

Zimbabwe Crisis: A Credibility Handicap for China's Africa Politics

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Abstract

Since the Cold War ended in 1991, Africa-China relationship has been in the ascendant. Africans, believing that China can inspire and drive fresh hopes for their development, have been wittingly and unwittingly encouraging her deepening presence on their continent. They particularly believe that a closer relationship with China can play a very big role in their efforts to scale down their dependence on their traditional aid givers and development partners such as the US and the former colonial powers. In short, what Africa expects from China are assurances that she can play the role of benefactor and protector which the US and other Western countries have been playing for their clients on the continent. This expectation, however, is being jeopardised by China's inability to give Mugabe sufficient protection against his critics and help him recall his country from the politico-economic crisis that has dragged it to the brink of failed statehood. This paper looked at this debacle of unfulfilled expectation, concluding that it could undermine China's image in China.

Introduction

The last one decade has not been a happy ten years for Zimbabweans who have had to grapple with the ogres of hunger, diseases, run-away inflation, and uncertainty of body-politic. The crisis which has made their country a pathetic headline in international media broadcasts is not letting up; neither are the efforts being made by Mugabe's friends such as China having the desired impacts. The brooding visage of this crisis have triggered speculations about the country becoming a failed state. For example, in 2008, the U.S Ambassador to Zimbabwe, James McGee, lamented that the country was "rapidly deteriorating into failed-state status."¹ Of course, these speculations are not unreasonably alarmist because she has already manifested all the known symptoms of state bankruptcy. Inflation has gone out of control; there is anomie, with the people being so unsure what to do with the remainder of their life; famine is endemic, HIV/AIDS is having a field day; and political leadership is atomized, with the members of the coalition government pulling in different directions.

This crisis started in the early 1990s when Mugabe began losing control over both the political and economic directions of his country. Certain factors wrong footed him, severely damaging his credentials as a liberation hero. Zimbabwe is a country which, a few years ago, could boast a credible capacity to glut the whole of southern Africa with food. Before the crisis, she was famously referred to as the "bread basket" of southern Africa. However, now about 1.6 million of her citizens "will be food insecure between January and March 2013."² The crisis has shrivelled the purchasing power of the national currency, the Zimbabwe dollar. The country boasts the second-highest inflation rate in history. In mid-November 2008, her monthly inflation rate reached 79,600,000,000 % (seventy-nine billion, six hundred million percent).³ The following year, 2009, a loaf of leavened bread ran away with 300(three hundred) billion

Zimbabwe dollars.⁴ By creating a hostile domestic environment in which life has become ‘solitary, nasty, brutish, and short’, the crisis has also caused serious demographic hemorrhage by generating about one million internally displaced persons, and causing a forcible cross-border flight of several millions of the citizenry. (many more are straining at the leash to flee too). In South Africa alone, there are about 3 million Zimbabwean refugees.⁵ In fact, the crisis has pulped this country into a spectacle of humanitarian disaster.

The origin of the crisis has been disputed. But it should be ascribed to any, or a combination, of these three factors: President Robert Mugabe’s refusal to retire from power and politics, his bungled land reform programme, and the structural adjustment programme he was compelled to implement by the International Monetary Organisation in the 1990s. The West, whose involvement in the crisis has helped to exacerbate it, ascribe the crisis to the first two of the above factors. They accuse Mugabe of both refusing to give up power and injecting indecency and publicity gimmickry into his land reform programme. Essentially, they accuse him of playing carrot-and-stick politics with the land reform by using it as an alibi for tenancy extension in power. In contrast, those who empathise with Mugabe believe that the crisis was created by the West to sabotage his land reform. They see the crisis as a neocolonialist effort to torpedo Africa’s renaissance. One such empathiser, Kenneth Kaunda, former president of Zambia, said that

Leaders in the West say Robert Mugabe is a demon, that he has destroyed Zimbabwe, and he must be got rid of. This demonising is made by people who may not understand what Robert Mugabe and his fellow freedom fighters have gone through...Of course, there are some things which President Mugabe and his colleagues have done which I totally disagree with. For example, the police beating of Morgan Tsvangirai... On the other hand, given their experience, I can understand the fury that goes through President Mugabe and his colleagues.⁶

The IMF's involvement is her agreement to give Zimbabwe the loan she requested on condition that she would reduce her fiscal deficit, reduce tax rate, deregulate both the financial and labour markets, dismantle protection of the manufacturing sector, lower minimum wage, remove certain guarantees of employment securities. Unfortunately, Mugabe's compliance with these conditionalities made his country's economy to slip out of gear. According to Naiman and Watkins, compliance with these conditionalities "combined with the effects of a severe drought on agricultural production to send the Zimbabwean economy into recession in 1992 -- real GDP fell by nearly 8% that year. In Zimbabwe, economic crisis actually followed rather than preceded the implementation of structural adjustment."⁷

Whatever are the true causes of the crisis, it can hardly be denied that all the factors implicated in it are traceable to Zimbabwe's exposure to the vagaries of international politics--- a game in which Africa is a cannon fodder used by the major players to advance their selfish interests. Involved in the international politics of the crisis, on the one hand, is the West (especially the United States of America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand), and on the other hand, is China whose support for Mugabe has not been able to staunch the economic and political bleeding the crisis has caused his country. However, essentially, it is the defective insurance cover which China has given her staunch ally, Mugabe, that should astound all those that are familiar with the history of their relationship.

Mugabe's close relationship with China is a secret which is known to the whole world. It predates the reclamation of political independence by Zimbabwe in 1980. It started when liberation leaders such as Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Ndabaningi Sithole and Abel Muzorewa were fighting to end white minority rule in their country. As was the case with all liberation struggles

during the Cold War, the Zimbabwe struggle for freedom was inexorably entangled in the ideological rivalry among the major powers. Thus, Mugabe and other freedom fighters were, willy-nilly, involved in the Russo-Sino rivalry for the control of the soul of international communism. Mugabe and China became friends as a result of a default action of the Soviets. After the racist actions of the Ian Smith-led white minority regime forced them to resort to the use of violence in their struggle against the white minority rule in Southern Rhodesia starting from the 60's, African freedom fighters turned to the USSR for armed support.

The USSR armed Joshua Nkomo who was leading the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), but cold shouldered the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Ndabaningi Sithole. Whereupon, ZANU turned to Chairman Mao Zedong's China which at that time was snooping around the world for friends to co-opt into her struggle with the USSR for the control of the soul of international communism. She hosted and trained some ZANU guerrilla cadres and indoctrinated them with Maoism. The initial contacts between the two (on the Zimbabwean side) were supervised and fostered by leaders such as Ndabaningi Sithole, Herbert Chitepo, and Robert Mugabe. Among these three, Mugabe played the most dynamic role at the initial stage of the relationship.⁸

After many years of inspiring guerrilla war by Africans and unmitigated racist violence by whites, Zimbabwe regained political independence on April 18, 1980. On the very same day, she established diplomatic relationship with China. Mugabe became prime minister since his ZANU won the most parliamentary votes. Two months after the independence, in June, he dispatched his foreign minister Simon Muzenda to Beijing to thank Mao Zedong for supporting ZANU's armed struggle against colonialism. Prime Minister Mugabe who later became President in 1987

himself visited Beijing the following year, 1981.⁹ It is those contacts which predated and immediately followed the independence that explain the buoyancy of his close friendship with China. The two friends love to flaunt their chummy relationship, and never hesitate to seize every opportunity that will make it a bold media headline. For example, in February 2010, the Chinese embassy in Harare threw a lavish party to celebrate Mugabe's 86th birthday. The bash was held inside the Chinese embassy, and Mugabe's physical presence at the embassy marked the first time he would visit an embassy in Harare since his country's independence. Mugabe reserves the prerogative to keep his friendship with the Chinese. No one begrudges him this freedom of association. However, the rapidity with which his country's economy has raced downstairs has brought the whole wisdom of his carrying on with this friendship into question. The argument of this paper is that China has been unable to help Mugabe leash the tide of the economic and political collapse of his country. Its conclusion is that this apparent inability to help Mugabe regain balance and initiative can dissipate Africa's enthusiasm for a deeper relationship with her. Its suggestion is that she should step in with greater enthusiasm in the shape of moral support and resources.

China's protective canopy for Mugabe

Mugabe is one of the good friends China boasts in Africa. Since establishing relationship with the Chinese thirty-two years ago, he has not in word or in action suggested his choice of China for friendship was a faulty judgement. By the same token, China has faith in him and feels bound by his steadfast friendship to help him with most of the essential accoutrements without which it will be so hard for him to regain balance and initiative in his country's current economic and political crisis. China has refused to allow vehement criticisms to panic her into mitigating her

solidarity with him. The four major ways in which she has supported Mugabe during the crisis are discussed below.

At the United Nations Security Council, China has been using her veto power to scupper all the efforts by Western powers to use the Council against Mugabe. Her posture has prevented the West from 借刀杀人 *jie dao sha ren* (borrowing a knife to kill another person). For example, in 2008, she and Russia used their veto to lynch an Anglo-American sponsored resolution that would have imposed severe sanctions on Mugabe and his close allies. Her permanent representative at the time, Wang Guangya, vetoed the resolution, arguing that, “Many countries, including China, repeatedly called upon the Security Council to respect the position of the African countries on this question and give more time. China has always maintained the best approach to solve a problem is negotiation and dialogue. To use or threaten to use sanctions lightly is not conducive to solving the problem.”¹⁰ Reservation about the utility of sanction in compelling acceptable behavior in international politics is a trait of China’s conflict resolution diplomacy. Generally, she is allergic to the use of punishment in settling disputes in international politics.

Secondly, China continues to do arms deals with Mugabe, in spite of the vociferous condemnation that trails them from a vocal cross-section of the international community. She has all along been the major arms supplier to Zimbabwe and is not prepared to adjust her unilateral judgement on the moral ramifications of her arms supplies to the ZANU-controlled government in that country. Her arms supply to Mugabe attracted their loudest denunciation ever in 2008, after a Chinese ship bearing a heavy consignment of Chinese-made arms was prevented from

docking at the ports of any of the southern African coastal states. Zimbabwe is a landlocked nation that depends on her neighbours for seaborne trade.

Thirdly, China has been trying to help Zimbabwe revive the agricultural sector which was the mainstay of the economy before the launch of the land reform programme. She has given Zimbabwe about 80 million worth of agricultural machinery and fertilizers.¹¹ By the same token, Zimbabwe has leased much of the land reclaimed from white farmers to Chinese farmers.¹²

Finally, apart from supporting the efforts to rehydrate Zimbabwe's agriculture, China also has been trying to ameliorate the crisis by giving the country loans for non-agricultural sectors such as telecommunications, road construction, etc...For example, in 2009, she gave her a \$950 million loan. This credit line was a big life line for Zimbabwe's economy--an economy struggling to regain its footing; and it was symbolically important because it came shortly after Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai returned almost empty-handed from a three-week-cap-in-hand tour of the US and Europe.¹³ There are many other loans China has given Zimbabwe.

The holes in the canopy

There is no doubt that the Chinese seem to be doing their best to tide over their good friend Mugabe. They have resisted pressures to modify their stand on the crisis by providing loans, refusing to discontinue arms supplies, beating back Western efforts to achieve UN sanctions and urging empathy. However, it is so clear that the Chinese canopy under which Mugabe has sought refuge has big holes through which the sun and rains have been beating him. So far all the Chinese efforts have been unable to bail his country out of her economic and political crisis. How each of the four major ways through which the Chinese are trying to keep Mugabe up has been ineffective is examined in the following paragraphs.

To China's credit, the West has been unable to force through even one UNSC sanction against Mugabe and his allies. Her vehement opposition to UNSC sanctions has actually left the West with the only option of recourse to a combo of unilateral and multilateral sanctions signed up to by the US, the EU, Australia, and New Zealand. These sanctions are the utmost the West can afford in the face of determined Chinese opposition. The posture which China has maintained on Zimbabwe has attracted criticisms, some measured and charitable, some weird and outright uncharitable. Although, China has been trying to remain a friend in need for Mugabe, there are occasions on which she has wavered between two options: to stick to her protective behavior for Mugabe or to barter him for the advancement of its own selfish national interest in the Sino-West relationship. For example, shortly before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China, in her desperation to weather the vociferous hostility of certain opinions which were against her hosting the events, tolerated a UNSC presidential statement that condemned the presidential election that took place in Zimbabwe in 2008.¹⁴ As the Beijing Olympics neared, what became China's major obsession was how to preempt any action that could derail the opportunity to host the world. Then, it was not issues such as the need to uphold the honour of their long-lasting relationship with Mugabe that bothered her. So, Zimbabwe was summarily traded off, thereby sparing the Beijing Olympics fatal dislocations. Even President George Bush was persuaded by her readiness for this Zimbabwe trade-off to honour his decision to grace the opening ceremonies of the games.¹⁵ Another hole in the protective canopy is the unreliability of Mugabe's dependence on China for arms supplies. China has been the major arms supplier to Zimbabwe for years. One of the major issues which make a cross-section of the international community to denounce China's Africa politics is her refusal to stop arms supplies to the political leaderships in countries like

Zimbabwe and Sudan. With respect to Zimbabwe, China has been accused of supplying Mugabe with most of the arms which he uses to suppress domestic political opposition led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In normal times, there would hardly be a whimper if China ships arms to this African country. But since the crisis began, their arms relationship with her has been harshly criticized. Critics argue that China has the moral responsibility to stop supplying arms to a regime which has, by its own actions, undermined its claims to political legitimacy. In 2008, this arms relationship between the two countries suffered a very serious embarrassment. In that year, presidential election had resulted in a run-off between Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC-T. The latter was expected to win in the run-off election. But shortly before the election, a Chinese ship, *An Yue Jiang*, appeared, bearing a consignment of “77 tonnes of small arms, including more than 3m rounds of ammunition, AK47 assault rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades” for Mugabe.¹⁶ This arms deal miscarried after the ship was denied permission to dock at any of the ports in the neighbouring countries. It roamed from one port to another, casting about for a hospitable port where it could dock and unload; but finding none, had to return with the cargo to its port of origin in China.¹⁷ This inability to get their arms to Mugabe showed China up and uncovered critical strategic misjudgements in the deal. It is so easy to conclude that issues such as geographic knowledge and pragmatism were evidently not factored in in the shipment plan. In fact, the cheapness with which the deal was bungled left the impression that China believably lacked the most basic cartographic knowledge of southern Africa. Even primer geography indicates that Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi, and Lesotho are landlocked countries in this part of Africa. Also, the botch shows that there was some loose acquaintance with the history of strategic contrivance in the

deal. Could the arms not have been airlifted in the manner the United States and her allies airlifted supplies to their own parts of Berlin during the Berlin blockade of 24 June 1948 – 12 May 1949? If China had taken this route, it would have saved her a lot of negative publicity. In fact, the miscarriage of the arms deal was, according to Lance Guma, “a public relations disaster for the Chinese.”¹⁸

There is also another way in which Mugabe’s close relationship with China has not been able to help a lot in his efforts to recall his country from the coma into which it has lapsed. Zimbabwe, which a few decades ago, was a net exporter of agricultural goods, has today become a ‘land of famine’. According to the WFP, about 1.6 million people ‘will be food insecure between January [2012] and March 2013.¹⁹ What is China’s business in this food crisis? China cannot be excused from it because, as one of the few nations in the developing world that have been able to solve the problem of food security, she is expected to help her ally, Zimbabwe. Some decades ago, “Can China feed itself?” was a question which agitated the Chinese but tickled their detractors. Then, China was so food poor that in 1926, G. M. Wrigley and Walter H. Mallory described her as a “land of famine”. In their book, China: Land of Famine, they noted that “In famine years, locusts are caught to supplement the food supply. The struggle for existence in China is indescribably hard.”²⁰ Skeptics continued this sneering reference to the country decades after because they beheld no glimmer of hope for her redemption in both the bankrupt leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and Chairman Mao Zedong initial false starts at organising a viable communist society. The country was not less food insecure during Kai-shek’s rule than during Mao’s patriotism-propelled dictatorship. Evidence: during the Great Leap Forward, “[she] was in the middle of the world’s largest famine: between the spring of 1959 and the end of 1961 some 30

million Chinese starved to death and about the same number of births were lost or postponed.”²¹

This high poverty quotient of about eighty years ago has been revised by the incredible achievements of today’s China in many aspects of national existence. Today, she is not only able to feed her more than one billion, three hundred million mouths, she also boasts an agricultural production expertise which can glut much of the world with food. She is food secure, feeding “over one –fifth of the world’s population with only one-fifteenth of the world’s arable land” (FAO).²² Justin Yifu Lin encapsulates this incredible capacity thus: “Today, [China’s] ability to feed its people in recent decades is a celebrated achievement in both Chinese and world history. China’s experience in achieving self-sufficiency in food production provides extremely useful lessons for other developing countries experiencing food shortages.”²³ Why have Chinese to whom Mugabe has given 250,000 acres in southern part of the country not been able to use their expertise in agriculture to turn them into tons of grains?²⁴

The paradox of food sufficiency in China and famine in Zimbabwe has grave public relations implications for the latter. If hunger in today’s China is not an immediate danger, it is in Zimbabwe where the government’s desperation to stem caloric deficit has given Chinese unfettered access to the lands reclaimed from white farmers. It is believed that most of the land which has been reclaimed has been turned over to Chinese farmers. Hunger has been conquered in China. The country’s ability to feed her about 1.3 trillion mouths is, indeed, one of the astounding miracles of our times; but it also makes the inability to pull Zimbabwe back from famine a paradox. It is indeed a sad story that the Chinese have been unable to use their ingenuity in food production to reduce Zimbabwe’s food problem. She comfortably feeds her

about 1.3 trillion mouths every day. Zimbabwe needs to feed only one percent of this staggering number: just only thirteen million mouths.

Another way in which China's help for Mugabe has been less than effectual is that there has not been a massive intervention of financial aid by China in the Zimbabwe crisis. China has been giving Zimbabwe loans and other forms of financial aid; but they appear to be too small to be considered Marshal Plan-sized efforts. The amounts she has been giving have not been able to make a dent in the country's financial need. The fact that Zimbabwe has become a serious credibility challenge for her should make to go for an affirmative action by increasing the pressure of her aid tap. She should understand that her sporadic intervention with meagre handouts is making no difference. Zimbabwe, in her present situation, certainly does not need drip feeding.²⁵

The implications of the crisis for China's Africa politics

The crisis in Zimbabwe certainly has ugly ramifications for China's ambition to secure a foothold in Africa. Since the end of the Cold War, China has been obtrusively creating a strategic offshore base in Africa. She has been able to contain Taiwan's challenge on the continent. Now she is grappling with the challenge of staking off the strategic base. She has been able to project a contrast between her policy on the continent with the West's. One of the African countries which boast strong relationship with China is Zimbabwe. As was mentioned in an earlier part of this article, Zimbabwe and China established diplomatic relationship the very same day that the former regained political freedom. Most of the Africans who sanction Africa's relationship with China had expected that the Chinese would hastily preempt the crisis which has left Mugabe's credentials on the chopping board. Unfortunately, this has not happened. Although, China has

been pitching in with some respectable efforts, the lethargy with which Zimbabwe's economy is retreating from its coma calls into question her resume as a viable substitute for the West as Africa's main aid-donor and development partner.

Africa seems to have made up her mind to step up her relationship with China. On the continent, governments are falling over themselves to sign contracts and bilateral agreements with her. She is cornering juicy contracts everywhere from the Cape to Cairo. The Beijing Consensus is being canvassed as a viable substitute for the Washington Consensus, but many in China do not appreciate how the crisis can undermine Africa's excitement about their own model of development. The success of the Chinese model of development has won the admiration of the Third World. Dustin R. Turin said that, "the Chinese model--informal as it may be--is quickly gaining appeal within the developing world and influencing a reassessment of Washington's antiquated policies. In short, the Beijing Consensus uses China as an alternative model for development in the Third World, and serves as a bellwether to the future of Western dominated development priorities."²⁶ In Africa, the opinion favouring the continent developing closer ties with Beijing has gained a lot of currency; and the speed at which the continent is opening up to Chinese investments could be adjudged a vote of confidence in the Beijing Consensus. In Africa, there is rebellion against the Washington Consensus because of the insinuation that it is a huge constraint on the continent's efforts to overcome the challenges of development. Africa is a continent whose cyclical development inertia is blamed on the West whose main error of judgement vis-à-vis the continent is its imposition of one-size-fits-all development solutions. This rebellion against Western-imposed development and economic strategies redounds to the Beijing Consensus. However, the political/economic crisis which has uncovered a lot of

Mugabe's nakedness has severely weakened the Beijing Consensus advocacy. Even Mugabe who once said, "We have turned east where the sun rises, and given our backs to the West where the sun sets," may himself be despondently reviewing the initial inspiration for his 'Look east' policy which has not been a great salvation for him. Since the crisis began, he has made many trips to Beijing in search of solutions. Unfortunately, most these trips appear to have been a proper waste of flight hours. It appears that all he goes home with after each trip is a hug, a pat on the back, and for good measure, a verbal reaffirmation of solidarity laced with proverbs and anecdotes. It could be that whenever he is in Beijing, Chinese leaders tell him his tribulations are the teething problems of true development. They may even add that their own dear country once passed through a similar valley of the shadows of death. Then he returns to Africa, brimming over with fresh hopes and inspiration. Those words he has heard from his Chinese friends will create for him a false psychological image of his many problems and make him forget that 'fine words butter no parsnips'.

Mugabe's relationship with China is a curious one. She apparently wants to help him, but her peripheral influence with the international financial system seriously curtails her ability to press it into the service of good friends like Mugabe. China boasts all the credible indices of development; but infrastructure wise, she is still a developing country. Her membership of the eastern bloc during the Cold War disenfranchised her from becoming a part of the earliest efforts that laid the foundations of the present international system. As a result, much of what she does whenever an ally is at dispute with the Western powers scarcely ranges beyond her usual advocacy for diplomatic solution. Contrariwise, the West use their dominant weight in the system to dispense favours to allies and to exert pressure on anyone who dares contradict their

inclinations. This is what is happening *vis-a-vis* the Zimbabwe crisis. The US and her allies have been frustrating Mugabe's relationship with the international multilateral economic system. They have made sure that multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund do not play a big role in Mugabe's efforts to resuscitate his country's economy. For example, in 2001, Zimbabwe defaulted on its \$53 million debt to the IMF. Under pressure from West, the Executive Board of this institution on September 24, 2001 declared the country ineligible to use its general resources, and removed her from the list of countries eligible to borrow resources under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF).²⁷ There is no evidence whatsoever of protest against this action by China. Two years later, in 2003, the institution suspended the country's voting and related rights, "after having determined that [she] had not sufficiently strengthened its cooperation with [it] in areas of policy implementation and payments."²⁸ Again, there is no evidence of protest by China. So, without effective protection from China, Zimbabwe has been taking merciless blows like a helpless lamb. IMF's refusal to reschedule the country's debt forced her (starting from 2005) to print 21 trillion Zimbabwean dollars (ZW\$21) trillion which it "used to buy foreign currency from the parallel market and paid off its IMF debt arrears."²⁹ This massive printing of currency notes triggered off hyperinflation in the country, making her the first country to hyper inflate in the 21st century.³⁰ The World Bank is not left out of this West's chastisement regime against Mugabe; but it has not been so vengefully and shabbily used as the IMF.

Zimbabwe was not the first country to default on debt to the Breton Woods Institutions. In 2002, Argentina defaulted on her loan to the World Bank. Yet, in 2003, IMF, fearing a similar fate would befall her own loan to her, provided what it called a "transitional" loan to it. The loan was

meant to head off the country's threat to default on its obligations to her multilateral creditors. A country which defaulted on a debt with folded arms was encouraged not to default on another ones with a 'transitional' loan, whereas a country which took the risk of massive printing of currency notes in order to repay her loan was barred from both loans and club membership. If Argentina could be given a 'transitional' loan and a grace of time, why was Zimbabwe considered ineligible for a similar gesture? To this question, an answer has been given:

The answer is found in an American law called the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act 2001, which enabled the United States government to block any finance applications made by Zimbabwe to multilateral lending institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank in which the US has majority shares or influence. In other words, using its powerful influence over the world's lending agencies the US imposed economic sanctions on Zimbabwe by imposing a world-wide freeze on Zimbabwe's ability to access international credit. The reason: the US was unhappy with Harare's political policies and in particular, its land expropriation policies. The IMF remains accused of being an instrument of American foreign policy. American policy being hostile to Zimbabwe the IMF by extension opted to call in Zimbabwe's debt, instead of entering into good faith rescheduling talks, extending lines of credit, some debt cancellation, etc, as happened before with other countries.³¹

China may not be feeling comfortable with how the West is using the Bretton Woods Institutions to shape their differences with Mugabe, but she cannot do much because she herself is a peripheral actor in the affairs of these institutions. She commands only 3.81 percent of voting power at IMF, (whereas US commands, 16.75; Japan, 6.23; Germany, 5.81; France, 4.29; the UK, 4.29)³² ; at the IBRD she commands only 3.44 percent of voting power (US commands 16.45, Japan, 9.68, Germany, 4.82, France, 4.31, the UK, 4.31).³³ Although she, in April, 2010, displaced Germany as the third largest voting power in World Bank, her strength *vis-a-vis* the combined power of the Western members is still weak. The West use their control of the international multilateral financial institutions, the West can easily use them to try to lick any 'rebellious' government into shape. With their enormous influence with these institutions, they can create

hope and despair for nations that need multilateral financial intervention to solve economic problems. It should not be forgotten that it was the solutions these institutions imposed on Mugabe that remotely sparked the crisis in his country. Among the major criticisms of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the institutions is that they often “result in the loss of a state's authority to govern its own economy as national economic policies are predetermined under the structural adjustment packages.”³⁴ The synopsis of what is happening in Zimbabwe is that Mugabe, while implementing the structural adjustment programme imposed on him by the IMF, lost control over the national economy; and because a cornered beast will bite indiscriminately, he remembered that 70 percent of the country's arable land was still being unjustifiably held by about 1 percent of the population. If this crisis was happening in a friendly country , the West would have quickly mobilized both the World Bank and the IMF to provide massive rescue operations. This has not happened because it is Zimbabwe; and China has not been unable to use the institutions to alleviate the crisis because she does not have a lot of influence with them. Her marginal influence with them can only dampen all the excitement over the Beijing Consensus.

The China appeal to Africa can also be dented up by the fiasco of her abortive arms shipment to Zimbabwe in 2008. The failure to deliver the arms can insinuate that she cannot be relied upon to provide her African allies with the milito-strategic assistance they may need. A point which must not be overlooked in the analysis of the arms supply incident is that it was a very serious strategic miscarriage in the national security calculus of a sovereign nation--Zimbabwe. History is not an idle collection of past events. It cannot be retired. It is ever active. It should be used to solve present and future problems The archives of the Cold War reserve a special place for the

ingenuity used by the US and her Western allies to circumvent the Berlin blockade. They did not chicken out as Chinese did when their ship was denied permission to dock and unload. They used planes to freight supplies to their own parts of Berlin.

What happened after the Chinese ship was forced to abort her mission generates questions such as: Could China not have airlifted the arms consignment? Could she not have cajoled or even arm-twisted her good friend Eduardo dos Santos of Angola into permitting the use of his country's sea ports? There can be little doubt that if the shipment had been finessed, she would have been able to use either of the two options—airlifting or using Angolan seaports--to deliver the cargo to Mugabe. If she meant business even a cacophony of protesting noises in the West or from labour unions in southern Africa would not have been loud enough to frighten her ship back to China. Did not her Chairman Mao say that "a loud fart is better than a long lecture"? Did they forget that George Bush ignored all the protesting voices in the whole world and invaded Iraq? Did they forget that after the invasion, he was able to bring the UN on board the post-Saddam reconstruction efforts? Are they not aware that America has never abandoned Israel in all her good and bad quarrels with the Arabs? China should have gone ahead with the arms delivery; and she would not have been breaching a UN sanction against Zimbabwe since there are no UN sanctions whatsoever against Mugabe. Arms transfer and military cooperation are among the core elements of her strategic interest in Africa. But how can she foster this interest if she will hastily abort strategic deals if there should be a whimper? Realism should have taught her to upload the shipment imbroglio onto her engagements with the US on the latter's persistent arms supplies to Taiwan. She should always remember that all her protests at the US-Taiwan arms relationship have not stopped Washington from selling more and more sophisticated arms to this

renegade province. She must realize that her “pullback was no great act of moral courage.”³⁵ It was indeed a very cowardly move that has not redounded to her image in Africa. For the sake of her own national ego and her relationship with Mugabe, she should have forced through the shipment. She should have powered the deal past the entire hullabaloo on the argument of national honour and prestige. Mugabe paid for the consignment, after all. In case the Chinese did not know, what they did was a breach of contract.

China has also run a risk of forfeiture of moral confidence in Africa by her prostitution of allegiance over the Zimbabwe crisis at the United Nations Security Council. Although, she has so far shielded Mugabe from sanctions at the UNSC, she has sometimes given cause to suspect her fidelity to him. There have been indications that her support is flagging. Andrew Small noted that China's support for Mugabe has “dropped almost as quickly as the value of the Zimbabwe dollar...China, which once perceived the West's condemnation of Mugabe and sanctions against his regime as an economic opportunity, now views its involvement in Zimbabwe as a liability both for its investments and international reputation.”³⁶ This drop in interest was evident in the exclusion of Zimbabwe from President Hu Jintao's itinerary of visits to eight African nations, *viz* Cameroon, Liberia, Sudan, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, in 2007. This visit involved four of Zimbabwe's neighbours (the last four on the list), but the president skirted Harare possibly because his country wanted to sidestep any action that might jeopardize the Olympics she would be hosting the following year. The president avoided Zimbabwe again during his 2009 visit to five African and Asian nations: Tanzania, Mali, Senegal, Mauritius, and Saudi Arabia. He avoided Mugabe clearly because his country craves moral grandstanding in her Africa politics. Jintao should have dropped in on Mugabe because exchange of visits between

national leaderships can be symbolically strategic. It emboldens friendship and deepens mutual trust just as ordinary visits between friends do. A flying visit by the president, even for ten minutes of meeting with Mugabe at the Harare airport, would have been enough to reinforce Mugabe's faith in his Chinese friends. Napoleon Bonaparte said: "better a declared enemy than a doubtful ally." It can hardly be imagined that a sitting US president on a visit to the Middle East will dodge Israel.

Conclusion

China's image in Africa is being given her greatest test ever by the crises in Zimbabwe and in Darfur. How deep she gets involved in these crises will either bolster or impair her image on the continent. But her half-hearted willingness to help staunch the hemorrhage in the former can drain Africans' confidence in her. She should understand that she is under an obligation of friendship to fire up as many rescue windows as she can for her good friend, Mugabe. Darfur, in essence, is just a conflict between Arabs and Africans, just a baleful mix in which a dichotomy of races is seeking a reconfiguration of power distribution system in the national politics of Sudan. In contrast, the Zimbabwe crisis is threatening the nationhood of a sovereign nation; but, regrettably, China seems not to have taken notice of the fact that it brooks no frugality of efforts by anyone who calls himself a good friend of Mugabe. Zimbabwe crisis is a crisis in which the continuing existence of a nation has been exposed to neo-colonialism and the vestigial sentiments of colonialism. It is this exposure to these two vicious enemies of Africa that should make it imperative for China to deepen her involvement in the efforts to end the crisis. China, however, appears to have been ignoring the cue for deeper involvement. If she is serious about

gaining a foothold in Africa, she must not begrudge any price she has to pay for Zimbabwe's recovery.

Recommendation

Zimbabwe may have become a burden China would be happy to offload; but she should not make her fans in Africa run away with the impression that she is a scalar quantity, a world power loaded down with energy but no pragmatic solutions to challenges of friendship. Let her note, as indicated in the following words, that Mugabe hopes he can reconstruct the economy of his country through her assistance: "We are going through quite some hard times and we are trying to reconstruct and rehabilitate our economy and to fight sanctions. As we look around the world, we find that our greatest friend is the People's Republic of China and that it is this great friend we rely upon, in the main, to come to our assistance as we carry out various programmes to rehabilitate and reconstruct our economy."³⁷ True friendship has its enormous sacrifices, and bailing Mugabe out of his current predicament is one of the effective demands of Africa-China friendship.

-True friendship isn't about being there when it's convenient; it's about being there when it's not.-

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