



Mugabe's Revenge: Halting the Violence in Zimbabwe

Following elections on March 29—in which the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), won control of parliament and won more votes in the presidential contest—the government unleashed a nationwide campaign of violence against opposition groups. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has never been so close to losing power, and appears willing to use all means available to physically beat his opponents into submission. As the international community considers its response to the complex crisis in Zimbabwe, its first order of business must be to stop the violence. The United States must diplomatically engage with African leaders to discuss a common way forward and put pressure on the regime to end the violence.

KEY TERMS, GROUPS AND PEOPLE

Morgan Tsvangira—the leader of the MDC who garnered more votes in the March 29th presidential election than all other candidates

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)—opposition party that won control of parliament in the March 29th election

Operation Mavhoterapapi (“Operation Who Did You Vote For?”)—a highly organized campaign using uniformed state security forces and ZANU-PF militias

Robert Mugabe—Zimbabwean President who has dominated Zimbabwean politics since 1980 and now is using a campaign of state-sponsored violence and intimidation against the MDC

Southern African Development Community (SADC)—a loose regional alliance of nine states in Southern Africa

Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)—Mugabe's ruling party in Zimbabwe

WHY DID ZANU-PF LOSE THE MARCH ELECTION AND WHAT NOW?

ZANU-PF's losses were unexpected because the MDC was divided and had made concessions in the lead up to elections, however, political violence, corruption, and gross mismanagement of the economy proved to be ZANU-PF's undoing.

Since the election, Mugabe has resorted to state organized violence. At least 32 supporters of the MDC have been killed, over 6700 have been displaced, and over 1000 have been arrested as part of the Operation Mavhoterapapi, or “Operation Who Did You Vote For?” All signs point to the situation worsening.

The MDC has sent mixed signals as to whether it would contest a runoff vote. Ahead of a runoff, the U.S. must work closely with regional and international partners to verify the accuracy of the numbers, send in poll monitors, and ensure a free and fair poll. The MDC has clear advantages, but Mugabe will not leave office without a fight.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS?

Violence and the political crisis must be dealt with on separate tracks; a political settlement will take time, but diplomatic intervention aimed at stopping the violence cannot wait. The U.S. government can be the engine that drives a solution, but the details of such a solution should arise from partnerships with regional governments.



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Impose a cost—U.S. diplomats should urge the U.N. Security Council to investigate the violence, and impose targeted sanctions on Zimbabwean officials if they obstruct investigators. The U.S. and its European allies on the Security Council should press for the case of Zimbabwe to be referred to the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Prevent violence through a political settlement—In the absence of a process to seat the legitimate winner, international actors should assist with negotiating a transitional authority that would oversee the development of a popularly supported constitution, paving the way for free and fair elections.

Carrots and sticks to achieve a deal—The U.S. should coordinate with international actors to develop and present a proposal for a settlement that includes immediate financial and reconstruction assistance in exchange for Mugabe's exit and a transition to a democratic government.

- ***Carrots***—impunity for Mugabe, a plan to convince militia members to disband, and assistance from the international community
- ***Sticks***—referring the case to the ICC, targeted personal sanctions, isolating Zimbabwe

A NEW WESTERN ALLIANCE

Past regional efforts have presumed that South Africa would take the lead in negotiations with Zimbabwe due to the close relationship of the two countries and its reputation as an economic and political powerhouse on the continent, however, efforts have not been backed up by action. The U.S. should side-step South Africa and conduct continued high-level consultations with other key SADC members, specifically Zambia and Botswana.

CONCLUSION

It's zero hour in Zimbabwe—a period that will be spoken of for generations as either a time when the region united to support the will of the people, or a missed opportunity that led to thousands of deaths and a failed state. The road ahead is difficult, but extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Regional leaders must publicly recognize gross abuses of law by ZANU-PF, and develop an African solution to an African problem by applying focused pressure on Mugabe to leave, side by side with meaningful incentives for a solution. The West should provide support for this effort, but be prepared to take strong action should that pressure fail to materialize.