

After Mugabe, Zimbabwe Will Need Post-Conflict Response

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Summary: Zimbabwe may technically be a country at peace, but it is suffering from extraordinary levels of political instability, economic dislocation and social upheaval, similar to a war-torn country. This suggests that, once Zimbabwe has an acceptable political leadership, donors may need to apply post-conflict recovery strategies. Given the country's fragility and the narrow window of opportunity a post-Mugabe transition will provide, the United States and the donor community should begin planning for such a response immediately. Formation of a U.S. Committee for Assistance to a Free Zimbabwe could help advance this goal. Letting Zimbabweans know they have not been forgotten and that the world stands ready to help once Robert Mugabe is gone could even hasten that day.

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It is not too early to start planning for a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. The southern African country, led since independence in 1980 by President Robert Mugabe, is in a perilous state of decline and could face a major transition at any time. Zimbabwe is now an international pariah, having quit the Commonwealth, nearly been expelled from the International Monetary Fund, and been listed by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as an 'outpost of tyranny' alongside the likes of Burma and North Korea. It is also clear that the situation inside the country is both extremely fragile and ultimately unsustainable: tensions are high, there are serious divisions within the ruling party and the military, and the economy is dangerously close to outright collapse. Importantly, this precarious state of affairs is being held together mainly by Mugabe himself. Although resilient and politically cunning, he is nonetheless 81 years old.

Once Mugabe is gone, the reality of his misrule will be immediately faced by a new government. Several post-Mugabe scenarios are possible, including a transition to a handpicked successor, the rise of a reformist faction within the ruling ZANU-PF, a broad government of national unity, a military coup, or even a descent into chaos. It is of course impossible to predict the outcome. What is likely is that the change will come without much warning and that a speedy and substantial international response will be necessary.

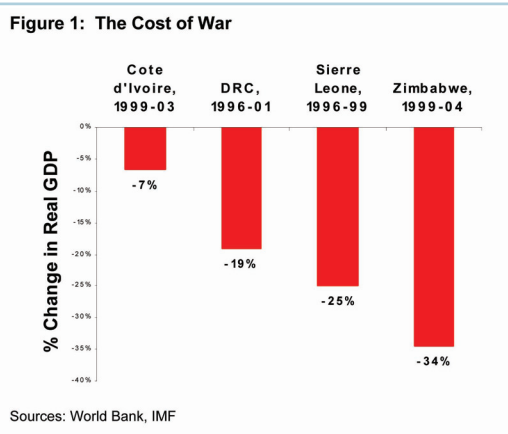
If the next government is sufficiently distanced from Mugabe and his cronies, the US and the international community should avoid getting caught flat-footed. As in post-conflict situations, Mugabe's departure will create a brief "golden hour," a crucial window of opportunity to help set Zimbabwe on the right path to sustainable peace and recovery. Once this window closes, the odds of making a difference will become much longer. Since the day after the fall of the dictator could be too late, the international community should start contingency planning now. Any response should also think beyond traditional development practice to incorporate lessons learned from post-conflict experiences such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, East Timor, El Salvador, Liberia, and Mozambique.

Why treat Zimbabwe as a post-conflict situation?

Zimbabwe may not be at war, but it exhibits many extreme characteristics of a society in violent conflict:

- *Political violence and social trauma.* Zimbabwean society has undergone intense stress because of organized violence and intimidation. State security forces and government-backed militias have terrorized civilians, committed gross human rights violations, and disrupted opposition political organizations.

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- *Economic collapse.* Zimbabwe's economic collapse is far worse than the decline experienced by other African countries with full-scale civil wars (Figure 1). The poverty rate has jumped from 35% to 80% since 1996. The local currency has lost 99.94% of its value in the past five years.
- *Erosion of economic foundations.* Chaotic land seizures and violence on the farms has turned Zimbabwe from a breadbasket to a basket case. Production of the national staple maize has dropped 86% since 2000, so instead of exporting food, it now needs donations to avoid famine.
- *Mass flight of people.* About one in three Zimbabweans has fled the country. Hundreds of thousands are internally displaced, the result of the dislocation of some 800,000 farm workers and their families and another 700,000 people made homeless by recent urban clearances.

Framework for international support of Zimbabwe's recovery

The extreme conditions suggest that the revitalization of Zimbabwe's society and economy will require many elements typically associated with a strategy for post-conflict reconstruction. The main impetus for recovery will of course have to come from within Zimbabwe itself. But the major international donors—the World Bank, the IMF, UN agencies, the British and American governments, and other key players—will need to play an active role in supporting the locally-owned recovery strategy.

Recent post-conflict experiences in poor countries provide important lessons about the priority tasks for promoting peace, stability and economic reconstruction in failed states, and about the principles that should guide donor engagement in those countries. The broad priority tasks especially relevant for Zimbabwe are:

- Establishing security and the rule of law;
- Fostering political reconciliation and legitimate institutions of government;
- Rebuilding the institutional capacities of the state;
- Encouraging a comprehensive and inclusive economic recovery, including timely normalization of relations with the international community and rapid support comprised of aid, debt relief, and private finance.

Crucial political support

Since Zimbabwe's troubles are at root political, getting the politics right is a necessary precondition for recovery. The donors should:

- *Be ready to provide assistance to smooth the political transition*, such as helping to establish a caretaker government or a shepherding "Contact Group."
- *Help to reform the security forces*, especially the police, military, intelligence services, and judiciary.
- *Promote justice and reconciliation*, through technical and legal aid for either a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or a more punitive tribunal.

Necessary economic support

To promote a parallel economic recovery, the international community should:

- *Meet essential humanitarian needs*, such as food aid and help for the internally displaced.
- *Facilitate an orderly return of migrants and diaspora* through provision of assistance and by ensuring that immigration and asylum laws in the US and Europe are not a barrier to returning.
- *Help formulate and implement a multidimensional economic recovery strategy*, including an early joint assessment followed by the development of a 5-year National

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Reconstruction and Development Framework.

- *Provide coordinated assistance, including:*
 - Helping the transitional government establish a strong national coordinating body;
 - Convening a World Bank-chaired consultative group meeting to get early multi-year pledges;
 - Creating a Zimbabwe Reconstruction Trust Fund (ZRTF) to facilitate aid coordination and mitigate absorption bottlenecks;
 - Quickly normalizing relations with the IMF and World Bank to open the aid tap and begin debt restructuring talks;
 - Assembling a private investment conference.

- *Promote a new approach to land use, focusing on ways to transparently enhance productivity and employment.*

recovery is impossible with the current leadership. But there is no time to waste in developing a multilateral framework to respond to the transition that is unavoidably coming to Harare.

There is also no reason to keep this contingency planning effort secret. Diplomatic etiquette aside, there would be considerable benefit to making this an open and consultative exercise. Letting Zimbabwe's people know that they have not been forgotten and that the world stands ready to help once Robert Mugabe is gone could even help to bring about that day a little sooner.

A Commission for Assistance to a Free Zimbabwe?

Planning for such a response should begin now. The US can start by tasking the new State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) to consider options and scenarios, as it has done for Sudan. A Zimbabwe version of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba might also be considered to play both a planning and propaganda role. Consultations with the UK, World Bank, and other donors should also begin soon, as any information sharing and contingency planning now can help to ensure a more nimble an effective response.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe is a country on the edge. In the not-too-distant future, the international community will likely confront the challenge of assisting the country's difficult transition from economic collapse and authoritarian rule. Fortunately, the world has learned lessons from post-conflict interventions in other countries, many of which it can apply to Zimbabwe—once a new leadership is in place. No donor should provide assistance to the government at the present time since a