

Are Britain and the United States moving against Zimbabwe?

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Amid speculation about the possible actions of the Britain and the United States, Zimbabwe's petrol pumps have run dry, deepening the crisis already caused by the famine and threatening emergency food deliveries.

The country's oil supplies ran out after the fuel deal it struck with Libya broke down. Libyan sources were keen to play down the significance of the interruption to fuel supplies. The country's ambassador to Zimbabwe, Mohammad Azzabi, attempted to reassure the local press that "As with any commercial transactions the world over, hiccups are bound to occur here and there, but that does not constitute a collapse of our commitment to Zimbabwe."

But the Zimbabwean *Sunday Mirror* reports that a high-level British delegation had flown to Libya to pressure Muammar Gaddafi into cutting off Zimbabwe's oil supply. The paper quotes "a highly placed source based in Tripoli" who said that the British government had used a carrot and stick approach. The carrot that Britain had dangled in front of the Libyan leader was that the UK would help to free the man found guilty of bombing Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988.

It has also been asserted that Libya pulled out of the oil deal because the Zimbabwean National Oil Company, NOCZIM, had not paid them but had attempted to buy oil from Kuwait on a cash basis. Libya's state-owned oil company TAMOIL has been supplying 70 percent of Zimbabwe's oil since last year.

However, the suggestion that Britain is behind Libya's decision to halt oil supplies to Zimbabwe gains some credibility from events in Washington, where oppositionists recently met with US officials. Mark Bellamy, deputy assistant of state for African affairs, was reported as saying, "We may have to be prepared to take some very intrusive, interventionist measures to ensure aid delivery to Zimbabwe.... The dilemmas in the next six months may bring us face to face with Zimbabwe's sovereignty."

Bellamy made these remarks at a meeting at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington at which Zimbabwean opposition leaders from Matabeleland reported

that Mugabe's Zanu-PF government was preventing food aid reaching opponents of the regime.

Johnson Mnkandla, a magistrate from Bulawayo in Matabeleland, told the meeting, "Food has been politicised. [Tribal] chiefs have been politicised. The distribution structure that exists does not benefit the Zimbabwe people, only supporters of the government. In some ways we would be better off without international food aid at all."

The US government, Bellamy said, was "considering all approaches" to the situation in Zimbabwe. "It's safe to predict that the situation is going to get a lot worse and that there will be no change unless outside forces prove to be the catalyst."

Drawing a direct comparison with Iraq, Bellamy said that Mugabe was "holding his people hostage the way Saddam Hussein is holding his people hostage."

These were not unconsidered remarks, as Bellamy repeated the substance of them in a telephone interview with the South African *Mail and Guardian*.

His remarks followed comments from State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, who said, "Politicisation of food distribution by the ruling party in the face of an urgent need and real human suffering is very cynical. It's a very self-serving response to a major humanitarian catastrophe."

He added, "We need to look very carefully at this situation to make sure that we can monitor the use of food and make sure it goes to the neediest people without any political consideration. So we're looking at that now."

In August this year the Bush administration made clear that it was taking steps to bring down Mugabe's regime. US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Walter Kansteiner declared that the Mugabe government was "illegitimate and irrational." The US, he said, did not see "President Mugabe as the democratically legitimate leader of the country."

Kansteiner said that the US was putting pressure on neighbouring countries to "correct that situation," and was providing oppositionists with finance and training.

The Washington meeting bears out Kansteiner's words.

While technically an independent body, the CSIS is led by former US Deputy Defense Secretary John J. Hamre and is close to government.

At the time of Kansteiner's remarks the *World Socialist Web Site* suggested that the Bush administration was offering the Blair Labour government in Britain a quid pro quo deal for its support over Iraq. These latest developments tend to confirm this supposition and suggest that the UK and US are now working in close conjunction to effect regime change in Zimbabwe.

Entitled *Famine and Political Violence in Matabeleland*, the Washington meeting was chaired by former secretary to the British High Commission in Zimbabwe David Troup, and was organised by the Zimbabwe Democracy Trust (ZDT), which includes such leading British political figures such as former Conservative foreign secretary Douglas Hurd.

The ZDT is a supporter of the Movement for Democratic Change, the Zimbabwean opposition movement led by Morgan Tsvangirai, which is calling for IMF policies to be implemented in Zimbabwe and the privatisation of all state-owned companies.

Matabeleland, where Mugabe's government carried out brutal massacres in the 1980s, is a centre of MDC support. Having failed to topple Mugabe in an election, the MDC and its backers are now pursuing an alternative approach.

Aid experts have suggested that the Bush administration may be considering airdrops of food into Matabeleland. The US and UK used this method to supply the Kurds in northern Iraq where they established a no-fly zone for Iraqi aircraft as a pretext for regular British and American bombing raids. The exact nature of the intrusive intervention that the US and UK have in mind cannot be known in advance, but following the recent CIA missile attack in Yemen nothing is ruled out.

Whatever form the intervention takes it will represent an implicit threat to the whole of Africa. The increasingly belligerent attitude of the Bush administration towards Zimbabwe follows its attempts to establish much greater control over the oil reserves of West Africa. It is reported that the US is planning to establish a military base on Sao Tome and Principe that would enable it to police the offshore oilfields developing in that region.

Britain is being forced to play a subsidiary role, although it was the colonial ruler of much of Africa. But it has established a foothold on the West Coast in Sierra Leone and is developing close ties on the eastern side of Africa.

At a time when overseas aid to Africa is declining, the UK is planning to increase the amount of money it gives. Most of this money will go to Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana and Rwanda. Rather than being channelled through charities,

which have a long record of working in these countries, it will go directly to governments.

One of the most notable projects backed recently by Britain has been Tanzania's air traffic system, which is far beyond the civilian needs of this impoverished country.

The conclusion that Africa faces a new wave of imperial expansion is inescapable. It is a threat that Mugabe and other African nationalist leaders are incapable of averting. Mugabe is concerned only to defend his own position of power and privilege. His political thuggery and manipulation of food aid have only served to provide a pretext for intervention.

Representing the interests of a narrow bourgeois elite who used the war against colonial rule for their own ends, Mugabe is incapable of uniting the oppressed masses of Zimbabwe or the rest of Africa against this new colonial enterprise. Instead he has created conditions of such political confusion that US or British intervention will be welcomed by many who hope it will mean salvation from hunger and oppression.

Such an intervention will in reality do nothing to help the millions now starving from a famine in Africa. Famine afflicts Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia. The US and UK are blaming Mugabe for the situation in Zimbabwe, but they have done nothing to alleviate the hunger in these other countries where Mugabe cannot be held responsible. Instead the imperialist powers are using starvation for which they are largely responsible as a means of tightening their grip on Africa. The present famines are the direct result of International Monetary Fund policies that have left African governments unable to buy food that is plentiful supply outside the regions immediately hit by drought and wars, which have been fomented by the West.



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