



# Executive Memorandum

No. 705

November 2, 2000

## HOW WASHINGTON SHOULD RESPOND TO INSTABILITY IN ZIMBABWE

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Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, a member of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front, has led his country to the brink of implosion. His policies flout democracy and the rule of law and have ruined a once-healthy economy. Washington should urge Mugabe to resign and withhold U.S. assistance until he does. It should also support the democratic opposition and plan to work with the United Nations and other organizations to supervise elections once Mugabe leaves office to restore democracy and stability to the troubled country.

Mugabe had been a guerrilla leader whose efforts helped end the white-minority government of the former Rhodesia in 1979. Under his leadership since then, the country's considerable economic potential—including a relatively diversified economy—has been squandered and its democratic laws openly disregarded.

**Squandered Economic Potential.** Compared with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe was a wealthy nation with a history of manufacturing for export, a thriving tourist industry, and a strong agricultural sector, but Mugabe has all but destroyed the prosperity Zimbabwe's citizens had gained. The economic slide, which began in 1995, came to a critical head this year. Unemployment is now over 50 percent. An acute fuel shortage and an inflation rate above 60 percent have crippled domestic industries and transportation. Prices for

bread and fruit have jumped by more than a third since October, according to *The Economist*.

Zimbabwe's fiscal deficit has increased from its 1998 level of 8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to an estimated 24 percent, largely because of the government's refusal to trim the bureaucracy and its poor fiscal policies, which have led to 70 percent interest rates on government debt. Finally, the government's land redistribution program to aid poor black Zimbabweans has been riddled with corruption and mismanagement. Most land purchased or seized by the government for redistribution has ended up in the hands of high-ranking government officials. Britain suspended funding for the program in 1992, and the United States followed suit in 1998.

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Produced by the  
Kathryn and Shelby  
Cullom Davis Institute for  
International Studies

Published by  
The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C.  
20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400  
<http://www.heritage.org>



This paper, in its entirety, can be  
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**Disregarding Democracy and the Rule of Law.** Mugabe's greatest political setback came on February 15, 2000, when a referendum to amend the constitution to extend his rule and authorize the seizure of farmland from white Zimbabwean farm-

ers without compensation was defeated by a public vote. Fearful that this foreshadowed difficulties for his party in the parliamentary elections eventually set for June 24 and 25, Mugabe urged his supporters to illegally occupy over 1,000 farms owned primarily by white Zimbabweans and others who opposed him. His government encouraged intimidation and violence against anyone who supported the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In the five months leading up to the elections, at least 31 persons were killed and hundreds beaten.

Not surprisingly, the June parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair. According to U.N. election monitors, supporters of opposition parties were threatened and 10 percent to 25 percent of the votes were fraudulent. Despite such intimidation and manipulation, the MDC won 57 of the 120 elected seats in the parliament (20 additional seats are appointed by the president and 10 by tribal chiefs). Following the election, Mugabe issued an amnesty for many crimes committed in the months before the election. Many of those who illegally occupied the farms and committed assault, arson, and even murder against innocent civilians during that time are to be made members of the army reserve.

Considering such policies, it is understandable that Zimbabweans are rioting. Mugabe has responded by sending in police and troops to attack the rioters with tear gas and clubs. The riots could lead to national chaos, which could in turn affect Zimbabwe's neighbors. The MDC has introduced a motion to impeach Mugabe out of fear that his continued rule will result in more violence.

**What the U.S. Should Do.** The Mugabe government has forfeited good relations with the United States. The Clinton Administration and Members of Congress should condemn Mugabe's anti-democratic policies that are crippling the country. Moreover, Washington should:

- **Suspend assistance to the government of Zimbabwe.** According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States has invested over \$750 million in Zimbabwe since 1980. It has appropriated \$14 million in foreign aid for Zimbabwe

in 2000, and the Administration has requested \$16 million for 2001. All assistance should be frozen until Mugabe relinquishes power. The World Bank suspended its aid to Zimbabwe on May 15 due to its delinquency on debt service, and the International Monetary Fund froze disbursements to Zimbabwe when it learned the government had misrepresented expenditures in support of troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo and failed to meet economic targets. The United States should oppose efforts to resume this aid and debt forgiveness until Mugabe leaves office.

- **Provide support and technical assistance to advance democracy.** The Clinton Administration should make support for and technical assistance to the democratic opposition through groups like the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute a priority, consistent with U.S. policy in other countries where democracy has been stifled, such as Serbia and Nigeria. The United States should not be a selective champion of democracy.
- **Plan to assist in elections following Mugabe's abdication or removal from office.** Zimbabwe has established opposition parties, as evidenced by the June election of 57 MDC parliamentarians. To help restore democracy, the United States should work with the U.N. and non-governmental organizations to organize and supervise elections soon after Mugabe leaves office.

**Conclusion.** The tragedy of Zimbabwe rests squarely on Mugabe's shoulders, but Washington's failure to speak out and support democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe has contributed to the people's suffering at the hands of the Mugabe government. It is past time for Washington to act.

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