not safe here, particularly when you break the rules as you have done. We just cannot guarantee that you won't be shot. You should stay in your embassy in Harare from now on," Philip Barclay (2010) was told by a Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) officer who stopped him. In his view, "the Zimbabweans considered that foreign envoys should confine themselves to attending national day functions and passing back to their capitals whatever commentary on national affairs ZANU-PF chose to provide. The UK, among other concerned nations, had a more expansive idea of what it wanted to see and do in Zimbabwe. Both sides had their own favourite clauses in the Vienna Convention" (ibid.).

Other countries, particularly those with similar historical circumstances such as South Africa, have enjoyed a larger degree of **legitimacy** in Zimbabwe — and thereby access to decision makers. Mugabe and ZANU-PF leaders perceive shared interests arising from common struggle for African self-rule in a post-independence environment. Many countries in the Southern African region directly supported Zimbabwe's independence struggle, and, once in power, Mugabe returned the favour by assisting against South African-backed insurgencies. These governments, acknowledging Zimbabwe's economic crisis, have been able to leverage these historical ties to maintain a dialogue with the ruling ZANU-PF party. In becoming an SADC member, nations agree to share values including "human rights, democracy and the rule of law," but this formal pledge has rarely been employed by SADC members to hold Zimbabwe to these commitments, in part because of questionable democratic credentials of some SADC members themselves, although Botswanan legislators operating in the SADC inter-parliamentary assembly have long been

critical of Zimbabwe's anti-democratic practice; recently the Foreign Minister followed suit. Diplomats from South Africa, particularly Ambassador Jeremiah Ndou, have on occasion reminded Zimbabwe of democratic values all members have agreed to uphold. South Africa has also been leading SADC-supported negotiations between ZANU-PF and opposition parties, although MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai publicly called for former South African President Mbeki to be replaced in this role, citing his lack of willingness to confront Mugabe.

The centrality of the British contribution to Zimbabwean independence was recognized by Mugabe until a decade ago. Other Commonwealth, EU and democratic governments such as the US and Norway also contributed a great deal to post-independence development. Western embassies have shown **solidarity** toward Zimbabwe's civil society and opposition, though often at the risk of antagonizing the government.

Finally, many diplomats have cited their ability to leverage **funds** as a useful asset to their diplomatic efforts in Zimbabwe. Funds have been used to provide support to civil society groups and democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, as part of a larger strategy to support democratic development in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean lawyer and intellectual Alex Magaisa has emphasized the importance of these initiatives as local resources become increasingly scarce. Embassies refrained from direct support to the MDC, "since any evidence of this would be used to prosecute opposition leaders." International food aid — bilateral aid from governments (such as the UK, US and Sweden), through embassies, and multilateral aid, through programs like the World Food Program — has also been a major force by the diplomatic community in helping to stave off famine in Zimbabwe. This aid has vastly increased as Zimbabwe's food crisis has worsened in recent years as a result of land seizures, economic mismanagement, non-cancellation of debt and persistent drought. In terms of proportion, funds for democracy and civil society assistance are dwarfed by the level of humanitarian aid. The fact that most democratic governments remain skeptical that aid will be abused by the ZANU-PF dominated government has meant that food and other humanitarian assistance (particularly in the devastated education sector) has been a point of contention.

TOOL BOX APPLICATION

The Golden Rules

Many diplomats cited **listening** as an important part of their strategy for democracy support. This includes listening to all sides of the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe. Edward Gibson Lanpher, US Ambassador to Zimbabwe from 1991–1995, said that he never turned down an invitation to speak to people throughout every region of the country. He made an effort to be very public in his conversations with a variety of stakeholders in Zimbabwe's future, including white and black

farmers, rural and urban residents, and missionaries. Listening to a wide variety of perspectives helps ambassadors to better **understand** the political situation. British High Commissioner Brian Donnelly organized "road shows" rotating around the main provincial cities, including staff from all the High Commission's sections — commercial, consular, British Council and aid. This effective moving open house facilitated access for citizens. Local officials, parliamentarians, religious and civic figures were invited to evening receptions. Often the visits would be pegged to the opening of some UK-funded project in the area. The effort allowed the High Commission to counter accusations that it was acting covertly. Other embassies conducted similar efforts on a smaller scale. Swedish Ambassador Sten Rylander made a point of getting outside the capital as soon as he was accredited in 2006 to donate vehicles to a community children's rights group, and sought their views on the situation in the country. Yet the ability of diplomats to operate this freely was further curtailed soon after.

A major part of listening to stakeholders and gaining a strong understanding of the situation in Zimbabwe is showing **respect** for Zimbabweans' hopes for the country. This respect forms a major part of South Africa's diplomatic interactions with Zimbabwe, which is largely centred on listening and engaging the government and opposition, so that Zimbabweans can find a common solution to their political problems. In a personal interview, former South African Ambassador Jeremiah Ndou said "The most important thing is that Zimbabweans themselves sit down and agree on what they want," yet, the Zimbabwean opposition and civil society feel this approach is overly solicitous to Mugabe and insensitive to their democratic aspirations.

In recent years, it has become more difficult for some diplomats to engage broadly across all sectors of Zimbabwean society. This is especially true for many of the more outspoken critics of the Zimbabwean government, such as the UK, who have been unable to speak directly with government officials. Because of these limitations, information **sharing** between diplomatic missions has become an important tool for foreign offices. EU ambassadors meet regularly, Commonwealth countries have monthly lunches and constant informal bilateral exchanges among diplomats are the norm. Matthew Neuhaus, director of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth, said that since Zimbabwe withdrew from the Commonwealth in 2003, it has relied largely on its relationship with the SADC for information.

Truth in Communications

Sharing information gathered from stakeholders in Zimbabwe with others through **informing** has been an equally important task of diplomats in the country. A key component of the Canadian mission's current approach is informing the public about human rights abuses and violent or undemocratic actions. Jennifer Metayer, head of Aid for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which was absorbed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 2013, says that CIDA stayed in direct contact with all of its implementing partners several times

per week. If affiliated staff members disappear or experience harassment, incidents are publicly reported so as to shine a spotlight aimed at preventing further abuse.

Formal **reporting** also plays an important role in communicating the current situation in Zimbabwe to home countries and the public, especially with the government's effort to limit international media access. Eden Reid, of the South African High Commission, said in 2008 that a major role of South African diplomats inside of Zimbabwe is reporting back to the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria. Because South African diplomats are able to talk to government officials, opposition leaders and civil society within Zimbabwe, Reid believed they were able to report an accurate picture of the situation in the country, which is useful for forming South African policy. Yet, with misgivings about South African policy, some opposition and civic figures are more apt to talk to Western diplomats. Furthermore, the humanitarian aid given by Western governments enabled insight into conditions and contacts with civil society around the country.

Some of the failure of diplomacy in Zimbabwe, however, may be attributed to a failure to heed warnings reported by diplomats. Former Canadian High Commissioner Robert MacLaren found little support at home for his alarm over reports of massacres in Matabeleland in the 1980s. A decade later, in 1995, US Ambassador Lanpher reported in his final cable to Washington DC that Zimbabwe was "increasingly corrupt" and had "the appearance of democracy, but was basically under a one-party, one-man control." In this case, it was not a failure of reporting, but a failure of capitals to follow up on these reports with action to help prevent further breakdown of democracy.

Working with Government

Though working with ZANU-PF government officials was initially the goal of most, if not all, diplomatic envoys, many diplomats soon found their efforts at democracy support severely impeded by these same officials. When Mugabe's government became increasingly authoritarian beginning in the late 1990s, many diplomats decided they could no longer stay quiet and issued public demarches condemning the actions of the ZANU-PF government. While efforts to work with the Zimbabwean government continued, illegal land seizures and violence surrounding the 2000 elections seemed to be the last straw.

Most notably, the UK and US governments attempted to pressure the Mugabe regime through public condemnation and economic sanctions, though this made their relationship with a retaliatory Zimbabwean government even more dysfunctional. UK High Commissioner Brian Donnelly was demonized in the official press and denied ministerial access, which led him to turn to public means of expressing his views on human rights, detailing the UK's large humanitarian assistance program. The Mugabe regime, seeking to undermine his local credibility, retaliated in many ways, placing Donnelly on 24-hour surveillance in 2002 and threatening to expel him in 2003, accusing him publicly of various fictitious plots ostensibly intended to

overthrow the Zimbabwean government. Donnelly believes these acts were designed primarily to intimidate Zimbabwean interlocutors.

This pattern of the Zimbabwean government continuing to refuse to work with diplomats in the wake of public declarations may prompt reflection on the benefits of such proactive public diplomacy in a one-man state. While such condemnations satisfied domestic constituents' desires to have their governments speak out about human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, the ability of diplomats in the country to influence or negotiate with ZANU-PF officials via **demarches** was severely thwarted. While the softer line taken by other countries may have preserved access, their ability to influence — or will to influence — Zimbabwean policies is hardly evident.

In a personal interview, Matthew Neuhaus said that he believes that better **advising** and greater mentoring involvement with Zimbabwe's government in the early years of independence might have made a difference in the country's ultimate democratic development. Yet the first Zimbabwe cabinets included several leaders who had spent exile years in international institutions. Focussed diplomatic advising to build up more such homegrown future leaders may have forestalled the transformation to authoritarian rule that Zimbabwe later faced. Zimbabwe's government *did* avail itself of external advice in areas of concern when it was desirable. Britain, for instance, helped mould the Zimbabwean National Army, having deployed a military training mission in Zimbabwe for over 20 years. However, many in the international community were eager to overlook governance deficiencies that could have been corrected through advising earlier in exchange for having a "model" democratic African leader to point to in the once-esteemed figure of Mugabe.

The abilities of diplomats to advise the Zimbabwean government in a way that would meaningfully improve democratic development have been constrained by a frequent divergence of views with officials on what constitutes a modern democratic state in Africa. Diplomats have thus turned to civil society as a potential force to strengthen Zimbabwean governance. By advising civil society leaders and working to build their capacity, diplomats believe they are helping to create an environment conducive to better future government. It appears that the unity government, particularly Finance Minister Tendai Biti of the MDC, was more open to international advice; he was perhaps the minister most open to the international community as he pursued foreign capital for the recently stabilized economy and others are also likely receptive. The real question is who actually holds the levers of power. Of "power ministries" (defence, interior and justice) and other government bodies (such as the CIO), these remain firmly in the hands of ZANU-PF hardliners who — if they took any advice — were more likely to accept it from counterparts in Beijing, Tehran or Gadhafi's Tripoli than from the democratic world, near or far.

This advising has largely taken place through an emphasis on **dialogue** that has formed a cornerstone of many diplomats' actions in Zimbabwe. South African Ambassador Ndou emphasized the importance of dialogue, specifically citing South Africa's efforts to encourage conversations between government officials and opposition leaders using the institution of the SADC to maintain legitimacy and

solidarity as an honest broker. Others tried to reel Zimbabwe back before relations with the West reached their current state. Commonwealth Secretary-General and New Zealand former Foreign Minister Don McKinnon was mandated by the Commonwealth Ministerial Advisory Group, formed as a follow-on to the 1991 Harare Declaration, to attempt to forge a creative solution, but was unsuccessful in gaining meaningful political access to Mugabe.

Following this failed attempt, the Commonwealth adopted the Abuja Process in 2001 at the request of then British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in a bid to work with the Zimbabwean government on issues of human rights, elections and land reform. A deal was reached, but the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US diverted international attention, and Mugabe rescinded his consent to the agreement at the end of the month. According to one senior diplomat, this "led the UK (and other Western governments) to doubt the value of dialogue when the other party seemed patently insincere" (cited in Barclay, 2010).

South African President Mbeki's 2007 mediation efforts were often opaque (even to South African diplomats) and viewed with great suspicion by the MDC. His failure to condemn Tsvangirai's beating alienated the MDC further. Yet the mediation did deliver some results that were later essential in the 2008 election. One of these was that all 210 seats in the House of Representatives would be elected — none appointed by the president. In the past, appointments were a method to "stack the deck" in Parliament against the MDC, even when it had won a blocking minority that should have prevented constitutional amendments. A crucial provision quietly included by the MDC negotiators was the posting of local election results at polling stations, rather than sealing and sending them to the next level. This made it possible to tally results on election night, making fraud much harder and monitoring the statewide results for the opposition and civil society possible. Following the 2008 election, however, after which Mbeki failed to acknowledge the MDC as the first round winner, Tsvangirai said Mbeki was too partisan to mediate and called on Zambian President Mwanawasa to take on the role instead. Incoming South African President and ANC leader Jacob Zuma did criticize the poll. A spokesman for the ANC party later said "President Zuma will be more vocal in terms of what we see as deviant behaviour" (BBC News, 2009).

In 2009, the arrival of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in the unity government certainly reopened relations between Harare and much of the international community. Tsvangirai was welcomed to the White House in June 2009 by President Obama, who proclaimed his "extraordinary admiration for the courage [and] the tenacity that the prime minister has shown in navigating through some difficult political times" (cited in Lobe, 2009).

Despite the new unity government, dealing with Mugabe remains difficult. Western democracies have adopted benchmarks for granting aid to the government to ensure it is spent appropriately. These have generated predictable acrimony from Mugabe, who attacked the new US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson, as an "idiot" after a meeting on the sidelines of the July 2009 African Union

summit in Libya. "We have the whole of SADC working with us, and you have the likes of little fellows like Carson, you see, wanting to say: 'You do this, you do that,'" the pro-government *Herald* quoted him as saying. "Who is he?...I hope he was not speaking for Obama. I told him he was a shame, a great shame, being an African-American, an Afro-American for that matter." Mugabe also refused to meet outgoing US Ambassador James McGee, who departed his post that same month. In May 2010, Carson again came under assault, this time by Zimbabwe's Ambassador to the US Machivenyika Mapuranga, who interrupted the Assistant Secretary's remarks on the state of human rights and good governance in Zimbabwe at an Africa Day dinner by shouting "You are talking like a good house slave!" He continued with "We will never be an American colony, you know that!" Carson retorted "You can sit in the audience in darkness, but the light will find you and the truth will find you…It seems that Robert Mugabe has some friends in the room tonight. Unlike in Zimbabwe, they are allowed to speak without oppression because this is a democracy. In Zimbabwe, that kind of talk would have been met with a policeman's stick. We don't do that here" (cited in Rogin, 2010). The Zimbabwean Ambassador was quietly convinced to leave by the event staff at the hotel. Another diplomat in attendance told a reporter that "In Africa, an ambassador is treated like a king. Here he can be humiliated just like anyone else" (ibid.).

Reaching Out

Former Canadian Ambassador John Schram was typical of several ambassadors over recent years who sought to encourage dialogue by **convening** a group of people who had a stake in Zimbabwe's future development and providing them with a safe place for discussion. This allowed local leaders to network with others in the country who were also working toward a more democratic Zimbabwe.

Strengthened by experience in South Africa a decade earlier, Ambassador Schram also emphasized his efforts to encourage dialogue by hosting private dinners every few weeks, attended by leaders from government, business, academia and the media, among other segments of civil society, to discuss Zimbabwe's challenges and to brainstorm solutions for the future. He and other such diplomatic hosts believe these efforts had an impact and helped to create a cadre of leaders who will be ready to help move Zimbabwe on a path toward democracy once the opportunity for change arises. The Norwegians developed a prominent profile for their outreach efforts in Zimbabwe, drawing on their experience organizing the negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords. Most embassies engaged in convening government and opposition at dinner parties and other gatherings.

Ambassador Lanpher highlighted the active participation of US diplomats in the International Visitor Program, which brings current and potential government, business and civil society leaders to the United States for 30 days to "meet and confer with their professional counterparts and to experience America firsthand." Many diplomatic missions also worked to **connect** local leaders with outside groups or individuals who might be helpful to their efforts, including in policy centres

and universities outside Zimbabwe. Each year, Britain's Chevening Scholarships program sends about 20 Zimbabweans for one year of graduate training in the UK; other democracies have similar exchange programs. The British Council also organizes training programs on aspects of democratic governance inside and outside of Zimbabwe. By **showcasing** best practices through these trainings, diplomats such as those from the US Embassy attempted to build capacity of the local Zimbabwean officials, public institutions and civil society.

Much of the support that diplomats have provided to Zimbabwe has also been in the form of **financing**. Diplomats have given funds to promote dialogue, support Zimbabwe's vocal labour movement, reinforce human rights, promote gender equality and build capacity of civil society to push for democratic governance, among others. These funding mechanisms have chiefly been lauded as successful in supporting democracy development. CIDA's Jennifer Metayer points to the especially flexible and rapid-response nature of the agency's funding as critical to the impact it has had in Zimbabwe.

Beyond the direct benefit that diplomats have gained from providing funding to local groups, an additional benefit is that providing funding — especially to development or humanitarian projects — allows diplomats an opportunity to interact with people and the media in a more public way than they might otherwise be able. Canadian Ambassador Schram, for instance, cited his ability to discuss the values of human rights, democracy and rule of law enshrined in such agreements as the Harare Declaration and the New Partnership for African Development undertakings on governance, both of which Zimbabwe had signed, to the media and the public during ceremonies designed to unveil development projects funded by the Canadian government. The ability to provide funds and other forms of aid also gave diplomats some leverage over government officials who rely on these funds. US Ambassador Lanpher recalls an example from the early 1980s, when Zimbabwe was suffering from a severe food shortage due to drought. In 1982, Mugabe had imposed a food curfew on Matabeleland as part of the punishment for the perceived rebellion of Joshua Nkomo's followers. When the US sent food aid to the country, Ambassador Lanpher refused to distribute it until Mugabe's government signed an agreement stating that the food would be distributed across all areas of the country. "I had a good relationship with the government," Ambassador Lanpher stated. "But sometimes you have to be tough." This approach became increasingly difficult, and with the 2002-2003 drought and resultant food shortages, leverage was very limited, as most donor governments refused to channel aid through the Zimbabwean government for fear of it being misused or inequitably distributed.

These financing mechanisms sometimes come at a cost. The public emphasis that many Western diplomats have put on funding pro-democracy civil society groups and opposition parties has allowed Mugabe to decry that the West has been funding "regime change" and has, to some extent, delegitimized opposition groups and even some NGOs in the public eye. Methods developed in post-Cold War Europe in the 1990s were predicated on open access to all parties. Given Zimbabwe's deepening

authoritarianism, support to the ruling ZANU-PF seemed perverse, but it therefore generated fierce resistance. Anecdotal evidence points to infighting that has begun to occur within NGOs and other civil society groups over access to foreign funds. The opposition MDC party split in 2005 was reported by some sources to be driven by disagreements over spending.

Since the adoption of the power-sharing Global Political Agreement, while most democracies held off on delivering aid to the government until they see its full implementation, they have made a point of directing assistance to where it is needed most in Zimbabwe — the beleaguered public — with food aid, help for students to buy books, uniforms and other supplies, as well as to the civic sector.

Defending Democrats

Support for local leadership in the Zimbabwean struggle for democracy has also been a part of diplomatic action in the country. Diplomatic missions like the US Embassy have **demonstrated** their support by being quite vocal in defence of democrats who have been persecuted by the Mugabe regime. These diplomats have identified and called for an end to persecution through official statements, such as the following, released by the US State Department on July 26, 2007: "Yesterday's beating of over 200 Zimbabwean citizens that were peacefully demonstrating for a new constitution is an overt attempt by the Government of Zimbabwe to eliminate any criticism in advance of elections planned for next year." Following an attack on a diplomatic convoy dispatched to investigate intimidation of citizens before the June 2008 runoff election, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that "I think that it gives us a window into the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, because this sort of intimidations is the sort of thing that is suffered daily, especially by those who are working with opposition groups" (cited in BBC News, 2008). South African President Jacob Zuma's visit to Deputy Agriculture Minister designate Roy Bennett, while he was still on trial for terrorism and other charges, sent a strong message to Mugabe's government, and may have stiffened the resolve of those in the judiciary to refuse to succumb to political pressure.

Jennifer Metayer of CIDA says that **verifying** the whereabouts of civil society members and reporting any disappearances or threats has formed a large part of CIDA's efforts in Zimbabwe. By verifying any persecution that civil society activists experience, CIDA let the Zimbabwean government know that the Canadian mission is watching their actions.

In May 2008, a group including the British, US, EU and Japanese ambassadors and the deputy chiefs of mission from the Netherlands and Tanzania (which chairs the African Union) and several other diplomats drove in an 11-car convoy north of the capital to investigate allegations that the government and ruling party were targeting opposition supporters in the aftermath of the first round of the presidential election, held in late March. The diplomats found a ZANU-PF detention and torture centre, and visited local hospitals to interview those injured. The diplomats pushed their way through armed guards at one hospital. On the way back to Harare, the

diplomatic convoy was stopped at a roadblock, and, after hearing from a US diplomat of what they saw, a CIO officer told them "we are going to beat you thoroughly too." Diplomats prevented the agents from fleeing and photographed them. US Ambassador James McGee said afterward "We are eager to continue this type of thing, to show the world what is happening here in Zimbabwe. It is absolutely urgent that the entire world sees what is going on. The violence has to stop." A second such convoy in June 2008, including US and British diplomats, was stopped by police 80 kilometres north of Harare. After refusing to go to a police station, the convoy was chased. At another checkpoint, the cars' tires were slashed by police. The immobilized cars were then attacked by a group of "war veterans." Diplomats were threatened with being burned alive in their vehicles. A Zimbabwean driver was beaten up, and equipment was stolen. Ambassador McGee stated "Zimbabwe is now a lawless country. They are not following their own laws. They are not following international law. The government is trying to intimidate diplomats from going to the countryside to witness the violence they are perpetrating against their own citizens." The police said that the diplomats "behave like criminals and distort information" regarding the incident.

Alex Magaisa believes that the attention of the diplomatic community, including their **witnessing** trials of accused opposition supporters, has had a big impact on Zimbabwe's democratic development. "It's reassuring to know that the world is watching," Magaisa said in a personal interview. "If you get a diplomatic figure from a more powerful country, it makes news and it communicates a message to the world…I think this has been very, very useful." Visits — and attempts to visit — those imprisoned send an important message to the government that these individuals are not forgotten. This act in itself can often save lives.

Diplomats have also tried to **protect** democratic rights by identifying when these rights have been curbed or violated and publicly petitioning the Zimbabwean government to restore democratic norms, including safety for those who are working toward democratic goals. On November 26 2007, the US government released a statement: "We call on the Government of Zimbabwe to end immediately the violent attacks against democratic activists and civil society organizations, to respect the rule of law, and to allow the Zimbabwean people to exercise peacefully their political rights."

These types of public statements that defend the actions of domestic democrats have become even more important in Zimbabwe's constrained media environment. Many foreign journalists were expelled. The few who have been allowed into the country are subject to being censored and periodically arrested, as are local Zimbabwean journalists. Stories of journalists being censored, jailed or beaten have become common, as independent media within the country has withered under stifling laws. Many of the country's journalists have since taken refuge in willing host countries including Britain, the United States and South Africa, where new independent media sources covering Zimbabwe have flourished. While there are

signs of liberalization in terms of print media, the broadcast media are as tightly controlled as ever.

WHAT LESSONS LEARNED?

From an early optimistic start, diplomats from both Western countries and those closest to Zimbabwe in history and geography have been able to use the assets at their disposal with diminishing success. Though colonial history has been manipulated by the Mugabe regime to exclude meaningful influence by the UK and other Western powers, the policies of entities as varied as the US government and the Commonwealth still require careful examination. In light of the diverging approaches of African and specifically SADC leaders and their diplomatic counterparts from the West, two questions are especially worth considering.

First, to what extent is public condemnation an effective diplomatic tool? The planned EU observation mission of the 2002 elections was cancelled on the grounds that the conditions of observation were unacceptably constrained, but also to defer to EU public opinion. It left EU and other missions the task of trying to monitor the elections with inadequate means (an apt example, however, of **sharing**).

Many countries and bodies have taken a hardline public stance against Mugabe and his regime. For example, then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a stern statement in 2007 which read, in part: "The world community again has been shown that the regime of Robert Mugabe is ruthless and repressive and creates only suffering for the people of Zimbabwe. We will continue to follow closely events in Zimbabwe, and we urge the Government to allow all Zimbabweans to freely express their views without being subject to violence and intimidation." In addition, "targeted" sanctions directed at regime officials and supporters have become a standard Western policy tool, which can have a strong psychological impact. While these measures are felt by their intended targets, their application — if perceived as irreversible — can also create a further obstacle to contact and influence with power brokers. Mugabe obsesses over the sanctions in most public appearances, decrying them as the reason for an economic recovery that remains unfelt by many Zimbabweans. This is not the case: investment and commerce can go forth unimpeded, except for arms sales, and Mugabe has travelled freely — even unannounced — to Davos for the World Economic Forum. But the question of the opportunity cost remains, and is difficult to answer with certainty.

Such declarations and policies probably further hampered diplomats' already reduced ability to work directly with government officials and maintain a flow of information about the situation on the ground. But democracies understandably wish to maintain what they judge is an important position of principle on human rights abuses, political violence and undemocratic action — these statements are an element of policy over which they have complete control. Inconsistencies on the part of critical democracies are exploited by autocrats and sow confusion among broad populations as well. Countries and bodies that, on the other hand,

have focussed on working within official channels have been accused of silent collaboration, but they have maintained open channels of communication and information inside Zimbabwe, for what they are worth in effecting moderation and change. Both approaches have had their strengths and weaknesses, with little public acknowledgment or cooperation on either side. Neither seems to have achieved their stated aim.

The second question concerns how much open support diplomats should provide to opposition parties and democracy-promoting civil society groups. In the case of politicians especially, credibility hinges on authenticity and independence. Too much public support and funding from foreign sources opens opposition parties and civil society groups to charges that they are simply fronts for foreign governments, yet without outside support, many of these groups do not have the resources or political space to operate. It is important for diplomats to find a balance between support for a multi-party democratic process and perceived support for "regime change."

This case study does not pretend to provide an answer to these questions, but it does draw attention to the merit of creative thinking about the opening up of diplomatic space between differently positioned actors with varying strategies (an example in this case would be the SADC and the Commonwealth), to find common ground in pursuing similar goals. Rather than viewing these approaches as either-or choices, a better calibration of application might maximize the potential benefits of each: greater willingness to conduct back-channel talks on the part of Western democracies, coupled with a greater willingness by SADC members to use the access they have to influence beneficial change.

CONCLUSION

Zimbabwe requires significant outside support to put it back on track toward realizing its potential, given that its once noteworthy assets are now severely degraded through abuse or neglect. Rebuilding an effective civil service not tied to political leaders, and re-establishing an economic and fiscal climate in which trade and industry can again flourish should be priorities. Generous international support for Zimbabwe's government and civil society would hopefully help the country to enjoy at last the self-governance and prosperity by and for the people that independence and self-determination once promised. There was little movement to date on this front despite the unity government; the growing acrimony around the July 2013 general election makes such developments look highly unlikely at the time of writing.

The resilience of Zimbabwe's people after more than a decade of freefall is remarkable. Prior to the elections, in the tenuous recovery of the unity government period, Zimbabweans were understandably nervous and wary, but also hopeful — a mood summed up by a resident of the Harare suburb of Highfield, where ZANU was founded in 1963: "we might have the best constitution in the world, but if our leaders abuse it, what good is it?" (BBC News Africa, 2013a). Some of his

countrymen hastened to underscore that "we don't want violence" in the upcoming election. A university student added "it is time for us as young people to rebuild this once-wonderful country and we can only do it if we stop fighting amongst each other" (ibid.). One can only hope that her advice is heeded by those in power in the aftermath of the elections.

As events in Zimbabwe unfold, diplomats will maintain a key role in helping the democratic world calibrate its approach toward the government in Harare, by identifying opportunities and threats to consolidating — or rather, rebuilding — democracy.

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