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Who is interested in Zimbabwe?

The recent UK media coverage of outbreaks of cholera, hunger and political unrest in Zimbabwe has been breathless and relentless.

But Zimbabwe's failing health should not come as a surprise. 6 years of UK & US economic sanctions weren't supposed to make it easy for the sanctioned population. They were designed to make life intolerable. Sanctions don't care about human rights, like access to food or clean water. Under sanctions 19% of Iraqi kids became malnourished. We rode to the rescue. Within four years of our occupation, 28% of kids had become malnourished.

So is it a failure of our imagination that we don't equate sanctions with the slow strangulation of an economy? Let's harbour no illusions. Sanctions are a license to kill.

Aha you say. Robert Mugabe deserves it. He is uniquely abhorrent. He is a liar and a murdering thief. Wasn't it he who rigged elections and authorised human rights abuses? Didn't his administration stop people from voting by wiping them off the electoral role? Didn't his media cronies miscall an election? Didn't his administration fly people abroad to be tortured? Didn't his administration get a 1200 page Act voted through unread by frightened members of congress? Didn't his army invade and terrorise a nation forcing millions to flee in terror? Didn't his administration hypnotise 70% of the population into thinking Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11. Hang on - have I got my Presidents mixed up here?

No, Mugabe is uniquely abhorrent. Of that we can be certain. We know this because President Bush told us Zimbabwe is one of the six "outposts of tyranny".

But have we forgotten what it was he did that provoked our sanctions?

Was it human rights abuses?

Let's rewind and find out...

Should we rewind to 1893 when British troops invaded, grabbed 10,000 square miles of fertile land and confiscated the cattle from the native inhabitants of this part of the world?

Should we rewind to 1905 by which time forced labour was assured and half the local population had been herded onto reservations?

Should we rewind to 1930 when the white settlers passed the Land Apportionment Act forbidding blacks from owning land outside these arid reservations?



Should we hark back to Ian Smith who imposed apartheid and racial discrimination from 1964?

No. None of these human rights abuses provoked sanctions.

The thing that provoked sanctions was a far more ghastly sight - that of Mugabe fast tracking land redistribution to dispossessed blacks. 134,000 black farmers (including opposition MDC members) received allocations of good quality land between 2000-2.

4500 white farm owners still controlled 70% of the productive land, but this accelerated land redistribution was the trigger. Absentee landlords, some of whom were sitting on the benches of the houses of parliament, demanded action. The response was predictable - sanctions resulting in the near collapse of Zimbabwe.

So, before we point our accusatory finger rigid, consider this...

It took a black liberation movement with Mugabe at the front to stand down Ian Smith and his white supremists and bring about independence in 1980.

It took Mugabe to start addressing the gross inequality between blacks and whites in Zimbabwe.

It took Mugabe starting to honor a manifesto pledge in earnest to expose the persistent interests of Empire in Africa.

These interests aren't to do with the welfare of black people. They are to do with control of Africa's breadbasket.

Our interest is the past, present and future exploitation of that breadbasket.

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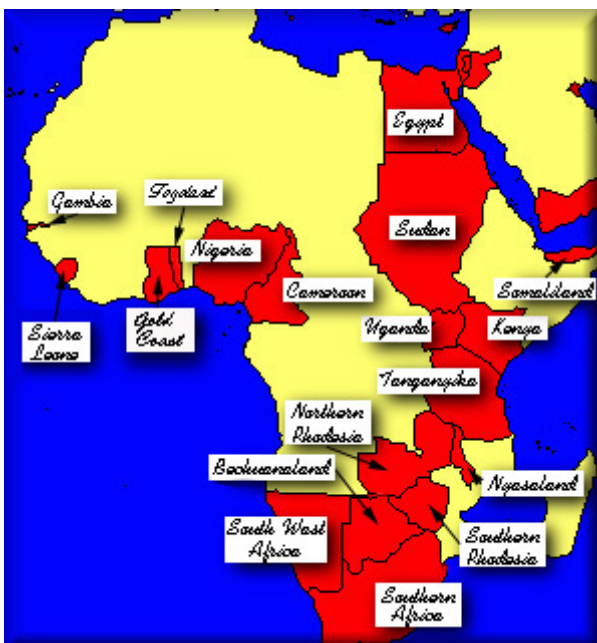
Full text of Mugabe's speech at UN in New York, 2007

Essential Reading:

Strange liberators - Militarism, Mayhem and the Pursuit of Profit by Gregory Elich

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