

Trajectory of Us and China Rivalry in Developing Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe's foreign policy has evolved from being characterised by a policy of reconciliation which earned it recognition on the international stage, to a policy based on African liberation fundamentals shaped by the country's land reform programme that

dominated Zimbabwe's international relations and foreign policy. This saw Zimbabwe's relations with the West becoming strained which resulted in the country being regarded as a pariah state. Zimbabwe sought to survive through new alliances and in turn focused on China and the Far East, which saw the formulation of the Look East policy (LEP). Zimbabwe's development from the turn of the century has been hamstrung by several factors which have emerged both internally and externally. The deterioration of the country's relations with the United States of America resulted in the imposition of sanctions and subsequently the country being unable to receive funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This heavily impacted Zimbabwe's development. Despite China pledging assistance in the midst of isolation, Zimbabwe's development has not improved much. This paper seeks to analyse how the competition between the US and China has affected Zimbabwe's development from 2000-2017. The paper is divided into five sections which are structured as follows; (i) introduction, (ii) bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and the US and China, (iii) the manifestation of trilateral relations (iv) effects of the rivalry on Zimbabwe and (v) the conclusion.

Keywords: Trilateral Relations, China, US, Zimbabwe, Rivalry

Introduction

Big power politics has taken centre stage in the 21st century pitting the US and China. The two powers have escalated rivalry in almost every sector, from technological issues to economic matters, with a turn to geopolitical issues emerging (Usman et al., 2022). The rivalry between the two powers is creating a new world order to which all regions will be subjected (Wang, 2020). Despite the US and China not conceding to being engaged in a scramble for Africa, the region has turned out to be a sphere of competition rather than cooperation. Zimbabwe, which is the focus of this paper, is one such country which has not been spared

from the effects of the competition between the two rivals. Zimbabwe is a country that has enjoyed bilateral relations with the US and China during the liberation struggle days and after 1980 when it attained Independence. Matunhu (2011:68) argues that Africa remains a victim of external forces which dominate political, economic and social affairs and this is true of African countries.

Zimbabwe's reliance on the US and China has drawn the country into a trilateral matrix. Dependence on the two powers for funding has left Zimbabwe in a quagmire. China seized an opportunity to acquire market for its products while at the same time gaining raw materials under favourable terms. Zimbabwe serves as an impeccable example of how the US-China rivalry included other countries before it intensified later in the 21st century. While there may be arguments that Zimbabwe is not the central target in the formulation of the US foreign policy, it must be noted that any country with strong links to a bigger power whose ideals challenge the western style of democracy automatically become a threat to the US national security (Chigora 2007:177). The period 2000-2017 is when the scramble for Zimbabwe between the US and China was at its uttermost. This indicates that the competition between the US and China ceased to be unipolar long before the rivalry escalated into the public eye. Furthermore, this period stretches to the time that Zimbabwe's former President Robert Mugabe was removed from power in 2017. Mugabe plays an influential role in which course the politics of the country took hence the limitation to the period 2000-2017. The fact that Mugabe was confident enough to stand up against the dictates of Western liberal democracy created more tension between Zimbabwe and the US. This explains how China was roped into the relationship, with China joining in with its own set of scores to settle (Huda and Xinlei, 2022).

Zimbabwe's bilateral Relations with the US

Zimbabwe has enjoyed close bilateral relations with the US in the pre and post-independence era. The leader of the liberation struggle who later became the first President of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, was a darling of the Western countries, the UK and the US. He received education under British Curricula and later became a teacher who stood out among many. The general populace described Mugabe as being more British than the British themselves and former British Foreign Secretary, Lord Hurd, expressed that Mugabe was a product of the British empire who knew all there is about being British (Landale, 2017).

In terms of the US, it was the first country to provide bilateral assistance to Zimbabwe in 1980 during the Carter administration. During the Reagan administration, this sense of amity

did not remain the same, although the US and the UK remained Zimbabwe's main bilateral donors during its first five years of independence. Relations between Zimbabwe and the US took a turn due to differences regarding Reagan's administration handling of apartheid South Africa and Namibia. This led to the US's enforcement of its regional strategy on constructive engagement which led to a reassessment of Zimbabwe and US relations on both sides. The US

imposed aid cuts in Zimbabwe due to "Zimbabwe's attitude" with regards to South Africa and Namibia issues. Relations between Zimbabwe and the US showed indications of recovery at the end of the 1980s in spite of their differing opinions on ending apartheid in South Africa.

Chigora and Dewa (2009) assert that the rivalry between international actors develops from the conflict of values which is characterised as "the pursuit for divergent national interests". The divergent view between Zimbabwe and powerful international actors such as

the US and Britain with regards to the land issue that resulted in the imposition of targeted sanctions could be explained by the above perspective on national interests. Of which, the cooperation between states exists primarily when there is a commonality of interests. The absence of the same national interests presents a level of hostility. This is portrayed by the state

of relations between Zimbabwe and the West especially under Mugabe (Chigora and Dewa, 2009).

Scarnecchia (2011) points out important phases in which the US stood and supported Zimbabwe. These phases span from the pre-independence period to the post-independence era. These include US former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger's 1976 shuttle diplomacy, the pressure for a peace settlement after the Lancaster House agreement and the purported cover-up for the 1981-1983 atrocities against civilians commonly referred to as Gukurahundi. American scholar, Nancy Mitchell, draws insight into the development of relations between Zimbabwe and the US dating back to 1975 when the Cold War first arrived in Southern Africa. The author chronicles the arrival of 36 000 Cuban troops in Angola which ruffled feathers among Americans for fear that Soviet influence was now spreading to another region. Angola's politics was in shambles as was the case with Zimbabwe which to the Americans meant that Southern Rhodesia, later Zimbabwe, was the next target. The scholar highlights that a prolonged struggle in Southern Rhodesia would have attracted Cuban and Soviet assistance and this prompted the US administration to work towards bringing peace to the Southern African country. The political instability in Southern Rhodesia at that time pitted Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo and Bishop Abel Muzorewa. Given that Nkomo was already receiving assistance from the Soviets, the US opted to back Mugabe who exhibited high intellectual prowess. This resulted in Kissinger visiting the region in 1976.

Mitchell argues that fears of Cuban and Soviet involvement in Southern Rhodesia heightened speculations of increased instability in the region hence the pressure on the British

to work with Mugabe. In particular, they feared that the Soviets and Cubans might instigate a

war between Apartheid South Africa and the Frontline States in order to gain a foothold in the

region. The Frontline States was a loosely formed alliance of African countries that were against apartheid in South Africa. The group included Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Carter administration directed efforts toward bringing the freedom fighters and the Ian Smith administration to the negotiating table. Mitchell points out how this laid the groundwork for the Lancaster House Conference which brought peace to the region. The author explains how President Jimmy Carter himself had experience with civil rights movements and was quick to sympathise with Mugabe and the cause he was fighting for. Scarnecchia adds that the US was in support of the idea of a non-racial state that Mugabe was advocating for. This meant that white farmers and business owners would be allowed to operate in the country after the power transition. This made Mugabe popular in Washington (Scarnecchia, 2011). Furthermore, the Carter administration favoured Mugabe's ascendance to power ahead of Bishop Muzorewa and Nkomo. Nkiwane (1993:207) highlights that Zimbabwe stood as a target for US' bigger plan given its strategic central location in the region. The author argues that for the US, stability in Zimbabwe would serve as a buffer to its investments in the then apartheid South

Africa. This was complemented by the sound economy that existed in Zimbabwe after independence which it had inherited from its former colonisers.

At independence, Zimbabwe's appreciation of the gesture was evidenced by America being the first to open an embassy in Harare while they snubbed the Soviets (Mitchell 2017). Former President Mugabe had very close relations with former US Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush (senior). Former President Mugabe made a State visit to the US in 1991 at the invitation of Former President Bush signalling the excellent relations between the two countries. Scarnecchia (2011) is of the view that Mugabe was under pressure from the US to show his anti-communist commitment hence he had no option but to delay approving the Soviets' request to forge diplomatic ties through setting up a diplomatic mission. The country's ability to maintain good relations with the Western countries paid off in the form of donor funding. Zimbabwe received aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) since its independence and was dependent on them for the execution of its programmes. Moyo and Tsakata, (2017:178) argue that the World Bank has been the largest donor to the country since 1980. The World Bank reports indicate that between 1980 and 2000, Zimbabwe had borrowed approximately US\$1.5 billion from the financial institution. This was to be used for reconstruction after the liberation struggle and general social development.

The post-colonial world has been a victim of conflicting interests which has resulted in conditional cooperation in the event that similar interests are prevalent. This was first evident in the period from 1981-1985 which witnessed alleged government perpetrated violence against civilians in the Southern region of Zimbabwe in a campaign known as Gukurahundi. Thousands of civilians reportedly lost their lives in what appeared to be Mugabe's way of enforcing authority among those that opposed him. Scarnecchia (2011) indicates that the US opted to turn a blind eye to the atrocities under the pretext that they were merely ethnic differences. The author notes that the US was not concerned with the damage that the internal issues would have as long as they did not affect their interests. However, Zimbabwe's relations with the US from the year 2000 took a tumultuous turn leading to deteriorated relations between the 2 countries. The country has been under sanctions instigated by the US since early 2000. This has had a considerable effect on domestic politics and ultimately relations with the international community.

Reasons as to why Zimbabwe was placed under sanctions have been a contentious issue from the US and Zimbabwe's perspectives. While the narratives differ between either party, this section will analyse the events and influences that can best be described as the catalysts to the end result of the imposition of sanctions. While a number of factors contributed to the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe, the land issue was at the centre of the matter. Part of the Lancaster House Agreement in 1979 was that Britain would fund the land redistribution exercise in the years to come. By the late 1990s, the Zimbabwean government was under pressure from liberation war veterans who were demanding compensation for the role they played in liberating the country from colonialists. In 1997, The government decided to pacify the situation by awarding the war veterans a once-off payment of \$50 000 in local currency which was equivalent to US\$4,205 (Chipaike and Mhandara, 2013:150). Maunganidze et al (2021) argue that this was one of the misinformed economic decisions that plunged the economy into a crisis. The pressure for land redistribution continued to mount and as such the government was forced to act. In September 1998, the UK as former colonisers together with other donors held the International Donor Conference in Harare. According to British Parliamentary publications, the conference discussed the procedure under which the land

distribution was to be taken, placing emphasis on transparency, fairness and adherence to economic interests. Zimbabwe and its former colonial master failed to reach a consensus resulting in the Zimbabwe government adopting an unpopular course of action as Britain reneged on its earlier pledge.

In the year 2000, Zimbabwe initiated the Land Reform Programme which repossessed land from white commercial farmers and redistributed it to the black indigenous people. The World Bank reports that during the exercise, 80% of farming land was listed for redistribution. This ultimately affected agricultural production, employment levels as the majority of farm workers were left jobless and industries that relied on agricultural raw materials suffered. The land issue had been a contentious one since independence. Ndakaripa (2021:97) notes that the whole land reform programme was conducted in a manner that was contrary to the agreed principles. The programme was reportedly violent which gave rise to disregard for property rights and human rights. The affected farmers later sought justice from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) tribunal court concerning the matter given that they were never compensated for their losses but it was to no effect (Mapuva, 2014:32). The US accused the Zimbabwean government of undermining democratic principles while the latter justified her actions of correcting the unfair distribution of land which characterised colonial rule (Ndakaripa, 2021). The Zimbabwean government regarded the sanctions as a mechanism through which the US sought to destabilise the country's internal politics (Ogbonna, 2017:34). During the same period, Zimbabwe held Parliamentary elections which were marred with political violence and intimidation in the pre-election period. The conduct of the elections was heavily condemned by the international community and civil society organisations citing gross human rights abuse (Chingono, 2010:69). The environment that ensued made Zimbabwe a good candidate for the US-instigated sanctions whose foreign policy is bent on spreading and upholding democratic principles (Portela and Van Laer, 2022:29).

Zimbabwe conducted a referendum in 2000, whereby a draft Constitution that included the compulsory acquisition clause was rejected. This was Mugabe's first loss since independence, it also led to the withdrawal of contested farms which made war veterans enraged. The Land Reform Programme accelerated due to the fact that between 1998 and 2000 only 90,000 hectares had been resettled in comparison to the 1,000,000 that was originally foreseen. This resulted in 11 million hectares transferred within three years, this was southern Africa's largest transfer of property to occur in peacetime. Almost 4000 white farmers were replaced by 7200 black commercial farmers and 120,000 blacks were recipients on small farms by October 2003. The Land Reform Programme facilitated in Mugabe positioning himself internationally as an antagonist of neo-conservatism and neo-liberal economics. Zimbabwe's Land Reform policy has also been construed as a challenge to rich nations and repudiation to run the economy according to the rules of the World Bank and the IMF. Analysis found that the major turning point in Zimbabwe's foreign policy under Mugabe was the Land Reform Programme, because it affected the political economy of the whole southern African region.

Zimbabwe's bilateral relations with China

China's relations with African states date back many decades ago though it gained momentum in the 21st century. Of significance would be the reasons behind the relations in the past and the present day. Ultimately it all points to a China that has been active in providing

assistance to its counterparts in the international community. Mhandara et al (2013:80) are of the view that the fact that China made no attempts to colonise any part of Africa at a time when other countries scrambled for Africa has made China's relations with African countries more attractive. This can be compounded by the fact China appears more as an ally than a superpower.

Zimbabwe and China's relations date back to 1963 when the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was established. ZANU was a crucial movement that spearheaded the liberation of Zimbabwe. Notably, ZANU was in opposition to the late Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) that was under the support of the Soviet Union. ZANU upon its establishment sought support from the Soviet Union just as other liberation movements had done. Upon failing to receive support from the Soviet Union, ZANU turned to

the People's Republic of China and the party was offered military and strategic support to execute the liberation struggle. This informs how relations between Zimbabwe and China began through the latter's support of Zimbabwe's struggle against colonialism and racial segregation (Mvutungayi 2010). In essence, through the support of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, China strategically propagated its anti-Soviet campaign in Southern Africa.

China assisted Zimbabwe through the training of its ZANU military wing the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). In this regard, ZANLA's military strategies underwent a vast transformation fundamentally through the adoption of conventional

military tactics and the implementation of the Maoist model that entailed mass mobilisation aimed at revolutionising the then Rhodesian black community. The ZANU leadership that included Mugabe, continued to adopt Chinese principles and approaches into their own structures. In essence, these influences are still fundamental and have continued to be incorporated in the present-day governance and economic relations between the two countries.

This is premised on Chinese socialisation that was embraced before independence and during the Chinese engagement with leaders of the current ZANU-PF party which is in power.

Zimbabwe's relations with China can be divided into two phases. The first dates back to the days of the liberation struggle. The second phase commences under the auspices of economic assistance. Zimbabwe first built relations with China during the former's liberation struggle from its coloniser, Britain. Mhandara and Chipaika (2013:213) highlight that the relations between the 2 countries at that time were largely politically motivated as China sought a foothold in Africa. Being a people who were fighting from a disadvantaged position characterised by lack of adequate funding, China was instrumental in equipping the freedom fighters. This was done in the form of the provision of arms and ammunition. The guerrilla fighters who were inexperienced during the struggle were given some military training in China. They were also taught Maoist principles which were crucial in the post-independence era to implement the equitable distribution of resources to all citizens (Manyeruke et al., 2013:205). The Maoist ideology embedded in the liberation fighters extended to all sectors and continues to be in use in the modern-day governance of Zimbabwe.

It is important to acknowledge the principles that guide Zimbabwe and China relations through the appreciation of a historical background of their relations. The two countries have over the years had a reciprocal reverence for each other's self-governance systems. The relationship between Zimbabwe and China has been founded upon mutual respect while upholding the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of either country

(Mhandara and Chipaike, 2013). The authors make reference to the Tiananmen Square disaster of 1989 which resulted in China being condemned by Western countries for human rights abuses. Contrary to the stance that the Western countries took, the then Zimbabwean President, Mugabe, stood by China in the face of widespread criticism. Such diplomatic relations cemented ties between the two countries. It is noteworthy that China continues to overlook or rather “distance” itself from the internal affairs of states it relates with. This appeared to augur well with Zimbabwe which was bent on giving primacy to being independent without any interference. Zimbabwe under the leadership of President Mugabe took a practical approach with regard to its relations with the international community. In so doing the country adopted a non-aligned policy which guaranteed benefits from the West as well as China (Chipaike and Bischoff, 2019).

Relations between Beijing and Harare were affected by the wave of communism which resulted in the latter aligning more with the West than with China. The later deterioration of relations between Zimbabwe and the US following the implementation of the Land Reform Programme meant that an alternative had to be found as donor funding from multi-lateral institutions ceased. The economy was already declining and Mugabe being a strategist as he was, turned to the East for help thereby reviving the old relations. This was done in the form of the Look East Policy (LEP). In an Independence Day commemorations speech in 2005, Mugabe exclaimed, “We have turned east, where the sun rises, and given our back to the west,

where the sun sets” (The Guardian). During the period when Zimbabwe enjoyed cordial relations with the West, China was in the process of developing its economy through the ‘open door policy’. At a time when Zimbabwe sought an ally following its isolation from the West, China was also in need of raw materials and new markets for its products. This birthed an attraction between the two countries as each country appeared to serve the interests of the other (Chipaike and Bischoff, 2019).

The relations between Zimbabwe and China blossomed further when the US imposed embargoes against Zimbabwe in 2005 and 2008. China as a member of the United Nations Security Council exercised its veto power together with Russia to block further sanctions against Zimbabwe. This strengthened the basis for the LEP. In an act of reciprocating the favour, Zimbabwe supported China’s anti-secession law. A government official from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs was quoted by Xinhua news stating that, *“We in Zimbabwe fully support the decision to adopt the Anti-Secession Law, which first upholds China’s basic policy of peaceful reunification and regards the non-peaceful means only as the last resort to stop Taiwan’s independence. Zimbabwe’s position is that Taiwan is part of the Chinese territory and therefore supports the policy of “one China two systems.”* In turn, Beijing supported Harare without interfering in any of the domestic affairs therein.

Manifestation of the trilateral relations Zimbabwe-US-China

In the year 2001, the US passed what became known as the Zimbabwe Democracy and Recovery Act (ZIDERA). ZIDERA empowered the US to use its voting rights to influence financial institutions to cease providing assistance to Zimbabwe in the form of credit lines, loans or debt cancellation (Nzaro et al., 2011:105). This affected the country which heavily relied on assistance from multilateral financial institutions. According to a WB report in 2005, financial assistance to Zimbabwe had reduced in comparison to the level it was at in the 1990s. The report noted that the World Bank was now limited to funding humanitarian assistance programmes which were exacerbated by the spread of HIV/AIDS

coupled with drought. This worsened the situation as the country was deprived of the requisite funds to boost its economy.

ZIDERA paved the way for a series of sanctions that were to follow. Ogbonna (2017:35) points out that the sanctions that followed after the implementation of ZIDERA were targeted at certain individuals within the Zimbabwe government. This is why the US has always argued that the sanctions have not affected the economy given that they were targeted ones aimed at influencing change in behaviour of politicians. In 2003, the US began issuing travel bans and asset freezes on high-profile officials in the government of Zimbabwe (Ndakaripa, 2021:97). The US Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) blocked all inward and outward bound telegraphic transfers by Zimbabwe. They went on to impose fines on any banking institution that attempted to facilitate transfers on Zimbabwe's behalf. This meant that Zimbabwe could not receive any investments thereby alienating the country (Nzaro et al., 2011:108). It is important to note that the general population was involuntarily affected by the sanctions (Kabalira, 2021:20). Chingono (2010:70) argues that while several other factors such as corruption played a part in the economic crisis, the role of the sanctions can never be downplayed. This can be attributed to the fact that Zimbabwe was already dependent on donor funds for its public sector programmes as such the absence of funding hampered the execution and provision of public goods and services.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) highlighted that the US has sanctioned over 141 individuals and companies from 2003 to date. Ndakaripa (2021) adds that most individuals who have been removed from the list were upon their demise. The list continues to be updated as it incorporates more government officials. The US has not shown any intention to remove the sanctions while the economic situation continues to deteriorate. The WB's reports indicate that as of March 2022, the external debt had reached approximately US\$14.5 billion. This indicates the gravity of the crisis that prevailed in the country. In the BBC report, it was stated that President Donald Trump had said that the sanctions would only be removed upon implementation of political reforms. The Zimbabwean government on the other hand continues to blame sanctions for the economic crisis.

Relations between Zimbabwe and the US mainly deteriorated following the implementation of the Land Reform Programme. This meant that an alternative had to be found as donor funding from multi-lateral institutions ceased. The economy was already declining and Mugabe being a strategist as he was, turned to the East for help. This was done in the form of the LEP. During the period when Zimbabwe enjoyed cordial relations with the West, China was in the process of developing its economy through the 'open-door policy'. The relations between Zimbabwe and China blossomed further when the US imposed embargoes against Zimbabwe in 2008. China as a member of the United Nations Security Council exercised its veto power together with Russia to block further sanctions against Zimbabwe. This strengthened the basis for the LEP. Mudavanhu (2014:284) argues that the LEP was initiated as a survival strategy in the face of the US which was blocking opportunities for Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe reaped some benefits from its ties with China through the LEP. Donor funding had reduced drastically such that the Chinese assistance came in at the right moment. Alao (2014:8) highlights that between 2003 and 2013, the intensified trade interactions between Zimbabwe and China were profound to such an extent that no sector was devoid of the Chinese touch. Chinese influence in the country was evident from mining to agriculture to the telecommunications sector. The author notes that the mining sector drew much interest from the Chinese and many investments were channelled toward that

sector.

Anjin is a major Chinese company which entered into a joint venture with the government of Zimbabwe in order for it to mine diamonds at Marange Diamond fields. Details of the arrangement made privy to the public highlighted that the Chinese would build the Zimbabwe Defence College for an estimated cost of US\$98million in exchange for mining concessions (Alao, 2014:10). Some of China's biggest companies commenced operations in Zimbabwe's mining sector due to the presence of minerals such as diamonds and platinum (Mhandara and Chipaike, 2013:216). Among these are China North Industries Corporation (NORINCO), Wanbao Rexco State Corporation and Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Company (AFECC).

China has also made strides in the energy sector in Zimbabwe. As of April 2022, plans were in progress for Chinese independent power producers to add an additional 600 megawatts of power to the country's 900-megawatt thermal power station. According to Xinhuanet, an Asian company, Sinohydro increased Zimbabwe's Hydroelectric power station output by 300mw in 2018 at a cost of US\$533 million. China has become Zimbabwe's biggest target market for tobacco and cotton and Zimbabwe received agricultural equipment. According to the Chinese government, Zimbabwe exports approximately 60% of its tobacco products to China. Tian Ze, a Chinese company started operating in Zimbabwe in 2004 and is credited for developing the tobacco industry in the country. By 2016, tobacco exports to China through Tian Ze had exceeded US\$1.5 billion, with signs of growth evident (China Embassy).

It is evident that while the US was pushing toward total isolation of Zimbabwe, China was pulling in another direction. It is from this context that Zimbabwe emerges again as a battle ground for different ideologies as witnessed in the Cold War era. The role that the US played in Mugabe's ascendancy to power is a reflection of the fact that the country is not a newcomer to being a proxy where big powers are in rivalry. The case that played out during the Cold War turns out to have returned in the US-China rivalry in the 21st century. The great powers once again seek to settle scores through proxies at the expense of development in the targeted countries. China's support to a country under US sanctions arguably points to a strategy by Beijing to settle scores with Washington that Harare as a proxy fails to recognise. China's continued provision of loans to a country with an economy that is underperforming arguably indicates a strategy to maintain control through debt entrapment. The US has continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe despite the existence of sanctions. This is a sign that shows that the bigger plan for the US and China is to have control over the country through dependence. The US President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) donated US\$163 million in 2020 and pledged over US\$230 million for the year 2021. All donations are channelled towards the fight against HIV/AIDS and the provision of assistance to those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Effects of the US-China rivalry on Zimbabwe

To date, Zimbabwe is experiencing an economic crisis which has left the general populace living in extreme poverty as a result of the US-China rivalry which has affected economic development. The economic crisis has even affected human development Life expectancy reaching a record low of 37 years in 2005 (Besada and Moyo, 2008). The authors make reference to the UN World Food Program report of 2007 which estimated that by end of 2008, 4,1 million people were in need of food aid. In 2021, USAID donated more than US\$86 million which assisted approximately 1,8 million food insecure individuals (US Embassy). The effect

of the collapse of the economy became evident as the GDP fell by more than 40% between 2000 and 2008 (Devereux and Kapingidza 2020:296). Unemployment rates skyrocketed 90% in 2008 (Mlambo and Raftopolous, 2010). Inflation reached unprecedented levels while the local currency depreciated in value making it nearly impossible to trade with other nations. Between 2009 and 2016, the government's budget grew from US\$1 billion to US\$4.4 billion. The education and health sector deteriorated due to lack of funding. Intermittent water supplies due to unserviced or depreciated equipment gave rise to water borne diseases and a cholera outbreak was experienced in 2008 (Mlambo and Raftopolous, 2010:3). In this section, the paper will focus on how various sectors suffered from the economic crisis.

Devereux and Kapingidza (2020:273) note that African countries have relied on external donors from the last century in order to be able to finance their developmental programmes. The authors highlight how such dependence gives the donors some level of soft power over the recipient country. Zimbabwe is evidence to this. The imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe meant that the government could no longer directly receive funds from donors as is the case in most countries. The US would now fund programmes through its agencies such as USAID. For a government that was reliant on donor funding to finance its budgetary requirements, this meant that sectors not covered by the agencies would be affected. State coffers were running dry hence government could only finance a meagre portion of the budget.

In a report by Voice of America (VOA) in 2015, the organisation indicated that the health ministry was in dire need of funding. The government and donor funds could not finance the ministry's required allocation for operations. Government reportedly allocated US\$53 million to the ministry while donors chipped in with US\$147 million yet public hospitals were in need of US\$142 million meant for operations alone (Chifera 2015). The Zimbabwe National Health Financing Policy report of 2016 highlighted that Zimbabwe's health allocations remained well below the World Health Organisation recommendations and the requirements for priority sectors. This meant that health facilities were now a privilege reserved for the rich leaving the poor to die from diseases which could have been treated (Kamaruddin and Huda, 2022:2).

The imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe gave rise to inflation due to the absence of adequate foreign currency inflows together with an imbalance between exports and imports in the country. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) bemoaned the fact that the negative image that has accompanied the imposition of sanctions has reduced investor confidence as a result Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has reduced. FDI inflow took a dip from US\$444,3 million in 1998 to US\$3.8 million in 2003. The US Department of State reported in 2019 that for over a decade, FDI coming into Zimbabwe had remained below US\$500 million. The prices of commodities continued to rise to such an extent that most basic goods became a luxury as the general populace could not afford to buy them. Wines (2006) in an article in the New York times reported that the country's inflation rate was the world's highest for a long period.

The economic crisis has caused forced migration upon citizens of Zimbabwe as they sought greener pastures away from a country bedevilled by a seemingly unending crisis. Potts (2006:288) highlights that from 2000, formal employment became extremely scarce spelling out poverty on the millions of job seekers. In an Amnesty International report quoted by Associated Press News, it is estimated that 3 million Zimbabweans have left the country in search of work in the neighbouring country South Africa. This has strained relations between the two countries as most of the people are illegal migrants using illegal ports of entry into South Africa. Despite the fact that the job seekers are now being subjected to xenophobia in

the neighbouring country, they continue to pursue that option in the face of a deepening economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Ndakaripa (2021:108) notes that the regional grouping, SADC, has argued that Zimbabwe's economic crisis, which came about as a result of sanctions, has put pressure on social amenities in neighbouring countries due to the mass migration of Zimbabweans in search for jobs. SADC has taken a lead role to call for the removal of sanctions with the hope that the removal of the measures will assist Zimbabwe to regain its position as the bread basket of Africa. The African Union (AU) has concurred with SADC pointing out that the sanctions have negatively impacted the economy which in turn has brought suffering to the people (Ndakaripa, 2021).

It is an undeniable fact that China has made several investments in Zimbabwe coupled with grants and loans. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the Chinese government continues to invest in various sectors. However, despite all the investments, there is no end in sight to the economic crisis. Chipaike and Bischoff (2019) argue that China has ignored pleas for financially supporting the government. The Chinese have opted to focus on investing in sectors where they can reap more than what they have devoted toward the projects. Chan (2014) argued that it was never the intention of China to financially rescue Zimbabwe but rather they seized an opportunity to loot minerals in return for loans. This has left Zimbabwe in a deeper crisis as the country has accumulated a huge debt. US State reports indicate that in 2019, Zimbabwe's arrears to international financial institutions and the external debt which includes loans from China was over US\$10,7 billion. Such an external debt does not spell out any financial assistance toward economic recovery.

It is prudent to note that Zimbabwe had a role to play in the economic crisis that continues to this date. Sachikonye (2002) highlights that the decision by the government to award the liberation war veterans with hefty payouts had a negative impact on the economy. In November 1997, the local Zimbabwean currency lost value by 50% against the US dollar upon the issuance of the payouts. This further increased the budget deficit. The author also points to the country's participation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war which began in 1998, whose cost was unbudgeted for by the government. The huge military budget which has not been revealed to the public points to a major financial strain on an economy that was not stable enough to cater for such exorbitant expenses. Corruption and nepotism have also been cited as cancerous ills in the country and have exacerbated the economic challenges.

Conclusion

Diplomacy has played an important role in ensuring that the rivalry between the US and China does not escalate into military conflict. As a result, the 2 powers continue to counter each other through proxies as they engage in purportedly humanitarian assistance projects. What has become more apparent is the fact that creating dependency syndrome works best for major powers and they will seize any opportunity to ensure that a country is dependent on the bigger power in a fight to maintain or gain hegemonic status. The developing world remains under the dictates of the developed countries and in this case, the interests of the US and China will continue to supersede those of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe faced socio-economic and political challenges between 2000 and 2009, which saw its traditional Western aid donors and trade partners disengaging from the country.

In turn, during a period of western isolation and sanctions China and Zimbabwe's relations strengthened. China supported Zimbabwe through the provision of economic and political

support, relations between the two countries became more pragmatic and commercial but remained grounded on the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in one another's internal affairs. China and Zimbabwe relations were further strengthened through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), an initiative established by China in 2000, that became an instrumental aspect that helped institutionalise China's symbolic diplomacy towards Africa.

Zimbabwe formulated the LEP in 2003, as a means of discovering alternative sources of financial and diplomatic support due to its isolation from its traditional partners. The policy was aimed at also attracting investors and political allies from South-East Asia, the Far East, and Pacific countries. In that regard, Zimbabwe established cordial relations with China, Malaysia, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Iran, and Pakistan, among others. The LEP was originally meant to engage the Asian and Pacific countries in a broad sense, however, the focus shifted to China. This was premised on the fact that China was adaptable to providing a platform that allowed the two countries to pursue their own national interests whilst simultaneously assisting each other to curtail Western supremacy.

Engaging China was also a feasible option as Zimbabwe and China shared prolonged historical ties. Mugabe utilised the LEP to reaffirm Zimbabwe's role on the international stage and legitimacy in the country and abroad. It was also a means of extending Zimbabwe's government sources of aid, as it had been reliant for long on loans from the IMF, World Bank and Western countries to fund its developmental ventures. In addition to assisting Zimbabwe through loans and grants, it also facilitated by investing in the country's main economic sectors. This was due to Zimbabwe's declining FDI inflows as a result of the withdrawal of support from its traditional partners. Zimbabwe and China have signed several bilateral cooperation agreements. China has been involved in Zimbabwe's development projects, however, there was a significant increase in the 2000s. Chinese investments in Zimbabwe were mainly focused on the extractive sectors, manufacturing, agriculture, retail, transport, and infrastructural development. China is transitioning from securing essential inputs to acquiring stakes in potentially productive enterprises in Zimbabwe. Bilateral trade between China and Zimbabwe involves the export of raw materials and in return imports of manufactured goods, transport, electricals, machinery, and other equipment.

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