

Mugabe, Mbeki, Maliki: They're Our Boys

Written by Ilana Mercer

Friday, 30 March 2007 00:00 -



“Zimbabwe’s Opposition Leader Is Seized,” blared the New York Times. “Zimbabwe's police have launched a new crackdown on the opposition,” the BBC chimed, decrying the arrest of Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change, and the stepped-up “campaign of violence and intimidation undertaken by the Mugabe government in recent days.” Earlier this month the unfortunate Tsvangirai and other opposition politicians were beaten in police custody.

Politicians and pundits alike, in policy papers and assorted disquisitions (including a State Department Human Rights Report), expound on the tragic tribulations of Zimbabwe. They use strong language and active verbs to implicate Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party henchmen for banning political protest, suppressing “freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and academic freedom,” rigging elections, rounding up and torturing opposition leaders, to say nothing of detaining them without trial; displacing over 700,000 people by turning them out of their shanties; seizing the commercial white-owned farms which fed the country and generated its exports, causing widespread starvation, and making Zimbabwe aid dependent.

Mind you, the commentariat hasn't protested the evils of property confiscation so much as it has bemoaned the fact that the land ended up in the hands of Mugabe's cronies, rather than being redistributed “fairly” to all black Zimbabweans. The process “lacked transparency,” one pointy-head complained, as though theft, transparent or clandestine, is ever aboveboard.

Mugabe, we are told, instituted a Soviet style command economy. He nationalized large sectors of the economy and fixed prices. His actions killed off the little economic activity still taking place. As the economy contracted, he continued to promiscuously print money. The result: hyperinflation approaching 2000 percent and predicted by the International Monetary Fund to reach 4,278.8 percent this year. The infrastructure is collapsing. The smell of sewerage hanging over Harare is more than metaphoric—the treatment facilities, like the grid, are not maintained.

At some point in the reams of repudiations and recommendations American writers issue authoritatively about Zimbabwe, they shift mysteriously to the passive voice. Allusions are made to a Zimbabwe where all was sweetness and light. One is told that once-upon-a-time, this helter skelter of a country used to export food. That not so long ago, life expectancy, now 33 years, was 60 years; that in that bygone era, unemployment, now over 80 percent, was extremely low; that Zimbabwe had the “best health care system in Africa,” and the highest literacy rates.

Mugabe reversed all this. That much we know. But who was the Prince among Men responsible for the good times? We are never told. The phantom was Ian Smith, prime minister of Rhodesia, RIP. Smith was ostracized by the international community which refused to recognize his minority rule, and treated him like it treated Saddam Hussein, with boycotts and sanctions. The

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British would not rest until Smith ceded power. When Mugabe was elected Leader for Life in 1980, he celebrated the West's stupidity by committing his first major massacre in 1983. While Dr. Robert Mugabe was eliminating 20,000 innocent Ndebele in Matabeleland, his pals in the US were busy bestowing on him honorary doctorates. By the time the Queen of England knighted Sir Robert Mugabe in 1994, he had already done his "best" work.

Yes, Mugabe is plenty cruel. Always has been. At least as cruel as the Iraqi Shiite security forces we're training and sponsoring, which double up as death squads in their spare time. The "humanitarian disaster" of their making—and ours—is everywhere apparent in Sunni neighborhoods.

The American Founders may have attempted to forestall democracy by devising a republic. Contemporary Americans, however, refused to rest until South Africa too became a democracy. It's a funny thing, then, that President Thabo Mbeki hardly ever protests Mugabe's undemocratic antics. But then Mbeki himself is extremely busy—busy implementing a slow-motion version of Mugabe's program. As columnist Andrew Kenny has observed:

In South Africa, the main instrument of transformation is Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This requires whites to hand over big chunks of the ownership of companies to blacks and to surrender top jobs to them. Almost all the blacks so enriched belong to a small elite connected to the ANC. BEE is already happening to mines, banks and factories. In other words, a peaceful Mugabe-like programme is already in progress in South Africa.

"Peaceful" is not the right word. The career criminals pillaging, raping and massacring their way across South Africa are certainly in the same league as the Iraqi Shiite death squads and the Zimbabwean state terrorists. My point? Mbeki (South Africa), Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Maliki (Iraq): they're our boys. We put them there.

The US's policy toward Rhodesia was slightly more nuanced, given that it equated African majority rule with Marxism. But once Jimmy Carter came to power, Marxism was no longer an impediment to mobocracy. The US joined the UN, Britain and the rest of the international community in a commitment to ensconce that sexy freedom fighter, Mugabe. The rest is history—as is post-colonial Africa.

The peanut gallery's messiah du jour is Morgan Tsvangirai of the Zimbabwean Opposition Party. They delude themselves that if not for the megalomania of one man—Mugabe—freedom would have flourished in Zimbabwe, as it has in the rest of Africa.

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