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ZIMBABWE: THE ONE PARTY STATE ISSUE

INTRODUCTION:

It is pertinent to pose the question: why do most African states adopt a one-party state system, as opposed to a multi-party system, at, or soon after independence? This paper attempts to address this issue with particular reference to the Zimbabwean situation. The arguments for a one-party state in Zimbabwe, could be that it will promote stability, national unity, economic development and socialism. To bring about the goal of the one-party state, Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, is seeking to bring opposition groups into an acceptable arrangement with his government, and he intends to build on his existing support base for this purpose.

By a 'one-party state system', it is understood that a political system relies on a single party to aggregate and articulate national interests in a society. The argument is that if disparate interests are permitted to aggregate (or collect together), they will automatically clash with other interests. If only one party is allowed to exist, then the various interests will either have to compromise with and accede to the single ruling party, or remain without an outlet for expression.

THE ONE-PARTY STATE IN AFRICA:

It is difficult to isolate any single factor that contributes to the frequency of the one-party state system in Africa, as the motivation obviously differs from state to state. However, there appear to be a number of recurrent themes. It is argued by some analysts that African indigenous systems of government - based on clan heads, chiefs or kings - invariably lead to a monopoly of power. Thus, the rejection of the multi-party system is attributed to the fact that it is alien to African systems of government.

A possible explanation lies in the types of political parties that exist within a state. One-party state systems first appeared in those African states governed by popular political parties. This type of political party generally has a greater organisational propensity to dominate the realm of political activity. It usually builds its party organisation through direct links with the population, encouraging large-scale party membership, which is mobilised through various party branches. The membership is usually widely representative of all sectors of the population, which transfers to the party, wide-ranging functions which epitomise the popular will. As popular political parties in Africa tend to adopt a variant of socialist ideology in conjunction with the one-party state system, the multi-party system is seen to be inconsistent with this ideology, as it usually represents particular (i.e. class) interests.

A third possible factor is the existence of political instability derived from tribal differences that promote internal conflict. Ethnic rivalry, it is argued, is a common feature of African states because of the artificial boundaries created by the colonial powers. The argument that a one-party state system promotes unity, and can prevent instability, is often used by proponents of this system. It can cut both ways, however. By its exclusive nature, a one-party state system may give rise to (often violent) opposition from the alienated sectors of the society. It could, therefore, contribute to its own instability, if the opposition is forced into illegal activities. That, in the final analysis, could endanger the single ruling party more than would a viable opposition, with a legitimate outlet for criticism. A further, related factor, is that regional instability has reinforced domestic instability.

A fourth argument for the frequency of the one-party state in Africa, is that unsuitable systems of government were imposed on these territories by the former colonial powers.

However, the over-riding motivation for the establishment of the one-party state in Zimbabwe remains Mugabe's commitment to socialism. Mugabe and his senior cabinet colleagues stress national unity as the precondition for the construction of socialism in Zimbabwe. Such unity, it is argued, can only be achieved by means of a one-party state. Mugabe believes not only that parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition is a luxury that Zimbabwe cannot afford, but also that such opposition is clearly unnecessary. The Zimbabwean premier and a number of his radical politburo colleagues believe Marxism-Leninism to be the answer to the country's political and economic problems. Their world view, does not necessarily apportion the same tolerance to competing ideas and beliefs in the relativity of values that hold in most Western thinking. The role of the vanguard party (in this case, Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) - ZANU) within Marxist-Leninist thought, is to control all economic and social organisations and institutions of the state to facilitate a single approach to building the socialist system. Non-socialist approaches will not be tolerated. Thus Mugabe's commitment to a socialist one-party state is a philosophical, ideological and pragmatic one. This commitment to socialism has always been the central element of his party's platform, and the mass popular support for ZANU may be interpreted as acceptance of this goal by the majority of Zimbabweans.

It must be stressed that, in this sense, the one-party state need not necessarily be a negative feature. It is only negative if it is enforced or imposed. A major criticism often levelled against the one-party state is that it institutionalises elite or ethnic domination - and many one-party states in Africa do just that. However, other one-party states operate on broadening foundations of consent and participation and therefore, work for the maximising of consensus, rather than conflict. Tanzania, under the Chama cha Mapinduzi and Zambia, under the United National Independence Party are cases in point, where broad popular participation is mobilised under what is termed a one-party state democracy.

ZIMBABWE VERSUS THE AFRICAN EXAMPLE:

Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF has never made any secret of its commitment to social, political and economic development along socialist lines, a goal to which it has remained committed since the inception of the party in 1963, and which was contained in its election manifestoes of 1980 and 1985.

In Zimbabwe, political parties are supported predominantly along tribal lines - the Ndebele (19% of the population) for Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU), and the Shona (75% of the population) for ZANU-PF. To deprive ZAPU of its legal existence, would only serve to inflame Ndebele resistance in Matabeleland, and this is something that Mugabe is anxious to avoid at all costs, as the continued dissident support for Nkomo has been a problem since independence. Although the two parties were united (under the Patriotic Front Alliance) against a common cause - white minority rule - from 1976-79, this ended shortly before independence in 1980.

In the former British-ruled colonies, the colonial legacy took the form of the Westminster system - a system with competing political parties and a prime minister as head of government. In the case of Zimbabwe, the Lancaster House Constitution was a carefully planned document with in-built checks and balances against any radical change to the Constitution until 1990. The Lancaster House Constitution was agreed to by all the parties prior to independence, although it must be noted that ZAPU and ZANU were pressurised into accepting this arrangement by the leaders of the Frontline States. Mugabe, so far has adhered to the conditions of this document, despite recent threats (uttered in anger at the outcome of the white elections in June 1985) that it was a 'dirty piece of paper' that would be 'cleansed'. The election results in 1980, and those for Zimbabwean black voters in July 1985, show that Mugabe has a considerable popular mandate for his policies which will facilitate the transition to the one-party state.

The regional destabilisation policies of the South African government, have led to accusations that it lends support to dissident groups in Matabeleland and in other Frontline States. This bolsters ZANU's arguments in favour of the one-party state system.

ZIMBABWE - TOWARD A ONE-PARTY STATE:

A series of restrictions have been placed on the opposition parties since independence. Although these have mainly been aimed at ZAPU, Muzorewa's United African National Council (UANC) and Sithole's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) - not to be confused with Mugabe's party of the same name - have also been affected. ZAPU - the only opposition party that ultimately counts, has been subjected to a 'softening up' process, beginning with Nkomo's sacking from the cabinet in early 1982 in connection with arms caches found on farms linked to his party. His two former top guerrilla lieutenants, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa, were jailed for their alleged role in the arms caches. Both are still in detention, despite having been acquitted on treason charges. Nkomo then fled Zimbabwe, first to Botswana and then to Britain and, in his absence, was frequently vilified in Parliament and in the state-controlled media, as being connected with the dissidents. He returned to Zimbabwe in late 1983, without guarantees for his personal safety. Indeed, after Nkomo's expulsion from the cabinet, Josiah Chinamano (the then Vice-President of ZAPU), pledged his support to Mugabe and to a merger of ZAPU and ZANU

At the end of 1983, ZAPU was banned from holding meetings for three months in the Midlands and Mashonaland West provinces, following ZANU demonstrations against it. This was followed by the expulsion of the last remaining ZAPU representatives from his 'national unity' cabinet - Cephias Msipa (Minister of Water Resources) and John Nkomo (Minister of State in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office) in late 1984. This action came in the wake of the assassination of a member of the ZANU Central Committee - Senator

Moven Ndlovu - at his home near Beit Bridge, allegedly by ZAPU dissidents. The killing sparked off a violent backlash in the area, in which Nkomo claimed that over one hundred of his supporters were killed.

The violence raises the fundamental question of who speaks for the dissidents. Mugabe has blamed Nkomo, and he accuses ZAPU of seeking power by violent means; hence their exclusion from the government. Nkomo has continually denied any association with the dissidents, claiming that they are not loyal to him, but connected with the 'super-ZAPU' movements with links to South Africa. Recently he asserted that he could rid the country of the dissident problem within two weeks if he were re-elected to the cabinet, thus implying he has an element of control over these groups. Continuous instability in Matabeleland culminated in a security clampdown in Bulawayo in March 1985, aimed at flushing out anti-government rebels. Nkomo has also claimed intimidation in the run-up period to the elections which limited his party's scope for political action.

Muzorewa's UANC and Sithole's ZANU were also affected. Muzorewa was detained in November 1983 for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government, and a frequent accusation levelled against him is that his former UANC auxiliaries had been trained in South Africa and were ready to be deployed in Zimbabwe. He was released in September 1984, but is no longer considered a threat, as his party was soundly defeated at the latest polls. He left Zimbabwe during the election, and has just recently announced his retirement from politics. Sithole, who has been in self-imposed exile in Britain, has expressed fears of his arrest if he returns to Harare. In January 1985, his party was accused of seeking United States arms for a coup against the government. Sithole's small ZANU party captured only one seat in the election in the Chipinga constituency. Prior to the elections, all of the opposition parties - UANC, ZAPU, ZANU (Sithole) and Ian Smith's Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (CAZ), were accused of planning to form an anti-ZANU coalition. In the immediate post-election period, Mugabe's supporters launched a campaign of reprisal in the Harare area against those who had not voted for ZANU in the elections. Recently, Amnesty International claimed, in a special report, that the torture and detention of opposition ZAPU supporters had increased sharply since the July elections.

Mugabe has, however, stopped short of outlawing opposition parties completely - preferring to encourage a 'united front' approach - a 'voluntary' merger of the opposition with the ruling party. What exists in Zimbabwe at present, is a 'de facto' one-party state, where the ruling party has an overwhelming legislative majority and utilises its legal, security and political powers to restrict the competitive potential of the opposition. As early as 1982, a bill was drafted which would have prohibited political parties from receiving external funds and also provided for state funding of parliamentary parties which enjoyed a significant following. The effect of such measures would have further hamstrung any attempts to maintain or initiate independent opposition groupings. These measures, however, were not imposed by the governing party. Almost all that remains now, is for the one-party state to be declared in name - but there are still a number of obstacles for ZANU to overcome.

OBSTACLES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ONE-PARTY STATE:

The main legal obstacle that Mugabe faces, remains the Lancaster House Constitution. In this regard, there are two issues at stake: the twenty seats that are reserved for whites, and the clause in the Declaration of

Rights allowing for Freedom of Assembly and Association - in particular the right to form, or belong to, opposition political parties. The latter, in particular, concerns Mugabe. The twenty reserved white seats are less problematic, as an arrangement that guarantees to roughly 100 000 people, one-fifth of the Parliament, is unlikely to survive after 1987 - the date when it can legally be abolished. At present, it can only be abolished by a 100% vote in the House of Assembly and two-thirds of the Senate, but after 1987, by 70% of the House of Assembly and two-thirds of the Senate. The protective provisions of the Bill of Rights are for a period of ten years (i.e. until 1990), amendable before this date only by unanimous vote of the House of Assembly and two-thirds of the Senate. The right to form political parties, is thus protected until 1990. Clearly, this is the main obstacle to the establishment of the one-party state before then.

Apart from the legal obstacles to the imposition of the one-party state, there remains the opposition of Nkomo's ZAPU and to a lesser degree, that of the other black and white political parties. The support received by Ian Smith's CAZ in the recent elections is indicative of white sentiment with regard to the one-party state issue. Analysts now believe that Smith's vehement opposition to the one-party state, as opposed to the Independent Zimbabwe Group's (IZG) (a predominantly white party) attitude of 'rather work with the government than against it', was the main reason for his fifteen-seat victory. This contrasts with these analysts' earlier predictions that the CAZ was a spent force.

Nkomo had campaigned against the establishment of the one-party state, and the ZAPU Party Congress at the end of 1984, rejected outright Mugabe's plans, claiming that it would only lead to disaster. Mugabe would prefer to bring about the one-party state by drawing the other black parties under one political umbrella. The present unity talks between ZANU and ZAPU are aimed at achieving this. Clearly, Nkomo has agreed to these talks, as he sees the one-party state as inevitable. The talks offer a last chance of maintaining some representation for his minority Ndebele group before ZAPU is effectively neutralised. He evidently believes that it is better to work with Mugabe now, and have limited influence, than no influence at all when the one-party state proper becomes a reality.

The question now is when, not whether, the one-party state will be established. At the August 1984 ZANU Party Congress, Mugabe emerged stronger in his leadership position, and his Party, more disciplined than ever. The Party Congress reaffirmed the political direction of Zimbabwe towards a socialist state 'based on Marxist-Leninist principles', but no timetable was set. The Congress called for the establishment of the one-party state 'in the fullness of time and in accordance with the laws and Constitution', thus suggesting that the Lancaster House Constitution would continue to operate at least for the time being. It has been suggested that the next five years will reaffirm the establishment of the de facto one-party state, paving the way for the de jure one-party state after 1990. The five year period will be crucial for the restructuring of the economy along socialist lines, through state involvement in key activities and the nationalisation of certain sectors of the economy.

On the issue of the twenty reserved white seats, Mugabe threatened after the news of Smith's victory to abolish them 'almost immediately'. However, it appears that this was merely election rhetoric. Smith's victory, after all, was not as overwhelming as the seat distribution indicates, as only about half of the whites eligible to vote did so, and only 55% voted for the CAZ. Moreover, in many constituencies the victory margin was narrow.

The removal of the white 'privilege', via legislative process after 1987, need not lead to a massive white exodus, as most whites are resigned to the fact that it is a temporary arrangement. Mugabe is unlikely to abolish the safeguard provisions before 1987 - by contravening the Lancaster House Constitution - as he is probably more concerned with his image. For such a step might diminish his trustworthiness in the eyes of the international institutions and investors from which he wishes to obtain support (e.g. capital). It therefore seems likely that his threats to abolish the reserved seats and his allegations that the Lancaster House Constitution was 'pitted against the will of the people' were merely rhetoric. It seems likely that Mugabe will tolerate the twenty reserved seats merely as an inconvenience until they can be done away with legally.

Mugabe will have to reconcile the radical elements within ZANU, who view his election victory - a total of 64 seats out of 80, which increased ZANU's majority by seven - as a mandate for the immediate implementation of the one-party state. It will be recalled, that the Youth Congress in May 1984, called for the total and unconditional rejection of the Lancaster House Constitution. There seems to be majority support for an approach stressing ZANU's emergence to a position of primacy through political mobilisation, thus rendering all other political organisations electorally irrelevant. The current talks between ZANU and ZAPU are an indication that this is the favoured path.

The establishment of the one-party state which is designed to combat divisive tribal tendencies might, however, exacerbate these tendencies. The voting pattern in the last election provides sufficient proof that these tendencies exist. The fact that Mugabe was unable to make any inroads into Nkomo's Matabeleland stronghold, and the fact that voting was almost purely along tribal lines, was the major drawback to Mugabe's election victory. Mugabe, then, is faced with the option of dealing with Nkomo on the one-party state issue, or risking serious national friction. This he is anxious to avoid, as he is concerned with the dissident support for Nkomo and the ongoing political violence in Matabeleland.

Both sides, then, have a vested interest in ensuring that the unity talks succeed. Mugabe certainly does, because he obviously wants an end to violence that has been the main obstacle to national unity, and to give the Ndebele a role in the government, thus alleviating tribal divisions. He is well aware of the consequences of completely excluding this important minority group.

MUGABE'S STRATEGY:

Mugabe has used a subtle blend of 'carrot and stick' to draw Nkomo into negotiations. The 'carrot' being the offer of a last chance to gain some political influence; the 'stick' being increased pressure on Nkomo. The recent appointment of Enos Nkala, a bitter enemy of Nkomo's, as Minister of Home Affairs, is a case in point. Since Nkala's appointment, anti-ZAPU rhetoric has increased and Nkomo has complained of intimidation - five ZAPU officials (including senior army officers) have been arrested, allegedly for 'anti-state activities', and Nkomo has been deprived of his aides and bodyguards, as well as his passport. Furthermore, the replacement of Willie Mazarurwa - a long-time confidante of Nkomo's - as editor of the Sunday Mail, signalled Mugabe's growing impatience with Nkomo's ZAPU. Moreover, there is a possibility that Nkomo is under increasing pressure within his own party, from both wings, to step down and make way either for a moderate, willing to

negotiate on the one-party state deal, or a militant determined to carry on the struggle against it.

Unlike the attempted unity talks in the past, Nkomo now has much more to lose, so the pressure will be on him to ensure that an agreement is reached. The outcome, it is hoped by Mugabe, will be a merger of the two parties, which will take the form of ZAPU's disbandment and its complete integration into ZANU, with ex-ZAPU leaders possibly gaining a few of the cabinet posts (probably token). A recent suggestion is that Nkomo could be appointed second vice-President of the new party, which will be called 'ZANU' (with the 'PF' being dropped), which would make him effectively number three, behind Mugabe and deputy Prime Minister, Simon Muzenda. Unity between the two parties will facilitate transition to the one-party state.

Mugabe's path to socialism, it is generally believed, will continue with the 'cautious mixed economy route' that he has favoured to date. Mugabe has stressed that he is not prepared to disrupt the economy in the pursuit of the socialist goal. Socialism would be implemented in those areas where the economy would not be adversely affected. He has consistently stressed that Zimbabwe has inherited a capitalist economy and that all enterprises could not be nationalised immediately. These enterprises would continue to operate in a manner that contributes to the economic well-being of the country as a whole. To this end, he has stressed to the white farmers that he has no intention of nationalising agriculture - a sector that earned over Z\$500m in foreign exchange in 1984, despite the drought. It is probable that he realises that he cannot afford to nationalise this sector at this stage in Zimbabwe's development. Moreover, as the white farmers are the backbone of the economy, Mugabe will have to tread softly. A recently-launched petition to have the separate white voters roll abolished, organised by Harare lawyer, Mr. Mervyn Inmelman, allegedly draws considerable support from the farming community (but not the business community).

However, the state's role in other sectors has been steadily increasing, and there are indications that this will increase in the period until 1990. Currently the government has a stake in a variety of activities - in mining, steel, fuel procurement, banking, minerals and metals marketing, the pharmaceutical industry, agricultural product marketing and processing, the hotel industry, the media and farming - through state farms and co-operatives. Mugabe has, however, gone to great lengths to reassure private enterprise that for the foreseeable future there would be a role for them, albeit an increasingly limited one alongside government or co-operative enterprises. The state has also increased its involvement in the economy through the establishment of the Zimbabwe Development Bank (ZDB), which was set up to mobilise internal and external resources for economic development and to finance projects in all sectors of the economy. The government has a 51% share in the ZDB. The formation of the Zimbabwe Industrial Development Corporation (ZIDCO) - a holding company which has varied sectoral interests, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Labour Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, Dr. Frederick Shava, supports this trend.

CONCLUSION:

Mugabe appears to have successfully manoeuvred between the more radical elements (especially the ZANU Youth) in the party who have complained that the socialist revolution has lost its way, and the more pragmatic, moderate elements arguing for economic reality. Mugabe himself stresses that the socialist transformation is not a mechanical process, and cannot be achieved

overnight, and so far he has avoided any specific commitment to large-scale nationalisation and land appropriation. In his New Year message, Mugabe announced a Soviet-style five-year plan designed to set the country on a long-term socialist path and to transfer the wealth to the majority.

Mugabe said recently - 'we can wait until the time stipulated (by the Lancaster House Constitution) is up. The way we see ourselves going, is first to the elections, then to the consultations (with other parties on how to introduce the one-party state) and then the constitutional amendments.' It appears that he is committed to achieving it in this manner, with as much popular support as possible. Of course, the possibility exists that the unity talks may succeed in bringing about consensus on the one-party state before 1990, but if no consensus is reached, Mugabe has stressed, he will proceed regardless.

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