

Zimbabwe: the futility of diplomacy

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However, we recognise that many people in Zimbabwe believe international pressure is the only way to end Mugabe's rule and the economic disaster that has engulfed the country. So while there are many governments that appear to be against Robert Mugabe, what are they actually proposing and will it have any effect?

A "transitional government"

The most trenchant criticism has so far come from Kenya, which called Mugabe's regime illegal with its prime minister Raila Odinga saying that Zimbabwe "is a disaster waiting to happen". It has called for African peace keeping troops to be sent in, for the release of all political prisoners, the ousting of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki as the head of Southern Africa Development Community's negotiators, and a transitional government leading to new elections (a position supported by Tsvangirai). Tanzania also supports the idea of a transitional government.

The transitional government is supposed to prevent Zanu-PF intimidation and murdering and secure the release of MDC prisoners and independent election observers. In effect it would normalise politics in the country and organise a "credible election". But it leaves open the make-up of such a "transitional government" and who would lead it the current military rulers are unlikely to hand over power quietly.

The SADC has been the body most involved in mediating. Until very recently Mugabe could count upon the support of figures in SADC such as Angola's president Eduardo Santos and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki. But it has recently (two days before the election) criticised Mugabe's handling of the elections, calling for their postponement and for meaningful talks between Zanu-PF and the MDC. What the "meaningful talks" should achieve and what will happen on the ground when they take place isn't mention.

But even this is too much for Mbeki, who did not turn up to the SADC meeting that issued the statement, despite being the lead negotiator on Zimbabwe.

The African Union is holding a summit in Egypt at the beginning of July to discuss the crisis, but Mugabe has already announced his intention to attend and deal with any opponents.

"The poll is a fiasco"

The UK, France and USA have been leading the rest of world opinion. Both have been pushing tougher sanctions and have refused to recognise Mugabe's poll or government. They have also pushed through the UN Security Council the toughest statement yet blaming Mugabe for the election fiasco although stopping short of refusing to acknowledge the result (apparently because of South African objections). Which means that the UN can do very little as it condones the result.

The other hamper on international action is the fear of being branded racists or a colonial power. The UK and US have ruled out any military intervention and emphasised there must be an "African-lead solution."

Any western intervention would quickly turn into the military quagmire like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Pressure for talks have only forced Mugabe to say he might talk after the election - when he is in a position of power. Furthermore some of the heads of African states involved in pressure have had long relationships with Mugabe and Zanu and are often as corrupt.

Sanctions have been ineffective or hit the poor worse (just as in Iraq). Why? Because the western banks and multinationals don't want to open the books to expose their dealings with various dictators or take action that would damage their profits.

That leaves military intervention, which only a few African countries, and some MDC officials, have mentioned.

All this diplomacy has shown that the bosses can only rely on the power of their capital, in other words the pressure they can exert on an economy through finance, business and trade. But where the economy is busted, little influence can be brought to bear. As the Financial Times stated: "When the economy is collapsing the threat to tighten sanctions on a handful of people is meaningless."

Even if talks did go ahead, the result would halt the violence but the country would be delivered over to a neo-liberal amalgam of the MDC/Zanu-PF, which would be offered aid with very tight strings privatise the economy, hand back land to the white farmers, open up the country to trade. In short a brief respite would have been earned for a future of greater exploitation and misery.

Mugabe is so confident in his own power and resilience that he recently declared "only God can remove me from office." In fact there is an earthly force that can remove the dictator- a revolutionary mobilisation of workers and peasants. This must start from the desperately needed measures needed to feed and employ the masses, as well as their democratic rights. But to fulfil these demands a revolutionary workers and peasants' government is necessary.

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