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The United States Must Increase the Pressure on Zimbabwe

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The second round of Zimbabwe's presidential elections will be held on June 27 according to Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission. The runoff pits the first round winner, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai, against President Robert Mugabe. Mounting state-sponsored political violence leads even Mugabe's staunchest supporters to question whether elections held under current conditions could produce a result with even a modicum of legitimacy. With the United Kingdom serving as the current President of the United Nations Security Council and the United States poised to take over in June, these countries should use their position on the Council to bring increased U.N. pressure and attention to Zimbabwe.

The Demise of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's March 29 presidential election cast the already unstable country into further crisis as the Mugabe regime sought to retain power despite losing at the polls. Delayed election results coupled with state-sponsored violence on the part of the military, police, and government-backed "war veterans" are compounding suffering for average Zimbabweans. The country has endured years of hyperinflation, currently estimated at over 200,000 percent, and an unemployment rate of over 80 percent. Some 3-4 million Zimbabweans have fled the country and the remaining 8 million have seen the country's average life expectancy drop from 57 years to just 34 years. The Mugabe regime destroyed the agricultural base of the economy through its chaotic land reform, which put productive land in the hands of regime supporters and created chronic food shortages in a

country that once served as a regional breadbasket. The current regime's violence against civil society and opposition supporters leaves Zimbabwe on the edge of collapse.

South Africa took the unprecedented step of sending a team of senior army generals to Zimbabwe to assess the political violence resulting from the March 29 first round of voting. Their "shocking" findings led the team's leader, Lt. General Gilbert Ramano, to state that a peaceful runoff election would be "almost impossible."¹ This assessment mirrors the views of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Executive Secretary Tomaz Salomao, who highlighted that "we can't say the playing ground is safe or will be fair."²

The Failure of South Africa and the SADC. The United States and the international community have rested their entire strategy for democratic elections in Zimbabwe on the so-far disappointing leadership of the SADC. It would be absolute folly at this point to fall into line with the Mugabe-appointed Zimbabwean Electoral Commission's election plans without strict demands aimed at ensuring a free and fair electoral process. The SADC has proven incapable, unwilling or both when it comes to forcing Zimbabwe to adhere to regional and international

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election standards. It is time for the mandate to shift to its appropriate place in the U.N. Security Council.

Even as Zimbabwe's post-election tensions reached ominous levels in April, South African President Thabo Mbeki stymied efforts to take up the crisis in the Security Council, noting that the issue did not represent a threat to international peace and security. Now, with over 700 documented cases of post-election violence that have resulted in scores of deaths, few could cling to such an argument. Strong statements from U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon show a willingness within the world body to engage, and Zimbabwe's presidential runoff will certainly require international resources best provided through multilateral mechanisms.

Those who might still be inclined to leave Zimbabwe's fate in the hands of Mbeki and the SADC must reflect on the potential scale of human suffering that awaits. It should not be forgotten that the number of political opponents and ordinary people killed in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 1982 by Mugabe and his North Korean-trained Shona army is widely estimated at 20,000. Mugabe took extreme measures to erase Joshua Nkomo's power base then, and it must be assumed that he is equally willing to act against the MDC now.

It is also relevant to highlight the fact that South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) was itself committed to a strategy of revolutionary violence and came to power after a decade of political violence that resulted in 25,000 deaths. Current ANC President Jacob Zuma, in whom the international community has placed significant hope, recently referred to Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) as a "fraternal liberation movement and an ally."

U.S. Leadership Is Needed. There is an appropriate time for "soft power" in the form of moral suasion, diplomatic pressure, and pointed outspokenness. These have been the tools of U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe and have worked hand in glove with Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy" for nearly eight years. The world has little to show for it, and the life

of the average Zimbabwean has continued to sink into a quest for day-to-day survival. African leadership on Zimbabwe is still a goal worth preserving, but it must find new impetus far from the reach of Mugabe's "allies."

The State Department should be commended for its recent efforts to cajole Zimbabwe's neighbors to take actions that are clearly in the region's best interests. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer took the first bold step when she flatly stated that Morgan Tsvangirai won Zimbabwe's presidential election. The importance of U.S. leadership cannot be underestimated, and by throwing aside Mugabe's distractions the U.S. opened the door to a process that can still result in a democratic outcome for Zimbabweans.

Recommendations. U.S. policy must continue first and foremost to support the Zimbabwean people and their nearly decade-long quest to rid themselves of a dictator. The process of moving beyond regional efforts and Mugabe's skillful ability to deflect them is at hand. Specific steps that the U.S. government should adopt include:

- Congress should immediately hold hearings in both the House and Senate on the situation in Zimbabwe. Congress should work with the Bush Administration to announce America's commitment to provide resources to help bring stability to Zimbabwe's chaotic economic and humanitarian situation should the upcoming election be free and fair.
- Both Congress and the Administration should immediately declare America's strong support for U.N. action to ensure that Zimbabwe's electoral process is free and fair and announce its willingness to coordinate with the U.N. to address post-election stability and economic recovery. While the U.N.'s track record can be questioned, there are few strong alternatives given the impotence displayed by the SADC and the African Union.
- The United States should work with the U.K. to engage the U.N. Security Council on Zimbabwe. The U.K. is the current President of the Security

1. Dumisani Muleya "Zimbabwe: Violence 'Shocks' SA Generals," *Business Day* (Johannesburg), May 14, 2008.
2. Dumisani Muleya "Zimbabwe: Country Sets Sights on July Poll Date," *Business Day* (Johannesburg), May 15, 2008.

Council and will be followed in June by the United States. Both countries should coordinate to ensure their consecutive presidencies bring maximum pressure on Zimbabwe. The first step would be for the U.K. to issue a presidential statement on behalf of the Council rejecting Mugabe's easily anticipated denunciation of neo-colonialism, condemning the post election violence, and calling on Zimbabwe to invite election observers from all nations. Additional statements should be issued as circumstances merit. Simultaneously, the U.K. and the U.S. should work to pass a Security Council resolution condemning post-election violence in Zimbabwe. It should require the country to admit international human rights and electoral process observers, including from non-African countries, to work alongside SADC teams, which were the only observers permitted in the March elections. And it should call for targeted international economic and travel sanctions against Zimbabwe's leadership, including the police and military, should the government fail to safeguard opposition supporters and members of civil society as they participate in legitimate election-related activities.

- Secretary of State Rice should play a visible and active role in bringing pressure on Zimbabwe,

including supporting actions by the Security Council to ensure that Zimbabwe holds a free and fair runoff presidential election and working with countries in the region affected by the crisis in Zimbabwe, such as Botswana and Zambia.

Conclusion. The election runoff date of June 27 chosen by the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission must be heavily scrutinized and the MDC should maintain a powerful voice in determining when the conditions are adequate for a free and fair contest. The opportunity to set Zimbabwe on a course toward peace, stability, and democracy must not be squandered. Africa's democratic movement over the last decade represents a hard-won gain, and Zimbabwe's shadow cannot be allowed to diminish the positive trends throughout the continent. Mugabe's efforts to obscure facts, stall for time, and hold on to power at all costs make him an iconoclastic relic of Africa's past. The United States and the world must now take decisive action to champion those fighting for democracy and hope of change in Zimbabwe.

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