

# Zimbabwe: From Hope to Crisis

## INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's precipitous decline from peaceful "bread basket" to malnourished autocracy has become one of Africa's most notable stories of post-colonial state failure. But the situation was not always grim: far from it. Upon transition from white-ruled Rhodesia in 1979, the country's future appeared bright. With plentiful natural resources, a bountiful agricultural sector, a strong complement of educated human capital, and solid government administration, Zimbabwe appeared poised for success. The government of the new Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, regarded as a liberation hero for his role in armed struggle against white supremacist rule, was racially inclusive in language and personnel. The new regime in Harare was embraced worldwide, on both sides in the Cold War and in the group of nonaligned developing states.

Since that moment of optimism, a slow decline, blamed by Western observers almost entirely on Mugabe's misrule, has led to the crippling of a vibrant agricultural economy, repression of political dissent, and violent land seizure. Others note the effect of rosy assessments early on and easy money in the 1980s, followed by the social destabilization of structural readjustments in the 1990s. As conditions in Zimbabwe began growing steadily worse in the 1990s, and as President Mugabe grew more adversarial, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among others, opted for an approach of punitive and denunciatory opposition to his methods and sought to isolate him while supporting a second track of outreach from Zimbabwe's regional neighbors.

But among Zimbabwe's neighbors in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Mugabe's casting of Western powers as neo-colonialist meddlers has carried some weight with politicians and a public attuned to the language of liberation struggle. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and other SADC leaders for some time eschewed open criticism of Mugabe in favor of attempts at engagement and mediation. However, though their methods differ, SADC leaders claim to seek the same goal as Western leaders: a stable transition to functioning democracy in Zimbabwe. But the power-sharing arrangement between President Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai has been fraught from the beginning, and barely functions, despite the fact it did allow for economic stabilization and reduction of political violence.

The harsh fact, though, is that neither sanctions nor "quiet diplomacy" has alleviated the fiscal and humanitarian crisis in the country. The Mugabe regime has bequeathed Zimbabwe's people with what was the world's fastest contracting economy and one of the lowest life expectancies in the world. The devastated economy will take years to rebuild. Zimbabwean society is dire in need of reconciliation to heal the scars of political violence that continues, and looms larger as elections approach. Three to four million Zimbabweans have moved to neighboring South Africa in search of a livelihood in recent years. In addition, the issue of land distribution at the heart of Zimbabwean conflict for decades remains divisive. The tasks ahead will likely require technical capacity from government that has largely eroded, and which will need robust reinforcement from the donor community.

## Roots of Conflict

The history of Zimbabwe's independence from British colonialism and white supremacist rule continues to play a significant role in political discourse. Southern Rhodesia, as it was formerly known, was settled by whites beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1930, the Land Apportionment Act restricted black access to land and forced many would-be farmers into wage labor.

In 1965, Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, fearing that the “wind of change” sweeping over Africa in the wake of de-colonization would ultimately produce majority rule in Rhodesia, unilaterally declared independence from Britain of his white-minority regime. The international community declared Rhodesia an outlaw state and imposed strict sanctions. It was recognized only by apartheid South Africa.

Liberation groups ZANU and ZAPU (the predominantly majority Shona and Chinese-backed Zimbabwe African National Union and predominantly minority Ndebele and Soviet-backed Zimbabwe African People’s Union, respectively) intensified their guerilla campaign against white rule, eventually leading Smith to submit to negotiations. British-brokered talks at Lancaster House in the UK led to British-supervised elections in 1980, won by independence leader Robert Mugabe’s ZANU party. Mugabe became Prime Minister and has remained leader of the country ever since, changing the constitution to become President in 1987.

### Post-Colonial Violence

In 1982, Prime Minister Mugabe feared rebellion by his political rival and cabinet member Joshua Nkomo and sacked him (ZAPU was unified with ZANU in 1987 to form ZANU-PF, or Patriotic Front, in what was seen by some as a move toward the one-party state Mugabe had been advocating). Mugabe then sent the North Korean trained 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, a unit subordinated directly to him, into Matabeleland in an operation known as *Gukurahundi* (“the early rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains” in Shona). Nkomo himself fled to London in 1983, accusing the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade of killing three persons in his home and fearing for his own life, calling the unit a “political army,” and denying the main issue was tribal in essence, but rather one of political control. The killings that took place over the next few years are widely referred to as a massacre, with estimates of the number killed as high as 20,000.

Diplomats in Harare conveyed to their governments the reports of massacres but authorities at home, not eager to call into question such a recent success and fearful of further regional instability, chose not to confront Mugabe’s evident intolerance for dissent. It remains a searing memory for Ndebeles and a social divide in the country. A commission to look into the campaign drafted a report that was never publicly released. Fear of accountability or retribution for the campaign is reputed to be among the reasons Mugabe fears losing power. Mugabe eventually succeeded in bringing ZAPU to heel, signing an accord with Nkomo to merge ZAPU into ZANU in 1987, and amending the constitution to create an executive presidency.

### Hope and Disappointment: the 1990s

There was a glimmer of hope for democracy in 1990 when Mugabe’s post-election attempt at constitutional change to establish a one-party state failed (his party and loyal security forces continued their *de facto* one-party rule, and Mugabe was re-elected in 1996). In 1991, hope continued to predominate among Western diplomats as Mugabe hosted the Commonwealth Summit, at which he held a garden party with Queen Elizabeth. With his support, the Commonwealth adopted the Harare Declaration, which committed member states to protect “democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government; (and) fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, color, creed or political belief...” Mugabe’s “constructive neutrality” was instrumental in overcoming objections from a number of autocrats: Kenya’s Daniel arap Moi, Malaysia’s Mahathir bin Mohamad, and Uganda’s still-serving Yoweri Museveni among them.

In the early 1990s, the land distribution issue came to the fore as Mugabe seized four large white-owned farms and denied any right of appeal. He dismissed the objections of Harare-based diplomats and isolated

from government contact those who protested vigorously, such as Canada's High Commissioner, Charles Bassett. The sense emanating from President Mugabe that he was embattled by foreign opponents began to dominate his public statements from this time.

Through the 1990s, Mugabe increasingly relied upon party and loyal security forces, which included the feared Central Intelligence Organization. In 1996, after being re-elected, Mugabe stated that land would be expropriated without compensation, which would be deferred until later. With infusions from international financial institutions drying up, both due to larger global trends and to misuse by the government, Zimbabwe sought alternative sources of income. Wealth from timber and mining concessions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where his armed forces participated in what became a regional war, went directly to military and party leaders. The relationships with Libya and China grew closer as the West became more estranged, less tolerant of Mugabe's authoritarian tendencies.

In 1997, John Major's Conservative government was defeated at the polls by the Labour Party under its new leader, Tony Blair, in Britain. Blair's first meeting with Mugabe at the Commonwealth Summit in Edinburgh was mostly consumed by a monologue by Mugabe on land compensation. The Mugabe government claims that Britain reneged on a commitment to support land redistribution efforts. Britain's position was that it would support "willing seller" land purchases, along with other donors, so long as it was integrated in a wider land reform and poverty reduction policy. Earlier efforts were assessed to have benefited ZANU-PF officials rather than the intended recipients. Mugabe never agreed to these stipulations. According to British High Commissioner Brian Donnelly, "The great Mugabe myth is that it has been lack of money that has precluded land reform. There would always have been money if he had been prepared to accept a transparent and equitable process." In Mugabe's worldview, this was an injustice.

By late 1999, a government-appointed commission on drafting a new constitution recommended that his powers be curbed, and limited to two terms in office. At that point, the Constitution had been amended fifteen times to increase executive power. Dissenting opinions on the committee criticized the draft for leaving Mugabe too much authority. Mugabe then proposed a constitution to increase his powers, put it forward in a referendum in February 2000, and lost. A civic movement, the National Constitutional Accord, met despite official vilification to discuss a constitution that could be accepted by a majority of Zimbabweans.

### Land Seizure and Opposition Politics: Becoming a Pariah

In 2000, forcible seizures of white-owned land by ZANU-PF "war veterans" (often party thugs too young to have fought in the wars of independence) began to seriously destabilize Zimbabwe's economy.

The 2000 Parliamentary elections saw a ZANU-PF victory over the newly formed opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai, but Mugabe's party lost its margin to change the constitution.

In 2002, Mugabe won the Presidency, but the freedom and fairness of the vote was condemned by the Commonwealth and western powers. A planned EU observer mission was called off by Brussels due to obstacles from the government, despite the advice of EU ambassadors in Harare that criticism of what was already an unfair electoral process would be undermined by not having observers on the ground. Norway did field an observer mission and strongly criticized the electoral process. The Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe, citing high levels of violence in the election; this was the beginning of ongoing sanctions by the EU, US, Australia and New Zealand. South Africa, fearful of state collapse on its border, endorsed the poll, as did the rest of SADC's members. The divergence between the western democracies' views and those of most in the region widened from here.

Also in 2002, the Supreme Court struck down the legislation allowing non-consensual land acquisition. Mugabe forced many judges from the bench in response.

Zimbabwe suffers from periodic droughts, and the combination of natural conditions and the chaos surrounding the country's agricultural land combined in 2002-3 to require rapidly escalating external food assistance – indeed most generously from the countries most vilified by Mugabe. The economic and social ripple effect from high rates of HIV/AIDS infection also began to take their toll. Zimbabwe's agricultural productivity and economy in general began to nosedive.

In 2004, Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition MDC, was tried for treason on trumped-up evidence and acquitted. Violence against MDC supporters would only escalate. The following year, 2005, the United States ramped up its anti-Mugabe rhetoric, declaring Zimbabwe one of six world “outposts of tyranny.” Perhaps both threatened and emboldened by his pariah status, Mugabe authorized Operation *Marambatsvina* (“take out the trash”). In the months leading up to another flawed election, hundreds of thousands of urban slum dwellers were forcibly displaced and their homes destroyed. ZANU-PF won at the polls in the wake of this brutality. The next few years, leading up to the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections, were marked by further sanctions, escalating rhetoric on all sides, and increasing economic woes, especially for Zimbabwe's poor.

Agricultural production and distribution fell to a point where at least half of Zimbabwe's population was at risk of hunger. Inflation reached astronomic dimensions. The flow of refugees across the border to South Africa grew unabated as Zimbabweans fled in search of jobs, food, and safety from political persecution. MDC leaders and activists came under increasing attack, often physical, by the government and ZANU-PF's own youth militia. The security forces publicly beat a number of prominent opposition figures, including Tsvangirai himself, in early 2007.

The different approaches of Western and African leaders to the crisis would grow more divergent, with increasing isolation and condemnation by the former, and what the international press dubbed “quiet diplomacy” led by South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, though Mbeki's passiveness following the April 2008 election has been increasingly contested by other SADC leaders and in South Africa itself. The failure of these two schools of thought to find more common policy ground on at least the shared interest in change became a subject of heated argument on both sides.

On June 27, 2008, Mugabe won a run-off election which Tsvangirai boycotted, stating that no free election was feasible under conditions where opposition supporters' lives were threatened. Mugabe quickly held a defiant inaugural ceremony, and then jetted-off to an African Union summit. No African leaders present questioned his legitimacy openly. Efforts led by the US and Britain to apply new sanctions to the Mugabe regime were rejected in the UN Security Council by China and Russia. But EU members added new sanctions on business transactions with the regime and connected individuals in August 2008. Reminiscent of the model that followed Kenya's fractious election and its bloody aftermath, Mugabe and Tsvangirai entered power-sharing talks in August 2008, which ultimately led to a deal in September. But implementation of the deal was stalled for months over the distribution of key ministries, especially those pertaining to public security, where Mugabe's ZANU-PF insisted on a monopoly. Meanwhile, a cholera outbreak brought on by the collapse of once-enviable public health infrastructure, along with rapidly accelerating inflation (well over 2 million percent annualized) sent ever-greater streams of refugees to South Africa. South Africa announced it would withhold aid until Zimbabwe had a representative government. Unpaid troops rioted in November 2008.

From Pretoria in January 2009, Tsvangirai announced the MDC was willing to take part in a unified government. He was sworn-in as Prime Minister in February of that year. Foreign currencies (primarily

the US dollar) were legalized to stem the hyperinflationary spiral, allowing consumer prices to fall. But the International Monetary Fund refused the new government a loan until its \$1 billion in debt was settled. China granted the country a \$950 million loan in July. Talks between Mugabe and Tsvangirai on the shape of a new constitution resumed in July 2009, but have gotten nowhere since. In late August 2009, Mugabe railed against the West in a public rally, claiming that after opening up to the West as friends “you want to be masters.”

The frustration of the MDC at its separation from real levers of power grew, and attacks on its members in the capital and the hinterland continued apace. South African President Jacob Zuma came in an attempt to mediate between Mugabe and Tsvangirai and seek full implementation of the Global Political Agreement that is the foundation of the power sharing government in order to “create confidence.” The MDC accused hard-line ZANU-PF supporters in the security forces of attempting to derail the deal. Soon after, the IMF loaned Zimbabwe \$400 million to bolster its foreign currency reserves without conditions, but did place an additional \$100 million in escrow until the country cleared its arrears. The parties differed on how the funds should be used, with ZANU-PF pushing for immediate disbursement to farmers and companies (many of which are party-linked).

The EU also sent a delegation to Zimbabwe in September 2009 to meet both Mugabe and Tsvangirai to press for progress that would allow fully normalized ties. Swedish Prime Minister (and chair of the EU Presidency at the time) Fredrik Reinfeldt said that a curtailment of the personal sanctions was not on the agenda. “It is not the restrictions that are creating problems in Zimbabwe, it is the mismanagement (and) not respecting of human rights.” The MDC wanted lifting of these sanctions to be conditional on full implementation of the Global Political Agreement, Mugabe wants these lifted immediately. While Mugabe noted that the talks “went well... Obviously they thought the Global Political Agreement was not working well.” He went on to claim that ZANU-PF had done “everything” required under the “GPA.” Tsvangirai said in a speech before his meeting with the delegation that “I am not going to stand by while ZANU-PF continues to violate the law, persecutes our members, spreads the language of hate, invades our productive farms (and) ignores our international treaties. We want partners who are going to commit themselves to good governance principles. We cannot have partners of looters.” Then-European Commissioner for Development Karel De Gucht said “They do not have the same reading of the same document. They have a different reading on how this should be done and at what speed.” Despite the positive characterization of the visit by President Mugabe, Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa accused the EU of buying into the MDC’s arguments “hook, line and sinker.” “They seem to want to undermine the inclusive government,” he said.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai began to boycott government meetings in October as a result of the prosecution of deputy Minister of Agriculture-designate, former coffee farmer and MDC member Roy Bennett, for terrorism, insurgency, sabotage and banditry. Bennett had been arrested earlier in February on the day government ministers were sworn-in. The case drew criticism from western capitals, including Washington and London, for having been politically motivated. Tsvangirai vowed not to go to his office until the case against Bennett was “resolved.”

While shops in Harare and Bulawayo may have finally been stocked and more citizens were able to afford basic necessities, fear continues to grip the countryside. White farmers, who once had 4,000 farms and were now down to a few score nationwide, told the BBC that “anarchy and lawlessness” remained the norm well after the power-sharing deal. Former British diplomat Philip Barclay opined “I think people now realize that what the (farm evictions) policy has really been about is the transfer of land from an arrogant white elite that was at least productive to an arrogant black elite that is totally unproductive. So it’s really hard to see this empowering the ordinary Zimbabweans in any way. The people who own the land now are a very small number of Mugabe’s cronies.” And Mugabe (and wife) themselves, he might

have added. Mugabe's wife now owns an expropriated farm that had been selling to Nestle, before the negative publicity compelled the corporation to end the arrangement.

A teacher in West Mashonaland noted that all teachers were suspected by ZANU-PF officials, war veterans and young toughs to be MDC supporters, and regularly harassed, intimidated, or attacked. The MDC asserted that the ZANU-PF was creating militia bases in the countryside and militarizing state institutions, in preparation for future elections. Military and security officials were even emplaced in the state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation.

But while the ZANU-PF still holds most of the high cards, the tenuous political arrangement is taking its toll on party unity. Mugabe himself stated at a party congress in December 2009 that "The party is eating itself up. The more intense the internal fighting is, the greater opportunity we give the opposition to thrive." Complaints about lack of pluralism in the party are more audible than before, as members look to the inevitable post-Mugabe future. "We must win (elections) resoundingly and regain the constituents we lost," Mugabe told the 10,000 members assembled. How ZANU-PF might get out the vote might not be from the democratic retail politics playbook either.

But in March 2010, South African President Zuma mediated between President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai to arrive at a deal to allow the government to move forward. The package of measures apparently included some senior appointments for the MDC that had long been on hold, including a new head of the Central Bank, Attorney General, and provincial governors. Soon after, a Human Rights Commission and Electoral Commission were inaugurated by Mugabe, and also applauded by the MDC. The former is headed by Reginald Austin, former head of the Commonwealth's legal affairs division; the latter is headed by Simpson Mutambanengwe, a former judge on the Zimbabwean Supreme Court and acting chief justice in Namibia. Of the Election Commission, Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara (who is from an MDC splinter party) said "The Commission will go a long way in creating conditions for free and fair elections in our country." President Zuma also made a point of meeting with deputy Agriculture Minister designate Roy Bennett, who was still on trial. In May, Roy Bennett was acquitted by Zimbabwe's High Court. The judge found insufficient evidence of the charges. The government (the Justice Ministry is held by ZANU-PF) vowed to appeal the verdict. An Attorney General's office spokesman said the High Court judge had taken a "piecemeal approach. He should have considered the merits of the case and the facts which pointed to the accused." The MDC's spokesman denounced the appeal, stating "This has nothing to do with the law, but something to do with politics."

Yet in a rare show of unity, Prime Minister Tsvangirai invited President Mugabe and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara to join him at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where all three encouraged investment in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwean media landscape opened more in May 2010 with the new Zimbabwe Media Commission's (ZMC) licensing of four private dailies, including the *Daily News*, which had been shut down in 2003 and whose restart was delayed since 2008. "We are here to allow Zimbabweans access to media," said the ZMC's chairman, Godfrey Majonga.

The government remains prone to ructions, and there is no clear common governing agenda for the elements of the power sharing government, short of trying to attract foreign investment to Zimbabwe. There have been some successes by the MDC in reducing ZANU-PF leverage, its own power still appears constrained. Finance Minister and General Secretary of the MDC, Tendai Biti, is seen by former British diplomat Philip Barclay to have "more direct power (than Tsvangirai). At least he gets to control the budget. And given the difficulties he's faced getting public servants back to work, he's achieved a

tremendous amount.” Zimbabwe may be off the boil, for now, but its situation remains precarious and uncertain.

## DIPLOMATIC ASSETS

Diplomats have supported the quest for democratic rule in Zimbabwe since the country’s early days of independence. The assets available, however, have varied largely depending on factors including historical legacy, membership in regional organizations such as SADC and international ones such as the Commonwealth, and whether or not the diplomat’s home country is in Zimbabwe’s neighborhood.

The legacy of colonialism and the power of the liberation struggle still make for strong domestic politics in Zimbabwe, and ZANU-PF has traditionally exploited its roots in the independence movement. Robert Mugabe has specifically vilified Britain, reveling in caricatured criticism of Tony Blair during his tenure as Prime Minister and referring to any diplomatic actions taken by British diplomats as plotting by “colonizers.” After United States President George W. Bush openly advocated regime change in Iraq and invaded that country in 2003, Mugabe was able to invoke the US as bogeyman, and scapegoat US sanctions for Zimbabwe’s economic crisis. The dynamic created by Zimbabwe’s colonial legacy has limited diplomatic assets available to many embassies. By linking diplomatic actions taken by Western countries with colonialism, the Zimbabwean government limits the *influence* that these diplomats can have. But the sense that there was a golden age of mutual understanding may be illusory. According to High Commissioner Brian Donnelly, “I am not sure that Mugabe ever would have been receptive to advice on democracy. Moreover, he was never very accessible to diplomats...even in the ‘good’ years.” This point seems to be bolstered by the treatment meted-out to outgoing Swedish Ambassador Sten Rylander in the pro-government press upon his departure in June 2010. Rylander had served throughout southern Africa, and noted Sweden’s support for the liberation struggle when making criticisms over child detention, media freedoms, and other matters. He was pilloried in the pro-ZANU-PF press as a simple cheerleader for the opposition and agent of “British capitalist-inspired change.”

Furthermore, *immunity*, traditionally one of the greatest assets afforded to diplomats, has been called into question as Mugabe has threatened and intimidated many Western diplomats along with journalists and other critics of his government. Mugabe has grown increasingly outspoken and brazen in his actions. Security services have used violent tactics against two Canadian High Commissioners.

On March 20, 2007, President Mugabe threatened to expel Western diplomats, accusing them of meddling in Zimbabwe’s domestic affairs. This warning to Western diplomats against supporting or interacting with opposition leaders was thought to have been aimed at scaring Zimbabweans from interaction with Western diplomats, and more specifically the British Ambassador Andrew Pockock and the American Ambassador Christopher Dell. Ambassador Dell walked out of the meeting in protest.

Other countries, particularly those with similar historical circumstances such as South Africa, have enjoyed a larger degree of *legitimacy* in Zimbabwe – and thereby access to decision makers. Mugabe and ZANU-PF leaders perceive shared interests arising from common struggle for African self-rule in a post-independence environment. Many countries in the Southern African region directly supported Zimbabwe’s independence struggle, and Mugabe returned the favor to them once in power by assisting against South African-backed insurgencies. These governments, acknowledging Zimbabwe’s economic crisis, have been able to leverage these historical ties to maintain a dialogue with the ruling ZANU-PF party. In becoming a SADC member, nations agree to share values including “human rights, democracy and the rule of law.” But this formal pledge has rarely been employed by SADC members to hold Zimbabwe to these commitments, in part because of questionable democratic credentials of some SADC members themselves, although Botswanan legislators operating in the SADC inter-parliamentary

assembly have long been critical of Zimbabwe's anti-democratic practice; recently the Foreign Minister followed suit. Diplomats from South Africa, particularly Ambassador Jeremiah Ndou, have on occasion reminded Zimbabwe of democratic values all members have agreed to uphold. South Africa has also been leading SADC-supported negotiations between ZANU-PF and opposition parties, although MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai publicly called for former South African President Thabo Mbeki to be replaced in this role, citing his lack of willingness to confront Mugabe.

The centrality of the British contribution to Zimbabwean independence was recognized by Mugabe until a decade ago. Other Commonwealth, EU, and democratic governments like the US and Norway also contributed a great deal to post-independence development. Western embassies have shown *solidarity* toward Zimbabwe's civil society and opposition, though often at the risk of antagonizing the government.

Finally, many diplomats have cited their ability to leverage *funds* in Zimbabwe as a useful asset to their diplomatic efforts. Funds have been used to provide support to civil society groups and democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, as part of a larger strategy to support democratic development in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean lawyer and intellectual Dr. Alex Magaisa has emphasized the importance of these initiatives as local resources become increasingly scarce. Embassies refrained from direct support to the MDC, "since any evidence of this would be used to prosecute opposition leaders." International food aid – both bilateral from governments (such as the UK, US, and Sweden) through embassies, and multilateral through programs like the World Food Program – has also been a major force by the diplomatic community in helping to stave off famine in Zimbabwe. This aid has vastly increased as Zimbabwe's food crisis has worsened in recent years as a result of land seizures, economic mismanagement, non-cancellation of debt, and persistent drought. In terms of proportion, funds for democracy and civil society assistance are dwarfed by the level of humanitarian aid. The fact that most democratic governments remain skeptical that aid will be abused by the still ZANU-PF dominated government has meant that food and other humanitarian assistance (particularly in the devastated education sector) has been a focal point.

## TOOLBOX APPLICATION

### The Golden Rules

Many diplomats cited *listening* as an important part of their strategy for democracy support. This includes listening to all sides of the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe. Edward Gibson Lanpher, US Ambassador to Zimbabwe from 1991-1995, said that he never turned down an invitation to speak to people throughout every region of the country. He made an effort to be very public in his conversations with a variety of stakeholders in Zimbabwe's future, including both white and black farmers, rural and urban residents, and missionaries. Listening to a wide variety of perspectives helps ambassadors to better *understand* the political situation. British High Commissioner Brian Donnelly organized "roadshows" rotating around the main provincial cities, including staff from all the High Commission's sections – commercial, consular, British Council, and aid. This effective moving open house facilitated access for citizens. Local officials, parliamentarians, religious and civic figures were invited to evening receptions. Often the visits would be pegged to the opening of some UK-funded project in the area. The effort allowed the High Commission to counter accusations that it was acting covertly. Other embassies conducted similar efforts on a smaller scale. Swedish Ambassador Sten Rylander made a point of getting outside the capital as soon as he was accredited in 2006 to donate vehicles to a community children's rights group, and sought their views on the situation in the country. Yet the ability of diplomats to operate this freely was further curtailed soon after. Some of that room to maneuver may be returning, but so long as there remains lack of clarity over who is in charge, this remains uncertain.

A major part of listening to stakeholders and gaining a strong understanding of the situation in Zimbabwe is showing *respect* for Zimbabweans' hopes for the country. This respect forms a major part of South Africa's diplomatic interactions with Zimbabwe, which is largely centered on listening and engaging the government and opposition so that Zimbabweans can find a common solution to their political problems. Former South African Ambassador Jeremiah Ndou says, "The most important thing is that Zimbabweans themselves sit down and agree on what they want." Yet, the Zimbabwean opposition and civil society feel this approach is overly solicitous to Mugabe and insensitive to their democratic aspirations.

In recent years it has become more difficult for some diplomats to engage broadly across all sectors of Zimbabwean society. This is especially true for many of the more outspoken critics of the Zimbabwean government, such as the UK, who have been unable to speak directly with government officials. Because of these limitations, information *sharing* between diplomatic missions has become an important tool for foreign offices. The EU ambassadors meet regularly, Commonwealth countries have monthly lunches, and constant informal bilateral exchanges among diplomats are the norm. Matthew Neuhaus, Director of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth, says that since Zimbabwe withdrew from the Commonwealth in 2003, it has relied largely on its relationship with SADC for information.

### Truth in Communications

Sharing information gathered from stakeholders in Zimbabwe with others through *informing* has been an equally important task of diplomats in the country. A key component of the Canadian mission's current approach is informing the public about human rights abuses and violent or undemocratic actions. Jennifer Metayer, Head of Aid for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), says that CIDA stays in direct contact with all of its implementing partners several times per week. If affiliated staff members disappear or experience harassment, incidents are publicly reported so as to shine a spotlight aimed at preventing further abuse.

Formal *reporting* also plays an important role in communicating the current situation in Zimbabwe to home countries and the public, especially with the government's effort to limit international media access. Eden Reid, of the South African High Commission, said in 2008 that a major role of South African diplomats inside of Zimbabwe is reporting back to the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria. Because South African diplomats are able to talk to government officials, opposition leaders, and civil society within Zimbabwe, Reid believed they were able to report an accurate picture of the situation in the country, which is useful for forming South African policy. Yet given misgivings about South African policy, some opposition and civic figures are more apt to talk to Western diplomats. Furthermore, the humanitarian aid given by western governments enabled insight into conditions and contacts with civil society around the country.

Some of the failure of diplomacy in Zimbabwe, however, may be attributed to a failure to heed warnings reported by diplomats. Former Canadian High Commissioner Robert MacLaren found little support at home for his alarm over reports of massacres in Matabeleland in the 1980s. A decade later, former US Ambassador Lanpher reported in his final cable to Washington DC in 1995 that Zimbabwe was "increasingly corrupt" and had "the appearance of democracy, but was basically under a one-party, one-man control." In this case it was not a failure of reporting, but a failure of capitals to follow up on these reports with action to help prevent further breakdown of democracy.

### Working with Government

Though working with ZANU-PF government officials was initially the goal of most, if not all, diplomatic envoys, many diplomats soon found their efforts at democracy support severely impeded by these same

officials. When Mugabe's government became increasingly authoritarian beginning in the late 1990s, many diplomats decided they could no longer stay quiet and issued public demarches condemning the actions of the ZANU-PF government. While there continued to be efforts to work with the Zimbabwean government, illegal land seizures and violence surrounding the 2000 elections seemed to be the last straw.

The UK and US governments most notably attempted to pressure the Mugabe regime through public condemnation and economic sanctions, though this made their relationship with a retaliatory Zimbabwean government even more dysfunctional. Sir Brian Donnelly, the British High Commissioner from 2001 to 2004, was demonized in the official press and denied ministerial access, which led him to turn to public means of expressing his views on human rights, and detailing the UK's large humanitarian assistance program. The Mugabe regime, seeking to undermine his local credibility, retaliated in many ways, placing Sir Brian on 24-hour surveillance in 2002 and threatening to expel him in 2003, accusing him publicly of various fictitious plots ostensibly intended to overthrow the Zimbabwean government. Donnelly believes these acts were designed primarily to intimidate Zimbabwean interlocutors.

This pattern of the Zimbabwean government continuing to refuse to work with diplomats in the wake of public declarations, may prompt reflection on the benefits of such proactive public diplomacy in a one-man state. While such condemnations satisfied domestic constituents' desires to have their governments speak out about human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, the ability of diplomats in the country to influence or negotiate with ZANU-PF officials via *demarches* was severely thwarted. While the softer line taken by other countries' may have preserved access, their ability to influence – or will to influence – Zimbabwean policies is hardly evident.

Matthew Neuhaus believes that better *advising* and greater mentoring involvement with Zimbabwe's government in the early years of independence might have made a difference in the country's ultimate democratic development. Yet the first Zimbabwe cabinets included several leaders who had spent exile years in international institutions. Focused diplomatic advising to build up more such homegrown future leaders may have forestalled the transformation to authoritarian rule that Zimbabwe later faced. Zimbabwe's government *did* avail itself of external advice in areas of concern when it was desirable. Britain, for instance, helped mold the Zimbabwean National Army, having deployed a military training mission in Zimbabwe for over 20 years. However, many in the international community were eager to overlook governance deficiencies that could have been corrected through advising earlier in exchange for having a "model" democratic African leader to point to in the once-esteemed figure of Mugabe.

The abilities of diplomats to *advise* the Zimbabwean government in a way that would meaningfully improve democratic development have been constrained by a frequent divergence of views with officials on what constitutes a modern democratic state in Africa. But diplomats have also turned to civil society as a potential force to strengthen Zimbabwean governance. By advising civil society leaders and working to build their capacity, diplomats believe they are helping to create an environment conducive to better future government. It appears that the new government, particularly Finance Minister Tendai Biti of the MDC, has been more open to international advice; he is perhaps the minister most open to the international community as he pursues foreign capital for the recently stabilized economy. Others are also likely receptive. The real question is who is actually handling the levers of power. Of "power ministries" (Defense, Interior, Justice) and other government bodies (such as the Central Intelligence Organization), these remain firmly in the hands of ZANU-PF hardliners who – if they take any advice – are more likely to accept it from counterparts in Beijing, Tehran, or Tripoli than from the democratic world, near or far.

This advising has largely taken place through an emphasis on *dialogue* that has formed a cornerstone of many diplomats' actions in Zimbabwe. South African Ambassador Ndou emphasized the importance of dialogue, specifically citing South Africa's efforts to encourage conversations between government

officials and opposition leaders using the institution of SADC to maintain legitimacy and solidarity as an honest broker. Others tried to reel Zimbabwe back before relations with the West reached their current state. Commonwealth Secretary General and New Zealand ex-Foreign Minister Don McKinnon was mandated by the Commonwealth Ministerial Advisory Group (CMAG), formed as a follow-on to the 1991 Harare Declaration, to attempt to forge a creative solution, but was unsuccessful in gaining meaningful political access to Mugabe.

Following this failed attempt, the Commonwealth adopted the Abuja Process in 2001 at the request of then-British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to attempt to work with the Zimbabwean government on issues of human rights, elections, and land reform. A deal was reached, but the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US diverted international attention, and Mugabe rescinded his consent to the agreement at the end of the month. According to one senior diplomat, this “led the UK (and other western governments) to doubt the value of dialogue when the other party seemed patently insincere.”

The arrival of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in the unity government in 2009 has certainly opened relations between Harare and much of the international community. Tsvangirai was welcomed to the White House in June 2009 by President Barack Obama, who proclaimed his “extraordinary admiration for the courage (and) the tenacity that the prime minister has shown in navigating through some difficult political times.”

Yet despite the new unity government, dealing with Mugabe remains difficult. Western democracies have adopted benchmarks for granting aid to the government, to ensure it is spent appropriately. These have generated the predictable acrimony from Mugabe, who in July 2009 attacked the new US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ambassador Johnnie Carson, as an “idiot” after a meeting on the sidelines of the African Union summit in Libya. “We have the whole of SADC working with us, and you have the likes of little fellows like Carson, you see, wanting to say: ‘You do this, you do that.’” the pro-government *Herald* quoted him as saying. “Who is he?... I hope he was not speaking for Obama. I told him he was a shame, a great shame, being an African-American, an Afro-American for that matter.” He refused to meet outgoing US Ambassador James McGee, who departed his post also in July. In May 2010, Carson again came under assault, this time by Zimbabwe’s Ambassador to the US, Machivenyika Mapuranga, who interrupted the Assistant Secretary’s remarks on the state of human rights and good governance in Zimbabwe at an Africa Day dinner with a shout “You are talking like a good house slave!” He continued with “We will never be an American colony, you know that!” Carson retorted “You can sit in the audience in darkness, but the light will find you and the truth will find you...It seems that Robert Mugabe has some friends in the room tonight. Unlike in Zimbabwe, they are allowed to speak without oppression because this is a democracy. In Zimbabwe, that kind of talk would have been met with a policeman’s stick. We don’t do that here.” The Zimbabwean Ambassador was quietly convinced to leave by the event staff at the hotel. Another diplomat in attendance told the *Foreign Policy* reporter that “In Africa, an ambassador is treated like a king. Here he can be humiliated just like anyone else.”

### Reaching Out

Former Canadian Ambassador John Schram was typical of several ambassadors over recent years who sought to encourage dialogue by *convening* a group of people who had a stake in Zimbabwe’s future development and provide them with a safe place for discussion. This allowed local leaders to network with others in the country who were also working toward a more democratic Zimbabwe.

Strengthened by experience in South Africa a decade earlier, Ambassador Schram also emphasized his efforts to encourage dialogue by hosting private dinners every few weeks attended by leaders from government, business, academia, and the media, among other segments of civil society to discuss

Zimbabwe's challenges and brainstorm solutions for the future. He and other such diplomatic hosts believe these efforts had an impact and helped to create a cadre of leaders who will be ready to help move Zimbabwe on a path toward democracy once the opportunity for change arises. The Norwegians developed a prominent profile for their outreach efforts in Zimbabwe, drawing on their experience organizing the negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords. Most embassies engaged in convening government and opposition at dinner parties and other gatherings.

Ambassador Lanpher highlighted active participation of US diplomats in the International Visitor Program, which brings current and potential government, business, and civil society leaders to the United States for 30 days to "meet and confer with their professional counterparts and to experience America firsthand." Many diplomatic missions also worked to *connect* local leaders with outside groups or individuals who might be helpful to their efforts, including in policy centers and universities outside Zimbabwe. Britain's Chevening program sends about 20 Zimbabweans per year for one year of graduate training in the UK. Other democracies have such exchange programs. The British Council also organizes training programs on aspects of democratic governance inside and outside of Zimbabwe. By *showcasing* best practices through these trainings, diplomats such as those from the US Embassy attempted to build capacity of the local Zimbabwean officials, public institutions and civil society.

Much of the support diplomats have provided to Zimbabwe has also been in the form of *financing*. Diplomats have given funds to promote dialogue, support Zimbabwe's vocal labor movement, reinforce human rights, promote gender equality, and build capacity of civil society to push for democratic governance, among others. These funding mechanisms have chiefly been lauded as successful in supporting democracy development. Jennifer Metayer points to the especially flexible and rapid-response nature of CIDA's funding as critical to the impact it has had in Zimbabwe.

Beyond the direct benefit diplomats have gained from providing funding to local groups, an additional benefit is that providing funding – especially to development or humanitarian projects – allows diplomats an opportunity to interact with people and the media in a more public way than they might otherwise be able. Ambassador Schram, for instance, cited his ability to discuss the values of human rights, democracy, and rule of law enshrined in such agreements as the "Harare Declaration" of the Commonwealth and New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) undertakings on governance, both of which Zimbabwe had signed, to the media and the public during ceremonies designed to unveil development projects funded by the Canadian government. The ability to provide funds and other forms of aid also gives diplomats some leverage over government officials who rely on these funds. Ambassador Lanpher recalls an example in the early 1980s when Zimbabwe was suffering from a severe food shortage due to drought. Mugabe had imposed a food curfew on Matabeleland as part of the punishment for perceived rebellion by followers of Joshua Nkomo in 1982. When the US sent food aid to the country, Ambassador Lanpher refused to distribute it until Mugabe's government signed an agreement stating that the food would be distributed across all areas of the country. "I had a good relationship with the government," Ambassador Lanpher stated. "But sometimes you have to be tough." This approach became increasingly difficult, and with the 2002-3 drought and resultant food shortages, leverage was very limited, as most donor governments refused to channel aid through the Zimbabwean government for fear of it being misused or inequitably distributed.

These financing mechanisms sometimes come at a cost. The public emphasis that many Western diplomats have put on funding pro-democracy civil society groups and opposition parties has allowed Mugabe to decry that the West has been funding "regime change" and has, to some extent, de-legitimized opposition groups and even some NGOs in the public eye. Methods developed in post-Cold War Europe in the 1990s were predicated on open access to all parties. Given Zimbabwe's deepening authoritarianism, support to the ruling ZANU-PF seemed perverse. But it therefore generated fierce resistance. Anecdotal

evidence points to infighting that has begun to occur within NGOs and other civil society groups over access to foreign funds. The opposition MDC party split in 2005 was reported by some sources to be driven by disagreements over spending.

Since the adoption of the power-sharing Global Political Agreement, while most democracies have held off on delivering aid to the government until they see its full implementation, they have made a point of directing assistance to where it is needed most in Zimbabwe – the beleaguered public – with food aid, help for students to buy books, uniforms and other supplies, as well as to the civic sector.

### Defending Democrats

Support for local leadership in the Zimbabwean struggle for democracy has also been a part of diplomatic action in the country. Diplomatic missions like the US Embassy have *demonstrated* their support by being quite vocal in defense of democrats who have been persecuted by the Mugabe regime. These diplomats have identified and called for an end to persecution through official statements, such as the following, released by the US State Department on July 26 2007: “Yesterday’s beating of over 200 Zimbabwean citizens that were peacefully demonstrating for a new constitution is an overt attempt by the Government of Zimbabwe to eliminate any criticism in advance of elections planned for next year.” Following an attack on a diplomatic convoy dispatched to investigate intimidation of citizens before the June 2008 runoff election, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that “I think that it gives us a window into the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, because this sort of intimidations is the sort of thing that is suffered daily, especially by those who are working with opposition groups.” South African President Jacob Zuma’s visit to deputy Agriculture Minister-designate Roy Bennett while he was still on trial for terrorism and other charges sent a strong message to Mugabe’s government, and may have stiffened the resolve of those in the judiciary to refuse to succumb to political pressure.

CIDA’s Jennifer Metayer says that *verifying* the whereabouts of civil society members, and reporting any disappearances or threats has formed a large part of CIDA’s efforts in Zimbabwe. By verifying any persecution that civil society activists experience, CIDA lets the Zimbabwean government know that the Canadian mission is watching their actions.

In May 2008, a group including the British, American, EU and Japanese ambassadors and the deputy chiefs of mission from the Netherlands and Tanzania (which chairs the African Union) and several other diplomats drove in an 11-car convoy north of the capital to investigate allegations that the government and ruling party were targeting opposition supporters in the aftermath of the first round of the presidential election, held in late March. The diplomats found a ZANU-PF detention and torture center, and visited local hospitals to interview those injured. The diplomats pushed their way through armed guards at one hospital. On the way back to Harare, the diplomatic convoy was stopped at a roadblock, and a Central Intelligence Organization officer after hearing from a US diplomat of what they saw told them “we are going to beat you thoroughly too.” Diplomats prevented the agents from fleeing and photographed them. US Ambassador James McGee said afterward “We are eager to continue this type of thing, to show the world what is happening here in Zimbabwe. It is absolutely urgent that the entire world sees what is going on. The violence has to stop.” A second such convoy in June 2008, including American and British diplomats was stopped by police 80km north of Harare. After refusing to go to a police station, the convoy was chased. At another checkpoint, the cars’ tires were slashed by police. The immobilized cars were then attacked by a group of “war veterans.” Diplomats were threatened with being burned alive in their vehicles. A Zimbabwean driver was beaten up, and equipment was stolen. Ambassador McGee stated “Zimbabwe is now a lawless country. They are not following their own laws. They are not following international law. The government is trying to intimidate diplomats from going to the

countryside to witness the violence they are perpetrating against their own citizens.” The police said that the diplomats “behave like criminals and distort information” regarding the incident.

Dr. Alex Magaisa believes that the attention of the diplomatic community, including their *witnessing* trials of accused opposition supporters, has had a big impact on Zimbabwe’s democratic development. “It’s reassuring to know that the world is watching,” Magaisa said. “If you get a diplomatic figure from a more powerful country, it makes news and it communicates a message to the world... I think this has been very, very useful.”

Diplomats have also tried to *protect* democratic rights by identifying when these rights have been curbed or violated and publicly petitioning the Zimbabwean government to restore democratic norms, including safety for those who are working toward democratic goals. On November 26 2007, the US government released a statement: “We call on the Government of Zimbabwe to end immediately the violent attacks against democratic activists and civil society organizations, to respect the rule of law, and to allow the Zimbabwean people to exercise peacefully their political rights.”

These types of public statements that defend the actions of domestic democrats have become even more important in Zimbabwe’s increasingly constrained media environment. Many foreign journalists have been expelled. The few that are allowed in the country are subject to being censored and periodically arrested, as are local Zimbabwean journalists. Stories of journalists being censored, jailed, or beaten have become common, as independent media within the country has withered under stifling laws. Many of the country’s journalists have since taken refuge in willing host countries including Britain, the United States, and South Africa, where new independent media sources covering Zimbabwe have flourished.

### What Lessons Learned?

From an early optimistic start, diplomats from both Western countries and those closest to Zimbabwe in history and geography have been able to use the assets at their disposal with diminishing success. Though colonial history has been manipulated by the Mugabe regime to exclude meaningful influence by the UK and other Western powers, the policies of entities as varied as the US government and the Commonwealth still require careful examination. In light of the diverging approaches of African and specifically SADC leaders and their diplomatic counterparts from the West, two questions are especially worth considering.

First, to what extent is public condemnation an effective diplomatic tool? The planned EU Observation Mission of the 2002 elections was canceled on the grounds that the conditions of observation were unacceptably constrained, but also to defer to EU public opinion. It left EU and other Missions the task of trying to monitor the elections with inadequate means (an apt example, however, of *sharing*).

Many countries and bodies have taken a hard line public stance against Mugabe himself and his regime. For example, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took a stern position in a statement in 2007 which read in part: “The world community again has been shown that the regime of Robert Mugabe is ruthless and repressive and creates only suffering for the people of Zimbabwe. We will continue to follow closely events in Zimbabwe, and we urge the Government to allow all Zimbabweans to freely express their views without being subject to violence and intimidation.” In addition, “targeted” sanctions directed at regime officials and supporters have become a standard western policy tool. They can have a strong psychological impact. But while these measures are felt by their intended targets, their application and perceived irreversibility can also create a further obstacle to contact and influence with power brokers. Mugabe obsesses over the sanctions in most public appearance, decrying them as the reason for an economic recovery that remains unfelt by many Zimbabweans. This is not the case: investment and commerce can go forth unimpeded, except for arms sales, and Mugabe has traveled freely – even

unannounced – to Davos for the World Economic Forum. But the question of the opportunity cost remains – and is difficult to answer with certainty.

Such declarations and policies probably further hampered diplomats' already reduced ability to work directly with government officials and maintain a flow of information about the situation on the ground. But democracies understandably wish to maintain what they judge is an important position of principle on human rights abuses, political violence, and undemocratic action, and ideally consistently around the world. Inconsistencies on the part of critical democracies are exploited by autocrats and sow confusion among broad populations as well. Countries and bodies that on the other hand have focused on working within official channels have been accused of silent collaboration, but they have maintained open channels of communication and information inside Zimbabwe, for what they are worth in effecting moderation and change. Both approaches have had their strengths and weaknesses, with little public acknowledgment or cooperation on either side. Neither seems to have achieved their stated aim.

The second question concerns how much open support diplomats should provide to opposition parties and democracy-promoting civil society groups. In the case of politicians especially, credibility hinges on authenticity and independence. Too much public support and funding from foreign sources open opposition parties and civil society groups to charges that they are simply fronts for foreign governments. Yet without outside support, many of these groups do not have the resources or political space to operate. It is important for diplomats to find a balance between support for a multi-party democratic process and perceived support for “regime change.” This case study does not pretend to provide an answer to these questions. But it does draw attention to the merit of creative thinking about the opening up of diplomatic space between differently positioned actors with varying strategies (an example in this case would be SADC and the Commonwealth), to find common ground in pursuing similar goals. Rather than viewing these approaches as either-or choices, better calibration of application might maximize the potential benefits of each: greater willingness to conduct back-channel talks on the part of western democracies and a greater willingness by SADC members to use the access they have to influence beneficial change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Significant outside support will be needed to lift Zimbabwe back on the track of realizing its potential, given that its once noteworthy assets are now severely degraded through abuse or neglect. Rebuilding an effective civil service not tied to political leaders, and re-establishing an economic and fiscal climate in which trade and industry can flourish again will be priorities. Generous international support for Zimbabwe's government and civil society will hopefully help Zimbabwe to enjoy at last the self-governance and prosperity by and for the people that independence and self-determination promised.

Despite the changes in the past year in Zimbabwe, the functionality of the troubled power-sharing arrangement is questionable, as it snags on recurring political crises. Prime Minister Tsvangirai has said “Mugabe cannot govern without us. He can't act unilaterally... Already Zimbabwe is a different place, a significantly better place. As a society, we were near death, and we have come back to life.” Finance Minister Tendai Biti, of the MDC, has also sought donor support for his reforms, which have delivered noteworthy success in restoring stability and market functionality. While help is coming in, particularly for humanitarian aims, Western donors maintain their wait-and-see attitude. President Obama noted when welcoming Prime Minister Tsvangirai in 2009 that none of the \$73 million being given for work in Zimbabwe would go through the government “because we continue to be concerned about consolidating democracy, human rights and the rule of law, but it will be going directly to the people of Zimbabwe.” Also in 2009, former British Junior Foreign Minister Mark Malloch-Brown told the Zimbabwean Foreign Minister that more reforms are required “before the UK and international community as a whole can engage more fully.” This essentially remains the policy today, a year later, as Western governments call

for full implementation of the Global Political Agreement to re-establish their full spectrum of assistance with Zimbabwe's government.

The amount of assistance to devote, and how soon to commit it, remains a debated issue among established democracies, both in the region and the wider international community. In the United States, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry said in a press conference with Tsvangirai that the new joint government has made "real progress in stabilizing runaway inflation and trying to begin to create the conditions for democracy... I believe that we should explore our options to increase assistance for reform. Failure to act now may squander this opportunity for change, and the greatest beneficiaries will be Robert Mugabe and the other architects of Zimbabwe's destruction." Since then, Tsvangirai and others MDC members in government have accused Mugabe and ZANU-PF from reneging on key elements of the deal, threatened to leave the government altogether and call for new (and internationally monitored) elections, and then come back after gaining concessions they hope will strengthen public freedoms and weaken the ZANU-PF hardliners.

South Africa's new President, Jacob Zuma, has taken a different approach to Zimbabwe from his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, who pursued a "quiet diplomacy" policy. A spokesman for his African National Congress party said "President Zuma will be more vocal in terms of what we see as deviant behavior." In his August 2009 visit to Harare, President Zuma called on the power-sharing agreement to be fully implemented to allow foreign assistance to flow freely. "The inclusive government has the responsibility to fully implement the global political agreement and thus create confidence in the process...The important factor is that there is commitment amongst all parties which will make movement forward possible." He added that the current problems are not "insurmountable." As noted earlier, his engagement and personal mediation was integral to knitting the government back together in March 2010, after another crisis. President Zuma has been a frequent visitor to Harare since his inauguration. Still, Zuma went along with a SADC declaration in the midst of that crisis to say that the power sharing arrangement was working sufficiently enough to justify the lifting of all sanctions (which as noted above, are personal and arms-related only).

While there have been improvements felt by many Zimbabweans since 2008 and there has been progress in reopening the public space to independent media, the situation remains tense politically, and divisions in the ZANU-PF, while holding potential for greater democracy, also generate greater volatility. Philip Barclay, who served in Harare until last year, says "when the violence is bad, it's when the regime is driving it with an objective in mind, to terrorize everyone so they'll vote for them. And there's no need to do that at the moment. Though I'm afraid it would happen again if there were more elections...fundamental things haven't really changed. There's no greater respect for human rights."

As events in Zimbabwe unfold, diplomats will maintain a key role in helping the democratic world calibrate its approach toward a tenuous transitional government in Harare, by identifying opportunities and threats to consolidating democracy.