



Executive Memorandum

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PAST TIME TO ISOLATE ZIMBABWE

BRETT D. SCHAEFER

Under the repressive regime of President Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe—once one of southern Africa's more stable and wealthy economies—has fallen into economic crisis and political chaos. As the U.S. Department of State noted in a February 16 press release, the government has “harassed the judiciary while tacitly encouraging or condoning violence against its political opponents and the media... [and] ignored court rulings, and security forces have been increasingly responsible for serious human rights abuses.” Repeated condemnation of the regime, however, has not altered its repressive actions. On the contrary, the violence will likely continue, especially if Mugabe is reelected in 2002 using tactics similar to those he used to secure victories in the June 2000 parliamentary elections for members of his Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) party.

The United States should consider more tangible steps that would isolate the Mugabe government until free and fair democratic elections are held. Such steps include suspending bilateral assistance to Zimbabwe, working with U.S. allies to block assistance from international financial institutions and the United Nations, and restricting U.S. diplomatic relations with the country until it is clear that the government has reformed. In this respect, the Bush Administration should consider the proposals embodied in the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001 (S. 494), sponsored by Senators Bill Frist (R–TN) and Russell Feingold (D–WI), which are an attempt to hold the president of Zimbabwe responsible for his actions.

Abuses of Freedom. President Mugabe has plunged Zimbabwe—a wealthy nation, relative to the region, that has a history of manufacturing for export, a thriving tourist industry, and a strong agricultural sector—into poverty. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, his spendthrift policies, such as large increases in government salaries before the parliamentary elections and costly commitments to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, contributed to a fiscal 2000 deficit amounting to from 23 percent to 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The export sector was particularly hard hit. The government financed its expenditures by printing money (to the detriment of the inflation rate, which reached 56 percent in 2000) and issuing short-term domestic debt (payments will exceed 50 percent of the 2001 budget). Non-performing loans are also on the rise, and 36 percent are considered “substandard, doubtful, and loss.” Bank failures are likely if these economic problems are not resolved.

In response to rising opposition to his ZANU–PF party before the 2000 parliamentary elections, Mugabe encouraged his supporters to intimidate

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and beat hundreds of those who backed the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). He encouraged his supporters to invade hundreds of white-owned farms that were to be expropriated and redistributed to black Zimbabweans. Clinics and hospitals were ordered to refuse treatment to MDC supporters. A United Nations election-monitoring team pulled out of Zimbabwe before the June elections because it found that 10 percent to 25 percent of registered voters were dead and voting districts had been manipulated arbitrarily, with the new boundaries released to the opposition only through court order. Such heavy-handed and illegal actions have destroyed what little business and investor confidence there was in Zimbabwe.

Mugabe continues his lawless actions to ensure his reelection in April 2002. In addition to attacking opposition members and white farmers, he is encouraging supporters to intimidate the judiciary, local and foreign media, foreign embassies, and non-governmental organizations.

Washington's Response. S. 494 was introduced to define a more responsible U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe. The bill declares that America supports peaceful democratic change, economic growth, and the establishment of the rule of law in Zimbabwe. It opposes giving bilateral and multilateral debt relief and assistance to Zimbabwe until the government restores the rule of law; provides protections for democratic elections; implements an equitable, legal, and transparent land reform program; withdraws troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo; and establishes firm civilian control of the military, police, and other state security forces.

Though such an approach is long overdue, S. 494 could be strengthened by eliminating its exemption for assistance for basic human needs. Any assistance that goes into the hands of the government, regardless of its good intent, will be wasted or, worse, used to support Mugabe's repressive policies. The only assistance Congress should consider is for non-governmental organizations whose goals or programs support the Zimbabwean people directly, or for efforts that would help

restore the rule of law and establish democratic institutions.

Some nations like the United Kingdom have condemned the Mugabe government openly, yet others have been unwilling to hold Mugabe responsible for his government's abuses. On a recent trip to Europe, for example, French President Jacques Chirac and Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt hosted Mugabe, and Poul Nielsen, the European Union's development commissioner, met with him. Such official recognition gives unwarranted legitimacy to Mugabe's lawless and repressive government.

The Bush Administration should join the United Kingdom in condemning the Mugabe regime and should seek to have all assistance to Zimbabwe suspended until free and fair elections are held. This would send a clear message that the United States will not recognize any new government or its official representatives who come to power through an illegitimate election in 2002. To determine the election's legitimacy, the government of Zimbabwe will need to assure both access and protection to election-monitoring organizations such as the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

Conclusion. The Mugabe government portrays criticism of its administration as racially motivated. Ambassador Simbi Veke Mubako, for example, has called S. 494 an "attempt to show some support for white farmers" that "is unfair, unjust, and racially motivated." The reality is that Mugabe's supporters have killed both blacks and whites in a politically motivated strategy to discourage his rivals. The unfolding tragedy in Zimbabwe is a result of Mugabe's lust for power. Charges of racism are merely an attempt to shift attention from his brutal tactics. Repudiation of such lawlessness should be a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

—Brett D. Schaefer is the Jay Kingham Fellow in International Regulatory Affairs in the Center for International Trade and Economics at The Heritage Foundation.