

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 27 November 2002 the African Security Analysis Programme hosted a day-long seminar entitled 'Zimbabwe in turmoil'. The principal idea was to tap into expertise from within that country itself, and a number of prominent Zimbabweans were kind enough to fly south to share their insights, hopes and fears. Since then, unfortunately, an already grave situation has deteriorated further, and expectations raised at the beginning of 2003 of the possibility of a managed or negotiated transition to a new and more tolerant political dispensation paving the way towards economic revival seem to have been over-optimistic.

To recapitulate: between December 2002 and January 2003, stories began to circulate about approaches by leading elements within ZANU-PF to Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), offering a form of transitional government in exchange for the parliamentary opposition's cooperation in amending the constitution to permit a managed presidential succession and delayed elections following the retirement of Robert Mugabe. Such an arrangement, it was felt, would open the way for a resumption of relations between the international financial institutions and Zimbabwe, paving the way for donor support to eventual economic recovery.

Whether these talks about talks had the blessing of President Mugabe himself remains uncertain. Although he shortly went on record with indications that ZANU-PF should begin discussions about the succession, it is not impossible that he sought in this way to entice pretenders to the presidency to reveal their hands before it was prudent to do so. Part of the deal under discussion, the so-called "exit strategy", was to afford President Mugabe and members of his immediate family and followers with guarantees that they would enjoy immunity from prosecution for alleged misdeeds committed in office. Yet Tsvangirai's refusal to accede to Mugabe's precondition for talks by withdrawing a legal challenge to the presidential election result of 2002, and the apparent reluctance on the part of his supporters to consider amnesty to regime which continued to commit the grossest violations of human rights seem to have blocked this avenue.

Faced with growing evidence of popular disfavour and the willingness of large numbers of people to defy the wrath of the authorities by participating in strikes and stayaways, the government resorted to ever more severe repression. The authorities showed their desperation by having Tsvangirai arraigned on a second treason charge.

At the time of writing it is uncertain how matters will develop from here. Certainly within the ruling party there are those who wish to see President Mugabe stay on at virtually any cost, so much are their own political and personal fortunes contingent upon his survival. Yet there are other who have managed to acquire considerable capital at little cost in the economic maelstrom, and who now desire a return to some sort of normality in order to enjoy their riches. How long can the fractures in the edifice of the ruling party be papered over and, by the same token, what would the MDC look like in a post-Mugabe dispensation?

These are only some of the questions addressed in this monograph.

We have been fortunate that several of the participants at the seminar were willing to update their contributions to accommodate the rapidly changing economic and political scene. In addition, Patrick Bond kindly provided us with a piece looking at some of the problems inherent in an eventual economic recovery.

Chapter 1 by Brian Kagoro analyses the emergence of effective opposition politics within Zimbabwe against a background of deepening crisis. He identifies the continuity of the themes of violence and fraud that have been endemic to the country's political life since the 19th century, and shows how ZANU-PF's failure to transform the repressive colonial state led directly to its inability to deliver on the promises of independence. He also points to the contradictions inherent in the World Bank/IMF prescriptions of austerity and their simultaneous advocacy of neo-liberal democracy. Patronage politics and the emergence of a self-seeking authoritarian political elite have been the partial consequence of the confluence of these phenomena. After describing the antecedents and emergence of the MDC he speculates on the challenges currently facing a broad-based political movement.

In Chapter 2 John Makumbe looks at the prospects for a transition within ZANU-PF itself. He identifies tensions within the party between Mugabe's authoritarian inclinations and a majority of ZANU-PF supporters. Many of the centralist and commandist elements of the ruling party's style can be traced

to its history as a liberation movement with Eastern bloc backing. Other aspects of political intolerance are more correctly associated with the incumbent leadership's determination to brook no effective opposition to its dominance, as has been shown on various occasions since independence.

The economic consequences of this situation are addressed in Chapter 3 by John Robertson. After isolating some of the salient manifestations of Zimbabwe's crisis, this chapter goes on to analyse some of government's attempted responses, and shows how inadequate and even counter-productive these have been. Debt and shortages of foreign exchange interrelate at the heart of the economic meltdown. Fuel and electricity shortages and a wholesale assault on the commercial farming sector have had massive influences on the ability of the economy as a whole to continue performing. This dire situation notwithstanding, the author concludes that Zimbabwe could return to a recovery and growth path fairly quickly, though the window of opportunity for this to happen is closing rapidly. He believes that the co-operation of the international financial institutions would be an essential prerequisite, however, and this would necessitate a fairly radical change in the political leadership and the nature of the regime.

In Chapter 4 Patrick Bond presents an alternative view on Zimbabwe's economic future, arguing that the present crisis may present opportunities to break with unsuccessful strategies pursued in the past. He contends that neither the exhausted nationalism of ZANU-PF nor the globally oriented neo-liberalism of the MDC provide adequate bases for the construction of a just and equitable society in Zimbabwe. The author presents an outline of radical policy alternatives that would meet the broader needs of society rather than serving the interests, internal and external, of those seeking a deal between elites.

The final contribution, in Chapter 5 by Edward Lahiff presents a broader perspective on the land debate, which in the case of Zimbabwe seems to have focussed on the plight of white commercial farmers and (to a degree) their labourers. He stresses the importance of addressing the fraught issue of land reform throughout the southern African region on the grounds of equity and efficiency, which, he argues, are not always at odds with one another. He questions many of the myths perpetuated in self-interest by large-scale commercial farming, and argues that for rural poverty to be addressed, access to land has to be provided. Many of the misperceptions about the rural economy, he opines, are the consequence of a "colonial" mindset. There are also a number of myths about the relationship of freehold land tenure to commercial success in farming. In conclusion, he argues, there is a misperception that

the issue of land lies at the heart of the Zimbabwean crisis: the latter is primarily about economic collapse and political legitimacy leading to the abandonment of the rule of law.

The dynamics of the current situation in Zimbabwe are so unstable that to make predictions would be an exercise in foolhardiness. This monograph attempts to illuminate certain aspects of the crisis. Beyond that one can only say with any certainty that the current situation, economic and political, is unsustainable.

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