

Southern Africa Slaps British on Zimbabwe

by Dean Andromidas

The summit meeting of the heads of state of the 14-nation Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) on Aug. 7-8 gave strong support to Zimbabwe and its President, Robert Mugabe, delivering a slap in the face to the Anglo-Americans. The move occurs following a high-intensity campaign, particularly in the last six months, to overthrow the government of President Mugabe. The immediate conflict has been over the Zimbabwe government's determination to redistribute land to landless Zimbabweans. The closing statement of the conference demanded that Great Britain "honor" its commitment to finance the purchase of commercial farms.

The move flies in the face of an Anglo-American effort to mobilize the region's leaders to support the overthrow of Mugabe; in fact, not one African leader has denounced Mugabe. In his speech before the summit, the chairman of the SADC, Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano, attacked the West for putting a "blanket" over the history of the freedom struggle. He said that the SADC cannot condone the idea that those who fought Ian Smith, the former Rhodesian Prime Minister, could now be challenged and even called dictators. He said, "We are democrats; we want democracy to work according to the will of the people." The statement rang true for many of the leaders present, including the Presidents of Angola, South Africa, Namibia, as well as Zimbabwe, all of whom had led freedom movements against their former colonial masters.

Former South African President Nelson Mandela, whom the Western press is attempting to portray as anti-Mugabe, in his speech praised the Zimbabwe President, along with the late Joshua Nkomo, as examples of African leaders who had reconciled their differences for the good of the nation.

Britain Told To Honor Its Obligations

The conference issued an official statement supporting Zimbabwe's land policy, and calling on Britain to "honor its obligations" and pay for the purchase of the farms. It further said, "We are disappointed by the partisan and biased manner in which a sector of the international media have misrepresented the land policy of the government of Zimbabwe," and that the policy "seeks to effect a just and equitable redistribution of land in a situation where 1% of the population owns over 70% of the best arable land. We reiterate our acceptance of the urgent need to effect land redistribution in Zimbabwe to address land hunger and poverty affecting millions of black

Zimbabweans. . . . We welcome the assurance given by the President of Zimbabwe that the land reform program would be handled peacefully, and within the laws of the government of Zimbabwe."

The statement also endorsed the recent parliamentary election results in Zimbabwe, describing them as having been held "in a transparent, peaceful, free, and fair environment, in accordance with our shared democratic principles and values."

In Zimbabwe, 4,500 farmers and foreign corporations own 70% of the country's best farmland, leaving the vast majority of the country's 10 million citizens either landless or working small plots of land. Support for Mugabe also stems from the fact that many of the other countries in the region, particularly fellow SADC members Namibia and South Africa, suffer similar, although not as extreme, land problems.

The statement also denounced the Zimbabwe Democracy Act, passed by the U.S. Senate in June. "We note, with concern, that the bill also aims to subvert Zimbabwe's economic foundation by prohibiting assistance of debt relief. . . . This punitive piece of legislation is counterproductive and unjust since it will have far-reaching negative implications for the economic development and evolution of democratic institutions in Zimbabwe, in particular, and the region in general."

The Zimbabwe Democracy Act was sponsored by U.S. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), a strong backer of George W. Bush, and a strong supporter of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army's genocidal war against Sudan (see *EIR*, July 7, 2000). The bill calls for the suspension of bilateral assistance to the Zimbabwe government, including debt relief, and instructs U.S. directors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to vote against the extension of credit to Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe government has mobilized internationally against the bill.

The summit also designated South African President Thabo Mbeki and President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi to lobby Britain to release resources to fund the land reform program, as it had promised.

The statement has apparently upset the London-based Zimbabwe Democracy Trust (ZDT), which ran a report headlined "Southern African Leaders Support Mugabe and, Like Him, Blame Everybody Else." The ZDT is the command center for the overthrow of the Mugabe government (see "London Headquarters Established To Overthrow Zimbabwe's Mugabe," *EIR*, May 12, 2000). Among its patrons are Lord Peter Carrington, business partner of Henry Kissinger, and Chester Crocker, who was a State Department official in the Reagan-Bush Administrations in the 1980s and 1990s.

A regional free-trade protocol aimed at promoting intra-regional trade and integration was also signed at the conference. According to President Chissano, it will go into effect on Sept. 1.

The final communiqué also identified AIDS as a major security issue: "The summit expressed its concern that the

HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa continues to be a major developmental and security issue, with more than 10% of the adult population infected in some countries.”

During the conference, SADC Acting Executive Secretary Prega Ramsamy told the summit, “We now appeal for the cancellation of multilateral debt, as in most countries this is the source of problems preventing government from responding to urgent social needs, particularly in health and education.”

Land Redistribution Widens

The SADC support comes right at the time that Zimbabwe has begun the land resettlement process, and also announced the expansion of the program. More than 200 of the first 804 farms designated for redistribution are now in the process of having their land redistributed to the landless. At the same time, the Zimbabwe government intends to increase the number of farms designated for redistribution from 804 to 3,000 by the end of the year.

On July 31, President Mugabe’s official spokesman George Charamba told the state-owned *Herald* daily, that the government’s National Land Acquisition and Redistribution Committee has agreed “to expedite the process of identifying more farms” for settlement.

Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo is quoted: “The numbers are not important. What is important is that we are accelerating the resettlement program and that we are involving all stakeholders in the process. . . . The resettlement process technically has started at a very fast pace. This coming week we are going to see quite a lot of persons being settled in all provinces.” The military will be employed to assist in the process of redistribution. The government wants to resettle up to 500,000 people before the rainy season begins in October.

The expansion of the program follows efforts by the Anglo-American-backed opposition to escalate its attack on the government. This was signalled by the formation of yet another British-based front, the so-called Zimbabwe Farmers Holiday Trust Fund, based in Great Britain (see *EIR*, July 28, 2000). No sooner was this group organized, than commercial farmers threatened a national strike, implying that the country would be faced with starvation. The strike was supported by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. But, both actions fizzled out. The commercial farmers, who mostly grow tobacco or horticultural products for export, account for less than 20% of the country’s food supply — thus the starvation threat was somewhat hollow. The strike was cut back from four days to one, because its only effect would have been to hurt the same business community that supports the opposition.

Nonetheless, pressure on the government continues, particularly by the IMF and World Bank, which have cut all aid to the country since 1998. In early August, the government devalued its currency by 25%, in the face of an inflation rate of 50%.

The Goble Project

Nasty Geopolitics in the Transcaucasus

by Hovhannes Galajian

This is adapted from an article published in the Armenian weekly Iravunk.

While Armenian peasants were busy trying to sell this year’s bumper harvest of apricots, and urban residents were wrapped up in the conclusion of the investigation into the assassinations in Parliament last Oct. 27, radio station “Azatutun” broke in with some troubling news. It seems that geopolitician Paul Goble, who is associated with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, has not forgotten about Armenia’s southern district of Megri, and is still thinking about new projects for exchanges of territory among Transcaucasus countries.

Not long ago, Goble admitted that the first version of what became known as the “Goble plan,” offered in 1992, did not take regional circumstances into account. The new version suggests that Megri be exchanged for the Sadarak region of Nakhichevan, a district of Azerbaijan that borders on Turkey, but is separated from the rest of Azerbaijan. Nakhichevan would then be contiguous with the rest of Azerbaijan, but not with Turkey, while Armenia would still have a land border with Iran. The disputed Nagorno-Karabakh district would either become a separate country, or join with Armenia. It would seem that the new version is designed with an eye toward the restoration of relations between the United States and Iran.

Like previous such prescriptions, the new Goble plan is far from being in the national interests of Armenia. Since the armistice of 1994, after the Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Karabakh, Armenia has had its pre-existing 150 km border with Iran, while the land connection of Karabakh with Armenia was secure, and optimal from the standpoint of defense, and Nakhichevan remained divided from Azerbaijan by a rather wide barrier. If the new Goble project were implemented, the Armenia-Iran frontier would shrink to 25-30 km, Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan would be contiguous, and the Lachin Corridor between Karabakh and Armenia would be reduced to only a few kilometers, insufficient for security. It would take only a few hours to cut Lachin, as well as Sadarak, if Turkish Army participation is presumed. Nor would Azerbaijan obtain an advantageous situa-