

Cables reveal how US and UK sought to plunder Zimbabwe's resources

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The US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks contain revealing details of how the United States and Britain sought to further their commercial interests in Zimbabwe.

WikiLeaks has released 12 cables, which originate from the American embassy in Harare in addition to others from the South African capital Pretoria, London and the State Department commenting on the situation in Zimbabwe. They range in date from September 2000 to February 2010.

This was a decade in which President Robert Mugabe's regime came into increasing conflict with the Western-backed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by white agribusinesses and headed by former trade union leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The present power-sharing government was ultimately established in 2008, with Robert Mugabe as president and Tsvangirai as prime minister.

Inflation in Zimbabwe had by then reached the figure of 40 million percent. The infrastructure was breaking down, and the country had been devastated by a cholera epidemic. Thousands were fleeing across the border into South Africa every day to escape unemployment, poverty and hunger. Approximately 1.5 million Zimbabweans are now thought to live in South Africa.

A country that had once been among the richest in Africa, with an effective health service and educational system, had slipped to the lowest point in the UN Human Development Report for 2010. In 2006, life expectancy was the lowest in the world at only 34 years for women and 37 for men, according to the World Health Organisation. Since then, there has been some improvement, and life expectancy now averages 47 years. But in 2010, UNICEF estimated that one third of Zimbabwe children were at risk of dying as a result of malnutrition.

The cables track this human tragedy through the indifferent eyes of American diplomats, whose main concern was always for the potential profits to be made from Zimbabwe's natural resources. They chart the efforts of US, British and European diplomats, often working through the UN, to establish a regime that will open up the country to international investment.

In reality, this was a tragedy largely manufactured by the international financial institutions that Washington sponsors. When the International Monetary Fund attempted to impose a structural adjustment programme in Zimbabwe at the end of the 1990s, Mugabe broke from it because he realised that it would mean dismantling the system of patronage on which he depended to remain in power. "Let that monstrous creature get out of our

way," he declared, and attempted to find other sources of international finance.

He has succeeded in remaining in power by enriching the clique around him at the expense of the majority of the population.

Finally, after 10 years the IMF is back in town—insisting on a programme of structural reforms that will address what they refer to as "labour market rigidities" and establish secure property rights for foreign investors. Mugabe's bid to go it alone has failed, under circumstances that can only be described as disastrous for working people.

The cables that WikiLeaks has published reveal that throughout this decade the US was quite prepared to come to an accommodation with Mugabe and ensure him a lucrative retirement. They note the human rights abuses that his regime has committed, but show no desire to pursue justice in Mugabe's case. They treat, matter of factly, the process of engineering regime change without reference to the popular will. Creating a new strong man in Africa is all in a day's work for the US diplomatic corps.

Britain appears to play a minor role in the story told by the US cables, because they represent the American point of view. Yet, the relationship between the two powers is ever present. All of the cables are copied to Joint Analytical Command at RAF Molesworth in Cambridgeshire, England, where AFRICOM is based—demonstrating the close military and intelligence links between the US and UK. British companies, too, clearly look to the US as a friendly power that will protect their interests.

In 2000, the US embassy in Harare reported that elements in the ruling ZANU-PF were interested in a deal with the MDC that would involve Mugabe's departure. The board of Lever Brothers (Unilever) had informed the MDC that Kofi Annan, then head of the UN, had offered Mugabe a deal if he would step down. It included a financial package and safe passage to Libya. It seemed that "a shady white businessman," thought to be John Bredenkamp, had also offered Mugabe a retirement deal. It was not known whether Bredenkamp had sufficient resources to finance the package himself, but it was believed that he worked for MI6 and might become a conduit through which the British could channel money to Mugabe.

The cable noted that shortly afterwards, they were informed, probably by Bredenkamp, that "key members of the private sector here could prevent a political and economic train wreck."

The businessman claimed that Britain had £36 million available for land reform, but would probably not be able to act as an honest broker in securing a settlement. He appealed to the US to find someone to play this role, so that businessmen could set up negotiations between the MDC and Mugabe. The US embassy interpreted the businessman's discussion with them as a ruling party back-channel approach and believed it was probably genuine because elements of ZANU-PF had become convinced that Mugabe had become a liability.

In November 2000, the embassy reported a discussion with Tsvangirai, in which he stressed the need for a unity government with ZANU-PF remaining in power but with some MDC ministers brought into office. Mugabe would be removed by a convergence of ZANU-PF, the military and regional leaders such as President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. Tsvangirai agreed that mass action would be dangerous and said that if it became necessary the MDC would organise a general strike for the Christmas holiday when schools and most businesses were closed anyway. In the event, the MDC cancelled such plans.

In July 2007, US Ambassador Christopher Dell made his final report before leaving the country. According to the cable, the task for American foreign policy was to "stay the course and prepare for change. Our policy is working and it's helping to drive change here. What is required is simply the grit, determination and focus to see this through. Then, when the changes finally come we must be ready to move quickly to help consolidate the new dispensation."

Dell paid tribute to Mugabe's tactical ability. "To give the devil his due, he is a brilliant tactician and has long thrived on his ability to abruptly change the rules of the game, radicalise the political dynamic and force everyone else to react to his agenda."

He traced Mugabe's increasingly desperate measures to stay in power and the damage they had done to the economy, predicting that the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar as a unit of trade would ultimately bring about his downfall. The cable is headed "The end is nigh".

Events were to prove that Mugabe had not, as Dell supposed, entirely run out of options. A cable from 2008 describes how the ZANU-PF regime elite were looting the Marange diamond fields. Andrew Cranswick, the CEO of the British-based African Consolidated Resources, told the US embassy that leading figures in the regime were engaged in illegal diamond trading. First Lady Grace Mugabe is currently suing a number of media outlets for suggesting that she was involved in this activity. According to geological study carried out for de Beers, the field has a carats per hundred tons ratio (CPHT) of 1,000 compared to Rio Tinto's Zimbabwean diamond mine at Murowa, which has a CPHT ratio of only 120. Cranswick's motive for informing the American embassy was that the government had taken away his company's concession in Marange, but a specialist sent to this restricted area found his report generally credible.

Another cable the following year reported that the army had moved into the Marange diamond field, taking control of the trade, and that Mugabe was planning to visit Russia in an attempt to get hold of foreign exchange in a diamond deal. By then, a power-sharing agreement had been signed along the lines envisaged

earlier by the US ambassador. The military remained powerful, and by October 2009 Tsvangirai was asking the Americans to contribute to a trust fund that would "buy off securocrats and move them into retirement". Tsvangirai said that he would approach the Germans and the British with the same request.

In another cable, Tsvangirai appealed for the easing of Western sanctions against Zimbabwe. That view was echoed by a member of ZANU-PF, who told the embassy that sanctions only provided a convenient "whipping boy" for Mugabe. ZANU-PF, he said, was like "a troop of baboons incessantly fighting among themselves, but coming together to face an external threat."

The cables demonstrate how a form of neo-colonial domination continued to exist in this nominally independent country. Events did not always go according to Washington's plans, but the power-sharing agreement that is now in place is essentially in line with the ideas mapped out by successive US ambassadors over the last decade. Tsvangirai emerges from the cables as a creature of Washington, who is useful to US interests because his background as a trade union leader provided the means of averting an independent political movement among urban workers that might provide leadership to the rural poor.

Washington was prepared to offer Mugabe a peaceful retirement, since it was better to let the old liberation fighter leave the scene with honour than to antagonise the mass of population by making too public a demonstration of US power. Tsvangirai was entirely in agreement and was prepared to extend the same consideration to other members of the elite.

Mugabe has used every possibility open to him to remain in power, but he is still ultimately subordinate to the dictates of the world market and international financial institutions that were designed with American interests in mind. Competition for Zimbabwe's natural resources has given him very limited room for manoeuvre—by turning to Libya, Russia and China. But hyperinflation brought his regime to the point where he has had to make a deal with Washington.

The analysis that the *World Socialist Web Site* has made of Zimbabwe over the past decade has been entirely vindicated. We refused to back the MDC opposition and have consistently pointed to its reliance on Washington. Nor did we endorse the nationalist agenda of ZANU-PF or identify it with socialism, insisting that only an independent working class movement based on an international socialist programme can defend the interests of the mass of the population throughout Southern Africa.



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