

CSIS AFRICA NOTES

A publication of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.

Zimbabwe: A Status Report

by Roger Martin

Zimbabwe embodies to an unusually high degree the old truth that actions speak louder than words. Taken at face value, the image projected by official rhetoric is that of an anti-Western "Marxist-Leninist" state, intent on one-party "socialism" at home and confrontation with South Africa abroad. The reality is very different and much more complex.

Zimbabwe's economic, regional, and foreign policies are a mixture of pragmatism, caution, and muddle, overlaid with a barrage of strident rhetoric. In domestic power politics, the rhetoric of popular participation masks a sadder reality. What all this adds up to is that Zimbabwe is an African country, dealing with African problems in an African way — not a clone of either East or West.

Black-White Reconciliation

The policy of "reconciliation" with his former white adversaries, announced by Robert Mugabe immediately after his party's decisive victory in the independence elections of 1980 elevated him to the position of prime minister, was and remains a unique act of statesmanship that has served Zimbabwe well. It has ensured broad continuity over the long transition from white to black rule and averted the near-total flight of skills and experience that started Angola's and Mozambique's decline into economic chaos.

Zimbabwe's remaining 100,000 or so whites, enjoying a life-style they could not replicate elsewhere, have been treated far better than most expected. Nevertheless, their position as a conspicuously privileged 2 percent of the population, still owning much of the country's wealth, is under inevitable pressure as the racial inequities of Southern Rhodesia/Rhodesia/Zimbabwe's century-long existence are redressed. Prosperous whites are subject to heavy taxation as part of the government's effort to redistribute wealth toward the (black) poor. Almost all the whites in the civil service, police, and army have been replaced by blacks, and similar pressure for Africanization is mounting in the parastatals and the private sector (with the general exception of the farmers). Many whites have emigrated, and more would follow if they could get their money out.



CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Tribal Tensions

Black-black reconciliation has been less successful, although an encouraging new start has been made since December 1987. The early honeymoon between Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), representing the 80 percent majority Shona ethnic group, and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), representing the 20 percent minority Ndebele, broke down in 1981. The blame may be evenly divided. Groups of ex-guerrillas from Nkomo's forces acted against the national interest in deserting the embryonic national army and resuming guerrilla activity as "dissidents" in Matabeleland. The security forces and ruling party were equally misguided in the brutally repressive tactics they used in the years 1983-1985.

Bruised by the 1985 electoral loss of all its House of Assembly seats outside of its Matabeleland stronghold and by a subsequent government crackdown that included the arrest of 40 party officials, ZAPU entered into unity talks with ZANU. Despite the bitterness between the two groups, a unity agreement was reached on December 22, 1987, under whose terms the parties would ultimately unite under the ZANU name in a process to be administered by Mugabe. Both parties ratified the agreement in April 1988. Nkomo and other ZAPU leaders have returned to the cabinet. Some progress is being made toward merging the local party structures in Matabeleland. The bulk of the dissidents surrendered under a well-timed amnesty in mid-1988, and are now being peacefully resettled in small development projects.

Another less-visible set of ethnic tensions also poses problems for Mugabe. Within ZANU's Shona majority, power since independence has rested primarily in the hands of a coalition of the Zezuru and Manyika subgroups, giving the largest subgroup, the Karangas, a lesser position than many of its members feel is their due. Since the Karangas are predominant within the army, Mugabe (himself a Zezuru, but considered above tribe) has to expend considerable energy in preserving a stable ethnic balance among his party leaders; he accepts a certain amount of incompetence and an inflated ministerial payroll as the price of keeping tensions under control.

Constitutional Changes Ahead

Although Zimbabwe's human rights record has steadily improved since the nadir of the 1985 antidissident campaign, there has been a steady rise in authoritarianism.

The constitution hammered out in the 1979 independence negotiations at Lancaster House largely followed the lines sought by the British negotiators. It was based on the existing constitution of "Zimbabwe Rhodesia" as well as selected independence constitutions of other former British colonies in Africa. It provided for a government headed by a prime minister (a defeat for both ZANU and ZAPU, whose negotiators had called for a stronger executive with wide-ranging

powers). It also stipulated that 20 out of the 100 seats in the House of Assembly would be reserved for legislators elected by whites and that this provision could not be abolished during the first seven years after independence without a unanimous House of Assembly vote. Thereafter, amending the rule would require a 70-vote majority.

Mugabe wasted little time once the seven years were up. The House of Assembly voted through a constitutional amendment abolishing the white seats, to take effect in September 1987. The legislature also voted to abolish the post of prime minister and replace it with a stronger executive presidency; Mugabe was duly sworn in as president on December 31.

Mugabe has always made clear his intention to move to a one-party state. Although the independence constitution prohibits the establishment of a formal one-party system until 1990, in practical terms Mugabe is already well on the way to his goal. In the wake of the ZANU-ZAPU merger deal, ZANU effectively controlled 99 of the 100 House of Assembly seats. Indeed, Zimbabwe has been a de facto one-party state since 1980, in the sense that only ZANU members have held any real power.

Paradoxically, a formal (as opposed to de facto) one-party system might offer a few advantages to Zimbabweans. At present, for example, the voters of a given solidly ZANU area have the nominal choice of either a single ZANU candidate or anyone running under the auspices of another party. In effect, this is no choice at all, because the members of the ZANU Youth League are not liberal-minded democrats, and the physical courage needed to stand for any other party has been rare. Under formal one-party rule, some choice of candidate would be returned to the voter, since

CSIS AFRICA NOTES is a briefing paper series designed to serve the special needs of decision makers and analysts with Africa-related responsibilities in governments, corporations, the media, research institutions, universities, and other arenas. It is a publication of the African Studies Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C. CSIS is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit policy research institute founded in 1962.

EDITOR: Director of African Studies Helen Kitchen.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE *CSIS Africa Notes* is sent airmail/first class to subscribers worldwide. The annual subscription price for 13 issues and occasional supplements is \$48.00. Please make checks payable to: *CSIS Africa Notes*, Suite 400, 1800 K Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20006, U.S.A. Telephone: (202) 775-3219. Telex: 7108229583. Cables: CENSTRAT. FAX: (202) 775-3199.

ISSN 0736-9506

Mugabe's Formative Years

Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Africa's most broadly educated head of state, was born into "a poor and strict Roman Catholic family" in the Zvimba Tribal Trust Land (native reserve) of the self-governing British colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1924. His father was a laborer. Young Robert attended local mission schools through secondary level and then began university studies by correspondence. He was awarded a scholarship to Fort Hare University College in South Africa in 1949 and received a bachelor of arts degree in 1951.

Returning to Rhodesia, Mugabe combined teaching with further correspondence study, earning a bachelor of education degree from the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 1954. In 1955, he took up a post at a teacher training college in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), where he also found time to complete requirements for a bachelor of science (economics) degree from the University of London.

In 1958, he accepted a teaching post at St. Mary's Training College in Takoradi, Ghana, returning to Salisbury (now Harare) in 1960 strongly influenced by the political thinking of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah. His political career began that year, when he was elected publicity secretary of the National Democratic Party,

successor to the banned African National Congress; Joshua Nkomo was president of both parties. After the NDP was banned in December 1961, Mugabe joined in forming the new successor organization, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). In 1963, when ZAPU split, he became secretary-general of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) spin-off then headed by the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole.

During the decade from 1964 to 1974, when Mugabe was imprisoned by the Smith government, he indulged his passion for academic work by acquiring three more degrees — including an LLB and a bachelor's degree in administration from the University of London.

In the latter half of the 1970s, he guided ZANU from outside the country during the decisive phase of the guerrilla struggle. After the Lancaster House cease-fire at the end of 1979, he returned to Zimbabwe and led ZANU to its February 1980 electoral victory. In April 1980 he became the first prime minister of independent Zimbabwe.

Mrs. (Sally) Mugabe is Ghanaian-born. Despite a serious kidney illness requiring frequent dialysis treatments, she is active in the ZANU Women's League and various charities.

ZANU would put up several candidates for each seat. Furthermore, a greater degree of openness in debate on policy should be possible. In the absence of any concept of a "loyal opposition," criticism of the government by a member of an outside party tends to suggest to a ZANU supporter, "Let us beat up this traitor." The same views from a ZANU member suggest "Let us listen to this comrade."

The overall trend to authoritarianism, however, seems likely to continue. Most politicians (and not just in Africa) will take as much power as ordinary people will let them get away with acquiring. In Zimbabwe, the tradition of mass resistance to local tyranny is still in its infancy. Indeed, ZANU, with its roots in guerrilla struggle rather than a democratic process, exemplifies the truth of the old saying: "The trouble with guerrilla warfare is that the qualities you need to win are the opposite of those you need once you've won."

It must in all fairness be said that the top ZANU leadership exhibits character and leadership ranging from the noble to the thuggish. Yet power continues ineluctably to accrue to a relative handful of leaders, and the countervailing sources of authority are steadily diminished — e.g., the churches (especially the Catholics), the courts, and even the white farmers.

The Mugabe Enigma

By any standards, President Mugabe is a remarkably complex man. He is an intellectual with six university

degrees (three acquired by correspondence while in detention); a fanatically hard worker, trying not to drown in the growing range of decisions referred up to him; and a highly principled man, untainted by corruption. He is also a cold orator, more respected than loved; an austere, aloof figure, devoted to his ill wife, with no vices and no intimate friends. What might have been a softening experience of parenthood was cut short when his only child died in infancy while Mugabe was in detention. Almost alone among his cabinet, he seems genuinely driven by principle and inspired by the ideological dream that sustained him through a decade of imprisonment. His odd predilection for such trappings as mass displays, slogans, rallies, and party structures, however artificial or sterile, seems to reflect the yearning for order and discipline that any leader might feel, faced with the easygoing confusion of a modern African state.

Although Mugabe is instinctively a starry-eyed socialist, he is constrained by reality in his day-to-day decisions. He has generally respected the advice given him by his old friend and onetime protector, the late President Samora Machel of Mozambique: "Don't make my mistakes. Don't attempt radical changes overnight. Keep your economy going above all else. Keep your whites." Furthermore, in the tradition of Shona chiefs, he tends to lead his ministers from behind, refusing to back rash initiatives, needing to be convinced in ad hoc meetings, waiting for a consensus to emerge before

articulating it. This style of management does have some drawbacks. He is often accused of indecisiveness and is surprisingly tolerant of incompetent, corrupt, or even criminal ministers, giving them plenty of rope to hang themselves before easing them sideways (rarely out). He often seems more dreamer, thinker, and exhorter than man of action.

Economic Policy

Pragmatism and trial and error, rather than ideology, characterize Zimbabwe's economic decision making. The overall aim has been to maintain the (largely white) productive sector while redistributing the benefits. The Smith-era sanctions period bequeathed a powerful array of government regulations, which the incoming government used in unpredictable ways, often with unintended results. Nevertheless, exports have held up well, and the economy remains one of the most diversified, integrated, and prosperous in sub-Saharan Africa, with mining, agriculture, and manufacturing supported by high skill levels and good infrastructure.

Major Achievements

Considering the circumstances of Zimbabwe's independence, with a straight transfer of power from loser to winner at the end of a long civil war, the subsequent prosperity and stability of the country have been extraordinary. Much has been achieved:

- **Agriculture.** Zimbabwe's mix of policies toward commercial farmers and small-holding peasants is a model for the continent.
- **Education.** The explosion in black education since independence has been a striking achievement, at least quantitatively. The quality, with its colonial bias toward academic rather than practical education, is less reassuring.
- **Health.** An impressive network of new rural clinics, adequately staffed and equipped but costly to maintain, is now in operation.
- **The Army.** The process of fusing three hostile armies into one is now complete, and the 46,000-man result is one of the best balanced and most professional armies in Africa. A high level of British involvement in training continues to be welcomed.
- **Mining.** The mining industry (primarily gold, asbestos, nickel, coal, copper, iron ore, and chrome) has held up well. The dominant multinationals have amicable relations with the government.
- **Manufacturing.** The 14 years of sanctions Rhodesia experienced under UDI rendered Zimbabwe remarkably self-sufficient in its manufacturing base. (See "How British Policy Toward Africa is Shaped and Executed" by Roger Martin, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 87, July 27, 1988, p. 6.) That base has been maintained despite mounting pressure on foreign exchange and the inefficiencies inherent in small-scale production.

Some Troubling Negatives

On the other hand, there is no room for euphoria:

- **The Budget Deficit.** Repeated failures to control the deficit have led to a suspension of relations with the International Monetary Fund. Together with the tax system, the deficit is the primary tool for rectifying the imbalance in favor of the white minority built into the economy inherited at independence. Social services for blacks, probably beyond the ability of the productive sector to sustain, are being financed by borrowing — a dangerous course.

- **The Foreign Exchange Shortage.** Zimbabwe borrowed heavily as its economy boomed after independence, and its debt-service ratio is now peaking at over 30 percent. Dr. Bernard Chidzero, promoted in the January 1988 cabinet reshuffle to the position of "senior minister" with control over all the main economic ministries (including finance, economic planning, mines, agriculture, trade and commerce, and industry), is determined to honor the debt, service all postindependence investment, and fulfill the constitutional obligations to pay the pensions of former white civil servants, despite the fact that many of them are now resident in South Africa. But in consequence the whole economy groans under a shortage of foreign exchange, and the allocation system is rigidly bureaucratic and inefficient.

- **The Bureaucracy.** The civil service, which switched in five years from overwhelmingly white to overwhelmingly black, is generally terrified of making decisions. Government controls proliferate in many aspects of the economy — wages and prices, hiring and firing, imports and exports. Much is simply paralyzed in consequence. The problem resembles, but is much worse than, some of those faced by Labour governments in Britain seeking a highly regulated mixed economy. The decision-making process is already poor and getting worse.

- **Low Investment.** The number of jobs in the formal sector is the same now as in the early 1970s, and unemployment awaits some 90 percent of school-leavers. There has been almost no investment, domestic or foreign, in new productive jobs and little indication that Mugabe is prepared to grasp this nettle.

- **The Parastatals.** Efficiency is declining in most of the state-owned enterprises inherited from the Rhodesia era, notably in the airline, the steel corporation, and the railways.

- **The Police.** The decline of the level of competence is more evident in the police than in the civil service, especially since a purge of whites by Minister of Home Affairs Herbert Ushewokunze in 1981-1982. One of the legacies of UDI was an absence of senior black policemen.

- **Corruption.** Corruption, though still less prevalent than in many Third World countries, is markedly on the increase. Nepotism (which in Shona society can be viewed as a moral obligation toward one's family) imposes a cost in competence. Peculation in various forms is regularly exposed in the press, but few prosecutions result, and never among ministers. Mugabe is sincere in trying to impose a "leadership

code" whereby senior party members would avoid "contamination" by business interests, but the attempt is doomed. Too many of his colleagues are already involved in capitalist enterprises of one kind or another.

- **Foreign Travel.** Jaunts abroad are a major perquisite of office. In today's Zimbabwe, far too many important officials are away from their desks too often and for too long.

- **Popular Participation.** The tremendous enthusiasm with which Zimbabweans greeted independence was clearly unsustainable. But the pendulum is swinging hard among ordinary people these days as popular attitudes toward the ruling party and its attendant black bourgeoisie tend toward a mix of cynicism and alienation.

A Multifaceted Regional Policy

There are several reasons why Mugabe is first among equals in the leadership ranks of the Front-Line states. These include Zimbabwe's central (but exposed) geographical position, its economic and military strength, and Mugabe's personal qualities and track record as a political figure who survived a long period of detention and then played a key role as a guerrilla leader and negotiator in overcoming the toughest white-dominated government ever displaced in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mugabe's personal loathing of apartheid is unquestioned. Yet he is shrewd enough to realize how carefully he must play his cards if his nation is to survive South Africa's long turmoil. So again he uses fiery rhetoric and militant posturing to cover pragmatic deeds.

Trade, transport, and security are the most important elements in the relationship. South Africa remains Zimbabwe's major trading partner, taking 18 percent of its exports (40 percent in manufactures) and supplying 19 percent of its imports. Redirecting this trade would be very costly, so verbal exhortation to traders to look elsewhere is not backed by controls.

Landlocked Zimbabwe's dependence in the area of ground transport is by far the most significant consideration in shaping regional policy. Over 70 percent of its trade still goes through South Africa. The natural routes through Mozambique were closed and decayed between Mozambique's independence (1975) and Zimbabwe's (1980). The Beira Corridor rail line has been rehabilitated, but the far more important Maputo line (closed by South African-backed MNR guerrillas in 1984) will need years of work, and of security, before Zimbabwe's transport dependence on South Africa is reduced enough to allow Harare to disregard the threat of a Pretoria "squeeze play."

It is with regard to the Maputo line that the South African security threat looms largest. Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces should be able by the early 1990s to keep the line open against MNR disruption. But if South Africa's own commandos were ordered to close down the line, local forces alone would be no

match. The incentive in Pretoria to keep the transport stranglehold effective as a means of ensuring "good-neighborly" behavior by Zimbabwe must be strong, but the priority given by President P.W. Botha to his current diplomatic offensive in the region would seem to reduce the likelihood of any immediate escalation of the pressure.

In the face of this massive vulnerability to South African power, Zimbabwe, in company with the Republic's other vulnerable neighbors, accommodates to reality, complying generally with Pretoria's two basic "ground rules."

The first of these is that Zimbabwe must not itself initiate any economic sanctions, under threat of heavy economic (especially transport) retaliation. Thus, Air Zimbabwe and South African Airways fly reciprocal, busy, and profitable routes. Business contacts between the two countries are close. A preferential trade agreement dating from 1964 is still regularly renewed. Tourists travel freely in both directions. Functional cooperation on the railways is unimpeded (e.g., South Africa leases rolling stock and locomotives on demand). A large South African government trade mission remains in Harare. As previously noted, pension obligations to former white Rhodesian civil servants and soldiers now resident in South Africa, Australia, or elsewhere are paid. So are old debts, as well as remitted dividends from South Africa's large investments in Zimbabwe. On the formal diplomatic front, Mugabe sticks to his principles, forbidding any official contact at ministerial level and resisting South African pressure for a security cooperation agreement. Instead, there is a pragmatic arrangement for regular high-level contacts between the two countries' intelligence services. Zimbabwe also respects South Africa's second basic ground rule, which precludes the launching of any African National Congress or other military operations from Zimbabwean soil.

Zimbabweans remain desperately anxious to reduce their dependence on South Africa, however, and they have their pride. Zimbabwe has taken the lead among the Front-Line states and internationally in efforts to reopen the alternative transport routes, budgeting sizable sums toward this goal and committing up to 10,000 troops to Mozambique. Zimbabwean officials regularly call on the international community to impose sanctions on South Africa, even though they are aware from their own country's historical experience that sanctions would be ineffectual in ending white rule and heavily destabilizing for the region. The rhetoric of sanctions is a minimal macho gesture that they cannot bring themselves to abandon — especially since Mugabe is the current leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, for which such rhetoric is a unifying force. Whether the current surge in South African diplomatic contacts in the region will lead to an eventual change of policy is a question that must be put on hold.

The East-West Factor

In assessing Zimbabwe's relations with the international

community beyond Africa, superficial appearances are again misleading. The rhetoric from the years of the independence struggle (when ZANU got no help from the West) belies the reality. The Soviet and Eastern-bloc embassies in Harare are underworked, because relations in aid, trade, culture, tourism, information, consular cooperation, and security are in practice very thin. The same applies to most Third World missions from outside the region. The countries to which Zimbabwean ministers and others instinctively turn for help or advice are the Western Europeans (especially the British, Germans, and Scandinavians), the old Commonwealth (Canada and Australia), and the United States. Zimbabwe remains a deeply Anglophone and, Oedipus complex notwithstanding, Anglophile country.

In Sum

Given the long and bloody upheaval that led up to independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has performed consistently better in most fields than could reasonably have been expected. It is achieving real national unity. After the dark chapter in the mid-1980s, the human rights record has improved enormously. The dwindling white community is generally well treated, though its privileged status is steadily eroding. Independent newspapers and journals still thrive, though criticism of the government is cautious. The formal sector of the economy remains reasonably prosperous, diversified, and mostly run by the (still largely white) private sector. The informal (majority) peasant sector has generally boomed since independence. Despite the militant official rhetoric, pragmatism is the controlling factor in the conduct of regional relations. Barring some catastrophic lurch into a sanctions war with South

Africa, which looks increasingly unlikely, these trends will probably continue.

But there are serious negatives. As in some other African countries, population growth that exceeds economic growth is adding to environmental degradation, urban unemployment, and budget deficits. The formal economy is in slow structural decline because of the lack of new investment, incompetence, corruption, and a foreign exchange shortage. And (again reminiscent of situations elsewhere in the continent) the trend toward authoritarian one-party rule, benefiting the powerful minority more than the alienated and indifferent masses, is unmistakable.

Zimbabwe, because of its strengths and in spite of its flaws and vulnerabilities, will continue to be a major player in the southern African region and the wider world. It seems in the Western interest to understand and work with the country.

Roger Martin was a British career diplomat for 22 years. He first went to Africa as a VSO (Peace Corps equivalent) founder member and colonial administrator in 1959, and served in the Rhodesia Department of the Commonwealth Office from 1964 to 1966, a period that coincided with Rhodesia's 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence. He was involved in the Pearce Commission (which tested public opinion in Rhodesia in 1972 on behalf of the British government) and attended the Geneva conference on Rhodesia in 1976. He returned to independent Zimbabwe in 1983 as the UK's deputy high commissioner, serving in that post until his resignation from the diplomatic service in 1986. His previous contribution to *CSIS Africa Notes* was "How British Policy Toward Africa Is Shaped and Executed," issue no. 87, July 27, 1988.