

# British Guardian backs CIA dirty tricks in Zimbabwe

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In its most outspoken statement yet on Zimbabwe, the Bush administration has made it clear that it is taking steps to bring down President Robert Mugabe's government. US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Walter Kansteiner announced the shift in US policy in a statement on August 21. He told reporters that Mugabe's government was "illegitimate and irrational."

"We do not see President Mugabe as the democratically legitimate leader of the country," Kansteiner said. "The political status quo is unacceptable because the elections were fraudulent."

The US was putting pressure on neighbouring states, Kansteiner said, to "correct that situation." At the same time it was providing Zimbabwean opposition forces—such as trade unions, pro-democracy groups and human rights organisations—with advice, training and finance to overthrow Mugabe and establish a new regime.

The US announcement that it intends to bring Mugabe down won enthusiastic support from Britain's *Guardian*, a newspaper that prides itself on representing liberal opinion in Britain.

In an editorial on August 24 entitled "Zimbabwe endgame" the *Guardian* supported the US initiative—which it described with utmost cynicism as tending "toward the threatening end of the diplomatic spectrum."

The *Guardian's* embrace of CIA dirty tricks and military aggression cuts through the human rights rhetoric with which it has sought to garb its own campaign against the Mugabe regime—and not for the first time. Political assassination, invasions and coups d'état have been the hallmarks of US foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century. Once the *Guardian* would have registered its own meek protest.

This was not the case when former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown by a US-backed uprising, with the fulsome support of the *Guardian's* editorial staff, and it is clearly not to be the case with regard to Mugabe. The *Guardian's* only stipulation is that whatever dirty deeds are planned must be kept "private" since a "grandstanding approach" would have a bad effect on international relations.

As far as the *Guardian* is concerned, it is perfectly acceptable to overthrow a foreign government when it is in Britain's interests to do so—and provided it can be done without arousing mass opposition either in Britain or in the region concerned.

Privacy is everything in British ruling circles. There is no sin greater than that of being found out, whether it is a case of

fornicating with the maid or assassinating a foreign ruler. Thus a readiness to turn a blind eye to the truth and to employ every form of political hypocrisy has become the essential requirement of the liberal apologists for imperialism.

Recently, for example, the *Guardian's* editorial columns have voiced growing concerns about US plans to invade Iraq and whether this can be morally and politically justified. In reality, the paper has promoted this debate because it reflects divisions within Britain's political elite about how the UK's interests may best be served.

War in the Middle East threatens to disrupt international relations and destabilise friendly regimes; therefore the *Guardian* gives vent to its liberal concerns. But when it considers a hostile action by the US to be in Britain's interests, then to hell with diplomatic and legal niceties.

The *Guardian's* response is essentially that which Washington was seeking to elicit. Kansteiner's statement came as Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair found himself under increasing pressure from his critics over both Zimbabwe and Iraq. Members of Blair's own government have criticised his support for US war plans in the Middle East and the Conservative opposition has attacked his government's failure to defend British interests in Zimbabwe.

It seems likely that the US is offering the UK assistance to remove Mugabe in a quid-pro-quo arrangement. If the US uses its longer military and secret service reach to bring down Mugabe, Blair will be able to show his critics that his slavish adherence to US foreign policy has been rewarded. But more important in the long term than any back scratching for Blair, Kansteiner's announcement is a clear signal that the US is planning an aggressive assertion of power in Southern Africa.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously pointed out the *Guardian's* role as an apologist for British colonial ambitions in Zimbabwe. [ See "Britain's *Guardian*: An apologia for imperialist intervention in Zimbabwe" [http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/apr2002/zimb-a03\\_prn.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/apr2002/zimb-a03_prn.shtml) ]

In an editorial on March 14, the *Guardian* dismissed Britain's colonial history in Zimbabwe as "barely relevant." More than a century in which British colonialists drove Zimbabwean farmers from their land and looted the country's mineral wealth was dismissed in this phrase. "Today is the beginning of history," the editorial declared, referring to the Zimbabwean elections.

These editorials amount to a concerted campaign to manipulate

public opinion to accept deep-going political changes that will involve a new colonial division of the world and the curtailment of democratic rights.

This latest editorial on Zimbabwe confirms the analysis we made then. Now, having wiped the slate clean of the previous crimes that British governments and British owned companies carried out in Zimbabwe, the journal is preparing its readers to accept a new crime.

The *Guardian's* editorial line reflects a shift in the attitude of sections of the British political elite who were forced to give up their empire after the Second World War and have never reconciled themselves to it. They see the reckless war-mongering of the US administration as an opportunity for the UK to regain some of the power it lost then by rebuilding its empire.

A leading spokesman for this trend is Robert Cooper, who unusually for a civil servant has been allowed by his employers at the Foreign Office to publish his views on the world situation, often in the pages of the *Guardian*.

Cooper's call for a new British empire is dressed up as a humanitarian project. Kansteiner himself employed this type of humanitarian justification for an intervention in Zimbabwe advocated within the pages of the *Guardian*, by blaming Mugabe's land redistribution programme for the famine that is afflicting Southern Africa. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made the same point in an article in the *Guardian's* Sunday sister paper, the *Observer*, on August 25.

"In the name of his 'land reform' policies Mugabe is reducing his people to starvation," Straw wrote. He claimed that Zimbabwe was "not a colonial victim," but "a self-made pariah."

While Mugabe's land reform programme has certainly disrupted production, it is by no means the primary cause of the country's problems. Contrary to Straw's claims, Zimbabwe is a victim of colonial oppression and its present economic condition can be traced directly to its status as a former colony.

On independence in 1980 Zimbabwe inherited all the debts of the former colonial regime. Under the direction of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Zimbabwe incurred more debt. In 1998 it owed US\$5 billion and was paying more than a third of its export earnings on debt repayments. The debt now stands at US\$10 billion—more than its annual gross domestic product.

In a pattern typical of colonial exploitation, Zimbabwe's economy is dependent on the export of primary products such as tobacco and minerals, the prices of which have all collapsed in recent years—resulting in a severe economic decline. Since 1996 the value of its agricultural exports has fallen by 30 percent and of minerals by 24 percent.

The structural adjustment programme designed by the World Bank and IMF worsened the economic decline in Zimbabwe as in many other former colonial countries. Between 1990 and 1996 Zimbabwe's gross domestic product fell by one fifth, while its debt rose by 55 percent.

Mugabe's programme of land redistribution is clearly not the main factor causing famine. Drought is a frequent threat in this region and the famine has also hit Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia. What has made the situation so serious this

time is that none of the countries involved have adequate grain reserves or sufficient foreign currency to buy grain on the world market because of their economic decline.

Western governments have withheld food aid from Zimbabwe and the other countries in the region, using the famine as a means to tighten their control of Southern Africa. The proposed US/UK action to change the regime in Zimbabwe would be a further escalation of this attempt to re-establish colonial power in Africa.

Insofar as Mugabe bears responsibility for the present situation, it is because his bourgeois nationalist programme allowed the same pattern of colonial exploitation to continue after so-called independence. Until 1999 he was prepared to follow all directives from the IMF and World Bank and only ceased to do so when they threatened his own hold on power. Even now that he has fallen out with them, he has no realistic alternative to offer.

Mugabe remains a defender of the profit system just as he was 20 years ago when he came to power. The corruption and despotism of his regime are not new phenomena. The main difference today is that the transnational companies and Western governments want to dispense with his services.

The kind of opposition to Mugabe that Jack Straw, Walter Kansteiner and the *Guardian* express has nothing in common with the interests of the mass of the Zimbabwean population. Their attacks on Mugabe reflect the interests of the mining companies and big business and the international financial institutions, not those of the small farmers, the agricultural workers and the urban masses. In comparison to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe maintained a higher standard of living. The pro-IMF policies of the UK and US governments would go much further than Mugabe in wiping out all the modest social gains made by the Zimbabwean people.

At no point does the *Guardian* so much as question the qualifications of the US government to introduce a democratic regime in Zimbabwe. It did not even raise the fact that Kansteiner represents a government that itself came to power through election fraud.

The history the *Guardian* wishes to wipe out is not just of the last century, but of even the most immediate past. The paper is hoping to inculcate an attitude of forgetfulness that is conducive to political passivity and disorientation, in which its readers will respond uncritically to the most immediate propaganda offensive without the benefit of reflection or memory.

This latest *Guardian* editorial on Zimbabwe is a cynical attempt to justify a new colonial offensive. If the US and UK governments bring Mugabe down, they will install an even more pliant regime and oversee a further assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the Zimbabwean population.



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