

Opinion & Analysis

West must intervene to liberate Zimbabwe

WE HAVE all been shocked and horrified by the recent goings on in Zimbabwe. In his desperation to cling to power at all costs during the "election" process of the past few months, its despot Robert Mugabe has starved, beaten and killed Zimbabwean citizens for the affront of not supporting him. The run-off "election" alone saw a further hundred people murdered, thousands beaten and tens of thousands evicted from their homes.

And the violence continues, although Mugabe has now "won" an umpteenth term as president. He is clearly bent on punishing and destroying anyone with the temerity to vote or speak against him. Of course, the man has form.

Within a few years of coming to power in a popular vote, Mugabe, a Shona, sent in his personal, North Korean-trained military hit squad to perpetrate widespread massacres in Matabeleland, stronghold of his political opponent Joshua Nkomo. Some 20,000 died from the rival Ndebele tribe (which, descended from proud Zulus, historically regarded Shonas solely as a source of slaves, women and cattle).

It was in the 2000 election, which Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC party lost by only four seats, that Mugabe first learnt, to his shock, he was no longer adored by his people. In response, he began violently expropriating white-owned farms to reward his cronies, and as a direct result precipitated the economy's disastrous collapse.

For the 2002 presidential election, he deployed widespread violence and vote rigging against the opposition and achieved a "seriously flawed" if comfortable victory as his reward.

Similar tactics for the 2005 parliamentary election ensured a substantial triumph over the MDC by 37 seats.

His "Drive out the Filth" campaign followed where, by bulldozing the shanty towns and markets of the poorest people in

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Harare and other towns, he softened up urban opposition by rendering a million mortals homeless and without income.

Throughout all this criminal mayhem, there have been continual calls from the international community for Mugabe to moderate his behaviour and observe democratic norms. Travel bans and similar piffling sanctions have been applied, all to no effect. And in the past few weeks, he has happily journeyed, unmolested, to Rome and Egypt for conferences.

We are supposed to be encouraged because the UN Security Council for the first time "discussed" the latest "election" (even if China and Russia exercised vetoes), Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu condemned it, and even the 53-strong African Union (31 of them non-democracies) mumbled some vaguely critical words. Politicians, media and NGOs in the West continue to bleat about the need for sanctions, talks, negotiations and compromises.



TONY ALLWRIGHT

OPINION

Words and sanctions have failed – military action is needed to end Mugabe's regime

Words and mild slaps have been going on for years. If they were ever going to work, they would have done so by now, at least to some extent, but they haven't. Mugabe has made it abundantly clear that he will never leave office, that "only God" can remove him. And this is wise because his lifestyle if not life will be in immediate danger the moment he steps down. In 2002, Ian Smith, the country's last white ruler, laid down a challenge: "If Mugabe and I walk together into a black township, only one of us will come out alive. I'm ready to put that to the test right now. He's not."

Only direct military action – not words, not sanctions – will remove him and only the West has the military capability. It won't be difficult (though many will doubtless scream "illegal war").

In 2000, British prime minister Tony Blair deployed a crack task force to Sierra Leone, which in just six weeks defeated rebel forces who had been waging civil war for nine years. A few months later, he sent in a handful of SAS and SBS commandos who rescued a dozen military hostages from a different group of rebels deep in Sierra Leone. These decisive actions were instrumental in turning the country into one of the African Union's 22 democracies.

At the first sight of professional soldiery, you can be sure the Zimbabwe army and police, who have no idea how to deal with anyone who isn't an unarmed civilian, will discard their weapons and uniforms and simply melt away, much as Gen Mengistu's powerful, 400,000-strong army in Ethiopia did when confronted with rag-tag opposition in 1991.

In the name of enforcing the election results and without anyone's permission, the objective should be to capture or kill Mugabe and his senior colleagues. Survivors should be delivered for trial for crimes against humanity at the international criminal court in the Hague.

Having handed the administration to Morgan Tsvangirai, whom no one but the Mugabe clique doubts won last March's election, the invading force should then rapidly withdraw. This would allow the international community to provide the support it has already promised to help rebuild the shattered country.

In Mugabe's Zimbabwe, words kill, because by achieving nothing, they permit and encourage him to continue his murderous rampage. Thus those who forswear military action should just remain silent, for they are, however, unwittingly on the side of Robert Mugabe. I am not.