

Robert Mugabe's Africa: Zimbabwe as a Failed State

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INTRODUCTION

Independence, equality and freedom: these democratic ideals were at the heart of the revolutionary rebellion of Black Zimbabweans against the British colonial power of Rhodesia. The rebellion leader, Robert Mugabe, was initially thought to embody these ideals as a revolutionary hero and became Zimbabwe's first President upon independence in 1980 (CIA Factbook 2011). However, the state is now fully incapacitated due to rampant government corruption and economic failure. This paper will define a "failed state", concentrating on the Zimbabwean economy and political dictatorship under Robert Mugabe. The democratic spirit of rebellion has not been quelled in all Zimbabweans, as evidenced by the courageous actions of Mike Campbell and Ben Freeth against Mugabe's Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP). In spite of the indisputable failure of economic reforms like the FTLRP, the Indigenization Act of 2008 has condemned the utilization of Foreign Direct Investment to rebuild the economy as a means of stabilizing this failed state.

THEME ANALYSIS: THE FAILED STATE

State failure encompasses a wide variety of characteristics, affecting the social, economic and political spheres of a nation. Zimbabwe's classification as a failed state is indisputable, for the country ranks #4 globally on the Foreign Policy's *Failed States Index of 2010* (Foreign Policy 2010). This comparative index ranks 177 countries based on multiple categories that signify a "failed state" (Foreign Policy 2010). The index rankings are determined by an analysis of various indicators across all aspects of state function. Pervasive government corruption, de-legitimization of the state, persistence of violence, ineffective rule of law and uneven economic growth all contribute to the state becoming "governmentally empty", the most universal feature of a failed state (The Fund for Peace 2010; class notes 2011).

As Rotberg notes in his article, "*Failed States in a World of Terror*" an individual country's ability to function autonomously ensures the safety of a global system of states. While globalization and international organizations, like the UN and EU, continue to play a large role in global politics, failed states have a disproportionately large influence on international security. Because they are "breeding grounds [for] instability, mass migration and murder", they provide the ideal conditions for cultivating terrorist organizations, as is the case in Afghanistan. (Rotberg, 157)

Four rankings above Afghanistan on the *Failed States Index*, Zimbabwe scores a 9.6 in the category of "Delegitimization of the State". (Foreign Policy 2010) The political transparency indicators of this category include measures of endemic corruption, widespread loss of confidence in the state (usually in the form of violent protest), and arbitrary rule of law. Zimbabwe's scores account for the country's sufferings under the corrupt government of President Robert Mugabe. When the time came for his sixth re-election campaign in 2008, the Zimbabwean people spoke with their vote. The leader of the opposition MDC party emerged with Morgan Tsvangirai as a presidential candidate and he successfully won the first stage of the elections. The result was a presidential run-off between Tsvangirai and Mugabe, whose position had remained uncontested for almost 30 years (Zeleny, 2009). Mugabe was unwilling to relinquish his power to the newcomer and

declared himself President once again (CNN Wire Staff 2010). In a reaction echoed across the world, the MDC branded the election results “an absolute joke”, while The Pan-African Parliament observer mission announced that the elections “were not free and fair” due to intense intimidation (Raath 2009). The Zimbabwean people erupted into protests and riots, leading Mugabe’s government to respond with force, killing at least 200 civilians (Zeleny 2009). This instance led directly to the delegitimization of the state, for it reaffirmed public fears concerning the hopeless levels of corruption in their government. Elections are the only direct way for civilians to participate in the governmental process and thus ignoring the desires of the people in the case of these unfair elections illustrates how powerless the people of Zimbabwe are in the face of their government.

The Human Development Index as dictated by the United Nations reveals that Zimbabwe not only lags behind globally, but also in relation to its neighbors in Sub-Saharan Africa, the most impoverished region of the world (UNDP 2010). Since 1980, the HDI of Zimbabwe remained relatively constant. However, the year 2000 marked a steady decline in the HDI of Zimbabwe as a direct result of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP). White, large-scale commercial farmers (who constituted less than 1 percent of the population) operated 45% of all agricultural land while indigenous Africans constituted a small-scale subsistence agriculture base that was unable to yield profit in relation to larger farms ((Shaw 2003; Zikhali 2008, 4). Mugabe’s motivation behind the FTLRP was to reallocate farmland from the white minority to the black majority, empowering Mugabe’s ‘Africans’ to reclaim their land from their imperialist oppressors. Mugabe and his team of ‘political’ thugs systematically evicted and displaced thousands of white farmers (Hammer 2011). In turn, 40% of Zimbabwe’s most successful economic sector was left in the hands of inexperienced farmers and these reclaimed farmlands were eventually abandoned (Hammer 2011). As a result, 94% of Zimbabweans were left unemployed by January 2009 (AFP 2009). Unspeakably high unemployment led to a dramatic increase Zimbabwe’s income gap. The economic failure of the FTLRP is reflected in the second HDI graph, where income is at .0012 (UNDP 2010).

Zimbabwe scored lowest on the *Failed States Index* in the “External Intervention” category with a score of only 7.5 (Foreign Policy 2010). The lack of interventionism on the part of the Zimbabwean administration to improve its dire straits ignores concerns outlined by Rotberg, emphasizing how the concern for saving failed states is in the interest of international security (Rotberg, 157). In November 2009, US President Barrack Obama addressed an audience of WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe) and openly referred to Robert Mugabe as a dictator, which was the US’s sharpest critique of the Zimbabwean government to date. (Zeleny 2009) Since then, the US government has not taken any interventionist action against the incredible government corruption and violation of civil rights in Zimbabwe.

In response to international concern and domestic unrest, the Zimbabwean government took action to improve its legitimacy by appearing more transparent. Following the controversial elections of 2008, Mugabe agreed to consolidate political power with Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition MDC party (CNN Wire Staff 2010). As a way of fulfilling this power-sharing agreement, Mugabe conceded additional power to the media by allowing the licensing of five independent newspapers (The PanAfrican News Agency 2010). This could explain why a recent report by Freedom House cites growing optimism in the Zimbabweans, despite high risk of intimidation and violence demonstrated by the government over the 2008 elections (Freedom House 2011).

WHITE FARMERS’ RESISTANCE

As thousands of white farmers fled Zimbabwe, two heroic men stayed behind in the hopes of saving their family farm. Mike Campbell at 78 years old and his son-in-law Ben Freeth were faced with losing their family farm to Mugabe’s Fast Track Land Reform Program. (Dugger 2008) Mr. Campbell decided to take action against the injustice of Zimbabwean government by filing a case with the international tribunal of African judges established by the 15 nations of the Southern African Development Community international trade bloc. (Dugger 2008) He was the first white farmer to ever challenge

the Zimbabwean government's FTLRP since its implementation in 2000. (Rath 2008)

Mugabe's government attempted to intimidate the farmers in hopes that they would withdraw their case. Scarcely an hour before Robert Mugabe was sworn in for his sixth term as President in 2008, his henchmen abducted Ben Freeth and his family (Raath 2008). The 14 ZANU-PF party raiders proceeded to assault them and loot their home in order to prevent them from returning to Namibia and continuing the case against the Zimbabwean government. (Dugger 2008) Eleven days later, a similar invasion occurred at the Campbell farm, leaving Mike Campbell and his wife bloodied and bruised. The courageous farmers refused to stand down and traveled to Namibia to hear the court ruling.

The film documenting these farmers' stories, entitled *Mugabe and the White African*, presented a tragic ending to their story. The last scene ends in Campbell's tears of joy at the reading of the African Tribunal's ruling in their favor: an order to the end of land seizures to ensure that farmers are allowed to "produce food without harassment" (Raath 2009). However, the two men returned home only to be further intimidated and eventually evicted. The farm's new owner, a minister of the Zimbabwean government, was unable to properly fertilize, water or spray 40,000 fruit trees (BBC news 2009). As Mr. Freeth sadly admits after his long struggle, "there's nothing left there" (BBC News 2009).

Rule of law in Zimbabwe is non-existent, and thus the favorable international court ruling had no bearing on the ultimate outcome of the case. It accomplished little more than to make the Campbell farm a particularly appealing target for Mugabe's team of thugs. Mugabe is underserving the Zimbabweans by clearly exercising clientelism through this program by allotting ZANU-PF party leaders control over the reclaimed farms. His own relatives, as well as generals, judges, ministers and members of Parliament, were beneficiaries (Dugger 2008). Campbell's case embodies the spirit of rebellion that inspires democracy, but the suffocating grip of Mugabe continues to reign supreme.

“REVENGE” ON FOREIGN COMPANIES

In an interview with CNN, the financial minister of Zimbabwe Tendai Biti claimed to have “the worst job in the world” (Curnow 2011). This is actually plausible when one considers the country’s astronomically high unemployment rate and hyper-inflated currency of 376.30 Zimbabwe Dollar’s per United States dollar (Hanke 2010). Also to further impact the state’s economy is the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act of 2007 (fully initiated in 2011), Robert Mugabe’s latest plan for economic reform.

The goals of the Indigenization Act are to encourage Zimbabweans to become more involved in domestically supporting economy by allowing only “indigenous Zimbabweans” to operate businesses within the country. An “indigenous Zimbabwean” is defined as “any person who, before the 18th April, 1980, was disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the grounds of his or her race, and any descendant of such person” (CNN Wire Staff 2010). Foreign companies are allowed five years to submit plans for transferring 51% of their investments to black Zimbabweans, but Mugabe has stated that “we’ll go until 100%” (CNN Wire Staff 2010).

Tendai Biti himself noted “a lot of (deep rooted) negativity” in the Indigenization Act (Curnow 2011). Robert Mugabe threatened “revenge” on foreign companies, claiming “we have been far too good for malicious people from countries which seek to destroy us. Why should we continue to have 400 British companies here operating freely with Britain benefiting from us?” (CNN Wire Staff 2010). The public has perpetuated the discrimination against white Zimbabweans, as graffiti stating “we don’t want ‘whiteys’ here any more” covers the walls of white-owned businesses (BBC 2010). The provisions of the Indigenization Act are not limited to large, corporate investments, but also include small white-owned businesses, like salons, grocery stores, and beauty parlors. (BBC 2010)

The Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act could have disastrous consequences on the Zimbabwean economy. As evidenced by neoliberalism, Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs) can benefit developing countries by providing jobs, technology and entrepreneurship. The staggering unemployment rate in Zimbabwe could

be alleviated through these FDIs. The Indigenization Act threatens to ravage all sectors of the Zimbabwean economy, for similar reasons as the FTLRP failed the agricultural sector. These include the fact that “indigenous Zimbabweans” may not have the same experience working with business as their white predecessors. Additionally, isolating Zimbabwe from the international market will potentially increase economic hardship rather than improve the current state of the economy

CONCLUSION

The revolutionary black rebel guerrillas of 1979 in Southern Rhodesia sought to bring independence, equality and freedom to the native African people. These goals were rooted in the ideals of democracy, where the state protects John Locke’s natural rights of life, liberty for all people. However, the deeply rooted racism spawning from the legacy of European imperialism has allowed for a dictator like Robert Mugabe to seize power, systematically destroying all hope for state stability. The authoritarian tendencies of white minority rule have been perpetuated by Mugabe’s administration. Revenge on the “white man” quickly became the dictator’s primary goal, overshadowing the original goals of the revolution. As a result, the state economy has collapsed.

Mugabe’s Fast Track Land Reform Program, combined with his unwillingness to welcome foreign investment under the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act left the Zimbabwean citizens severely impoverished. Outbreaks of preventable diseases, like cholera and measles, will become more frequent and deadly without access to necessary social services like health care and reliable access to drinking water. Unfortunately, the prospects of an economic rebound in Zimbabwe are not promising, especially given Mugabe’s recent statements seeking revenge on international corporations. Overall, Zimbabwe’s failed state is a tragic example of how imperialism has ravaged African nations.

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