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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Greetings, everyone. Good morning in the United States and good afternoon or evening in other parts of the world. We're delighted to have you with us today for a discussion on Zimbabwe and its prospects for peace and security. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. And along with Vonda Felbab-Brown, I co-direct the Africa Security Initiative.

And today we are joined by a panel of distinguished experts with a lot of experience Southern Africa and a lot of knowledge about Zimbabwe as well as its neighborhood. And we're here to discuss at this pivotal moment in Zimbabwe's history an ongoing saga of difficulty in the aftermath of the long rule of President Mugabe and now a transition to a succession of some type that's been ongoing since with uncertain prospects for Zimbabwe's democracy and its economy in future years.

So, the full agenda is before us today. We are going to essentially take a blue sky approach to how to think about Zimbabwe at this moment in history, at this moment in the Biden administration, at this moment in the recovery from COVID, and everything else that may be of interest to you. We will invite the audience, all of you, to submit questions at [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu). And otherwise, you can tweet them in as well through the Twitter handle on our website and we'll get to those in the second half-hour, roughly speaking.

But let me first briefly introduce the panel. And I'm just, again, very grateful and delighted to have them with us today. I'm going to begin with Dewa Mayhinga, who has spent a good deal of time on the ground in Zimbabwe in his career, working on democracy; created a Democracy Institute there. He's a longstanding scholar with expertise in Southern Africa in general. He now is the Southern Africa field representative and senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, where he has kept a close eye in his writings that you can find online on the political process, but also the legal and human rights situation in Zimbabwe, trying to pressure the new government to try to do better by its own people than the Mugabe regime, especially in its latter years. And we welcome him today and we're very glad to have him with us.

Piers Pigou also is a Southern Africa-based scholar and with a lot of experience in South Africa, but also regional responsibilities now that the International Crisis Group. And his resume is a remarkable litany of projects and experiences in dealing with South Africa's own complex transition in recent years and decades, but he has kept a close eye on the entire region as well and will have a lot to share with us today from his perspective. As many of you know, International Crisis Group has really perhaps become the paramount organization for real-time monitoring of political and security crises around the world. And we're delighted he's joined us as well.

Ambassador Michelle Gavin is an extremely accomplished American scholar and public servant. She was the Obama administration's ambassador to Botswana as well as the Southern Africa Development Council about a decade ago for several years. She is now at the Council on Foreign Relations. She also worked at the Africa Center. So, she has really worked in a remarkable combination of approaches and responsibilities as a scholar, as an activist, as an ambassador, and certainly a person who understands, again, the broader region extremely well. Ambassador Gavin, we're delighted to have you with us today.

And also Ambassador George Ward, whose biography really reads like a recapitulation of some of the highlights of modern American foreign policy history. He was actually in the German Embassy at the time of reunification early in his career with important responsibilities there. He has been U.S. ambassador to Namibia at the culminating point of a 30-year Foreign Service officer career. He worked with the U.S. Institute of Peace. He spent time on the ground in Iraq during the difficult early days after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. And in recent years he's been heading up the Africa Initiative at the Center for Naval Analyses -- excuse me, the Institute for Defense Analysis. And delighted to have him with us today as well.

The way we'll proceed, I'll stop in a minute here, you've heard about as much from me as I hope you'll have to because the expertise lies elsewhere. And we're going to begin with Dewa and then Piers and then to Ambassador Gavin and Ambassador Ward.

And in my first round of questions, it's really going to be the same question for everyone. Tell us what we need to know about how you see Zimbabwe's recent history and where we are today. So, it'll be essentially a taking stock of the country's recent political and economic history, also with any observations about COVID that seem relevant given how much that crisis has affected everyone around the world. And that will be round one.

We may accelerate in the second part of that. In other words, we may get enough material from the first couple of panelists that the second couple of panelists can then start to segue already into policy recommendations. And that will be our main second focus and perhaps the most important part of today's discussion. So, I'm hoping that each panelists will offer one or two big ideas on where they think Zimbabwe itself needs to go, but also where the international community, whether it's the United States, whether it's the World Bank, whether it's any other international organization or group of countries working with Zimbabwe or trying to help Zimbabwe, including the private sector and the NGO world, what they can do to best get Zimbabwe beyond this difficult period, which I think it's fair to say has characterized most of its recent past.

So, thank you for being with us. And let me start now, Dewa, with you. Could you please, you

know, again, in just a couple of minutes, give us your biggest takeaway about how you see the country where you've spent so much time and that you know so well today? Where is Zimbabwe at this moment in history? Over to you.

MR. MAYHINGA: Thank you so much, Michael, for the question and for the invitation. So, I will start off with the story of a human rights lawyer in Zimbabwe, Siphon Malunga, who works for the George Soros Open Society Foundation. He is regarded as a key critic of the former government and now he and his partners, if they are found (phonetic), being invaded and being taken over by senior government officials because they are viewed as government critics. So, there is an ongoing crackdown on government critics, which includes invasions of properties, but we also know that there have been abductions, kidnappings, and increased incidents of torture by state agents in Zimbabwe, arbitrary arrests of opposition activists or civil society activists have been going on, led by security forces without justice or accountability.

President Mnangagwa, who took over from Mugabe in 2017 after the military coup in November, repeatedly, together with his senior officials, has been promising to deliver governance reforms to mark the post-Mugabe era, but he has so far taken very few concrete steps to improve people's lives, to rein in rampant corruption, and to demonstrate commitment to justice, to human rights, and to respect for the rule of law.

Zimbabwe is now openly a military state. And the military controls the Parliament through which now there have been changes in laws to control the judiciary, including the appointment of the senior members of the judiciary, including the chief justice of the country. We also know that the moves by the authorities to weaponize the law, to ensure that the law can be used to silence critics, to control even civil society groups, to control the Zimbabwean Bar Association, the Law Society of Zimbabwe. There are moves because the ruling ZANU-PF Party enjoys a two-thirds majority in Parliament, so it can do that with no hindrances. The opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, is severely weakened and has been subjected to this crackdown that is ongoing.

We know that President Mnangagwa is really presiding over a plutocracy. There is massive corruption and large-scale looting of natural resources. There are so many dubious economic business deals, some of them involving partners with different military groups, including with the Chinese, in the areas of mining, agriculture, and construction. And this is resulting in a looting of resources.

And we know that the U.S. Government, and more recently the U.K. government, placed some of the individuals on tightening sanctions because of corruption and theft of natural resources. For example, there is the president's close relative, Kudakwashe Tagwirei, who was placed on permanent sanctions because of this massive corruption that is happening in the country.

We know that President Mnangagwa is also using this corruption, its patronage, to buy off support from the senior members of the military, and security forces. So, survival at the top now depends on the looting of resources, massive human rights abuses, and attacks on critics, including kidnappings and torture of opponents. And no reforms that are happening and with a severely weakened opposition with no electoral reforms, and key election management institutions controlled of the government and ruling ZANU-PF Party. Prospects for credible free and fair elections which are due in 2023 are very slim.

And so this is the situation within now the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: increasing poverty and hopelessness in the people. There are little prospects for improved governance, democracy, and human rights in Zimbabwe; and that the current government of Mnangagwa, which is increasingly militarized and has moved away from respect for human rights and democracy.

So, I would say those would be my initial remarks. Thank you so much, Michael. Back to you.

MR. O'HANLON: Dewa, that's just as disconcerting as it is concise and very informative. So, thank you for setting the table, especially on the agenda for politics and human rights and democracy.

Piers, please pick up wherever you'd like. And, of course, I hope that at some point folks will also bring in the issues of the region and the economy and COVID. But feel free to say what you'd like by way of background and introduction as well, please. Over to you.

MR. PIGOU: Thanks, Michael, and thanks very much to the Brookings Institute for the invitation.

Yeah, I mean, following on from Dewa's overview, much of which I concur with, there's a general sense, of course, that the promises of what is called the second administration of the Mnangagwa presidency that this was going to be a breath of fresh air; that there was going to be something different. And indeed, a number of countries were inclined to give the Mnangagwa administration an opportunity with its reengagement strategy, with the reform strategy they had put on the table. It was saying all the right things at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018.

But that hope has faded and for a number of reasons, many of which Dewa has set out, with respect to a broader set of challenges that relates fundamentally to a ruling party that has now been in power for 41 years and whose primary motivation and its primary policy and political imperatives relate to power retention, notwithstanding a whole wave of internal divisions and dynamics within that party, the evolving relationship between the military and civilian element of ZANU-PF. Ultimately, the key objective is to retain power and this is the kind of cycle that we're locked into in terms of moving towards an election in 2023, which raises the broader prospects of

whether we're going to see some kind of recurrence of violence and abuses that we've seen periodically through elections in Zimbabwe's history.

The issue of human rights violations, of course, came very strongly after the 2018 elections and in early 2019 with the crackdown on protests, followed by a series of human rights violations around abductions and torture and abuse. What we've seen in the last year or so is kind of a downturn in some areas of overt violation, but a selective set of abuses that are perpetrated against certain critics. And Dewa referred to the Siphosami Malunga case and there are a number of others.

Overall, quantitatively, the volume of abuse, there's been a bit of a downtick in that. But there maintains a kind of undercurrent of violation and what some call harvested fear in play in Zimbabwe, where the opportunity to ramp up violations is very much at the forefront of people's minds. And there is a real concern that the forthcoming elections will be accompanied by some degree of repression.

The relationship of the political party with the state, of course, ZANU-PF and the state, is a huge challenge within this context. I talked about power retention and this overlap of state and political party interests plays out in the arena of the political economy in Zimbabwe and state capture, as we call it in this part of the world, where certain political interests and economic interests are very neatly intertwined in a number of key areas around key sectors of the economy.

The economy is in a terrible state at the moment notwithstanding some improvements around macroeconomic stability. The socioeconomic conditions of the vast majority of Zimbabweans are dire with more and more people living under the poverty line at the moment. And the prospects for some kind of bounce-back with the economy, and we see the World Bank and the IMF and so forth talking about economic growth, after some years of contraction, happening over the next year or so. But that's off a low base and that's unlikely to translate into significant improvements in the conditions of ordinary people.

The region in this situation had been expected to contribute to some kind of stabilization and some promotion of reform. But we see much more of a kind of continuity and acceptance of the ongoing concerns that we've seen play out around the political and economic arena under the guise of stabilization and notwithstanding some of the attempts to intervene by the South Africans last year, both at a party/political level and at a state level. We don't really see the region coming to the party.

And, of course, we have a number of other security challenges in the region, in Mozambique, and most recently with protests in Swaziland in South Africa that have taken the attention off of Zimbabwe. It almost

seems as if the body count and the levels of bloodletting in a country are relatively low, but the conditions that deserve attention are not going to get them. And I think this is one of the problems that we have in Zimbabwe in a sort of broader context of a multiplicity of competing challenges. Zimbabwe is not necessarily regarded as being that bad, but the trajectory is certainly not a positive one. And I think we have to really be concerned over the next months leading up to the elections about where this is going.

Thanks very much, Michael. That's my initial.

MR. O'HANLON: Piers, that's fantastic and really builds nicely on Dewa's earlier points. And I think sets up Michelle Gavin, given her background in Southern Africa and specifically with the Southern Africa Development Council. So, Ambassador Gavin, over to you, my friend.

AMBASSADOR GAVIN: Well, thank you so much and thank you for having me. I wholeheartedly concur with the analysis that we've already heard. You know, what's happening in Zimbabwe? Sadly, more of the same is really the answer. So, you do have these kind of recent seemingly optimistic reports from the international financial institutions, but they don't reflect a fundamental change in the nature of governance and the way that economy works. And the way that economy works is the way it's been described there as a small subset of elites who absolutely prosper in Zimbabwe.

And one thing we have seen recently is better detail, more granular detail in reporting on kind of the networks of corruption that enable this enrichment, that enable this subset of elites to sort of sustain themselves while the rest of Zimbabweans continue to suffer. And, you know, over half the population is living on less than a dollar a day. Two-thirds of the population is clear that their country's going in the wrong direction according to the last Afrobarometer polls, so that the kind of -- any time you get a rosy headline out of Zimbabwe that's kind of a macro headline, it bears a little closer look because any growth that's happening is not inclusive.

So, I think that it's important just to acknowledge that when the coup d'état occurred in 2017, and the international community was loathe to call it a coup because there was so much hope for some degree of change, and I think that a lot of Zimbabwean population, too, shared that hope, there was this outpouring domestically and internationally of enthusiasm for the idea of a new day in Zimbabwe in that period between the ousting of Mugabe and the election and the violence associated with it that brought President Mnangagwa to power was a moment where something seemed possible. There was new political space.

But what was happening was fundamentally a ruling party and military-managed transition, so that all of the sort of special interests that had been protected in the latter part of the Mugabe era were in control and able

to ensure that there would be no threat to kind of the parts of the status quo that benefit them. And where that has kind of left the people of Zimbabwe, I am forever stunned by the incredible persistence and bravery of Zimbabwean human rights activities, independent journalists, lawyers who continue to push back against the abuse of the legal system and of the courts.

But it's left them, I think, with few avenues, right, to kind of change the nature of governance, the structure that they're dealing with, and, as has been described, an atmosphere of fear, a sense that violence can be deployed indiscriminately at any time. And I think that the fact that you haven't seen significant numbers of the diaspora that fled Zimbabwe over the last couple decades returning tells you basically everything you need to know about whether or not there's been any kind of fundamental change in the nature of governance.

So, kind of what to do and why does it matter? Is it the case, as we just heard, that, well, because Zimbabwe's not on fire, right, it's just continuing in this slow and painful decline, that attention wanders? There is something to that. I think even more powerful is a sense of having kind of run out of ideas, right, limited tools in the toolbox domestically, as I described, but also internationally. You know, there have been targeted sanctions for quite some time from the U.S. and the Europeans have reinstated some of them. And, you know, they're not advancing the ball. Right? They're not changing behavior.

And the people of Zimbabwe, obviously, continue to need desperately some of the assistance that continues to be provided by the U.S. and by others. And so there has long been hope that regional powers, particularly South Africa, might take a stronger role in trying to help mediate some degree of genuine transition in the country, address the fact that this kind of sinking state and economy at the every heart of Southern Africa is problematic for all of its neighbors; that the sort of aspirations of Southern Africa as a region cannot be realized with a Zimbabwe this sick and ailing. But I don't see that in the cards.

Obviously, the South Africans are pretty distracted by internal issues and there are these other fires to put out in Eswatini or Mozambique. And so I'm hoping to hear from colleagues fresh ideas, but I'm incredibly sort of frustrated with the limited sort of set of options that all of the friends of Zimbabwe within and without the country have before them to try and address these problems that are causing such tremendous suffering for the people of the country, but also are a huge drag on the overall region's prospects.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, thank you. And appreciate, you know, the, again, blunt talk about just how challenging the situation is and how important it is to find a way to change the trajectory, especially in the regional context as you mentioned.



I'll just observe very briefly in passing before going to George something that I'm sure most people watching this show and all of you on the panel certainly know, which is that, again, if you think of Southern Africa as a region, Zimbabwe really is a fairly important player because while it's not anywhere close to the size of South Africa in population -- it's roughly, I think, 15 million versus 40 million -- it's still certainly big compared to Namibia and Botswana in population, where you two, George and Michelle, were ambassadors. Those countries are both, in many ways, I believe, more hopeful in their trajectory. South Africa, of course, as you say, has huge internal challenges right now, but also huge potential. And then we have Mozambique.

And I think of, you know, that region as being five or six nations that absolutely need Zimbabwe as a key locus of activity. It may not be the biggest economy, but it's an important one. It can be a bellwether of so many good and bad political developments.

So, George, without further ado, over to you for your table setting, if you will. And then we'll get into some further detail on policy recommendations.

AMBASSADOR WARD: Thanks very much, Michael, and thanks for inviting me to this forum. It's an interesting topic.

I concur fully in what Dewa, Piers, and Michelle have said about Zimbabwe. The fact is that the people of Zimbabwe, the wonderful, wonderful people of that country, are in the middle of a perfect storm of difficulty. But that storm has gone on now for so many years without a great deal of hope.

In some ways, I went back before this program and looked at a couple of things that I wrote about Zimbabwe back in 2015 and 2017, and realized that except for changes in names, the basic factors remain the same. In some areas there may have been, as others have pointed out, incremental progress, small progress. In other areas things have gotten worse.

So, we haven't even talked much about COVID, that is, of course, a new factor that adds to the difficulties that are made up of continued repression. The strife within the ZANU-PF has probably increased, as others have pointed out, because it has become a battle for political spoils as the economy has become increasingly cartelized.

Inflation, which down from a peak, is still in the hundreds of percent a year. Growth, perhaps 4 percent in 2021, but after two years of 8 percent decline in 2019 and 2020. That still leaves, as far as my math shows, a country way below where it was at the end of 2018. So, the people face huge problems.

And in terms of new ideas, Michelle rightly pointed out that we do need new ideas, but the area for

maneuver is fairly limited. One of the -- I'd echo the point that you made, Michael, about the possible role of the countries of SADC. A few years ago, we might have thought that South Africa would have played a leading role, but South Africa is distracted with many, many of its own problems. But that does leave the other members of the organization, even though they are smaller in general. Botswana, Namibia, and others, Lesotho and then so forth, are small countries, but they do have -- can have an effect.

And so SADC would need to be part of any effort to at least build bulwarks against the instability that might arise in Zimbabwe. If there were to be another crisis within the ruling party, were there to be another coup or other change of leadership, SADC's role would be various and would be essential. And one would hope that as South Africa becomes less distracted that its government might go back to playing the kind of constructive role that it attempted a few years ago.

Multilaterally, back a few years ago, one might have hoped that the United States might have had a dialogue with China about stability in Southern Africa. That somehow seems further away now because both countries are tending to define their policy in Africa on the basis of their global power competition. So, that makes cooperation all the more difficult.

However, that means that cooperation among democracies about Zimbabwe is even more important. And so I would urge that cooperation and consultation between the U.S. Government and the U.K. and others in the Western alliance are more important than before.

But, of course, all of this needs to be based on an unrelenting support, in fact, increased support of our government for the people of Zimbabwe. How do you do that? By helping civil society organizations, by increasing the exchange programs. The Young African Leadership Initiative has done a lot for the country and, hopefully, that can have an even greater impact in Zimbabwe.

On the economy, as opportunities for investment and trade appear, we should find ways to take advantage of them to the extent that we would not be helping the increasing cartelization of the economy. I read that the Biden administration is going to continue on course with the previous administration's Prosper Africa program, which is aimed at spurring American trade and investment on the continent, and that may have a role in Zimbabwe.

And finally, it seems to me that the United States ought to go through a -- do a deep dive on Zimbabwe and review policy. What, for example, would be enough in terms of -- what degree of progress on the human rights and democratization front would be enough for the United States actually to make any gesture whatsoever toward the government? So, that ought to be a priority, among many other priorities admittedly, that the

administration faces on Africa and around the world.

So, I'll stop there, Michael.

MR. O'HANLON: George, that's great. And let me actually come back to you with a follow-up to kick off the discussion about policy that Michelle also got going. But I'll go in reverse order now and I'll start with you with this follow-up question, which is that you talked about trying to encourage some degree of investment where appropriate in Zimbabwe already.

And let me just for the sake of devil's advocacy ask you if it's maybe too soon for that. If things are really as dire as I've been hearing the panel describe, should this be the situation or the kind of situation where the United States, whether through its official channels or through Chamber of Commerce or other kinds of vehicles, basically says to would-be investors don't go there until things improve?

Because, you know, unlike the time when I was in Africa in 1982 as a Peace Corps volunteer in Zaire, there actually are some reasonably functional African countries today that have better business climates and at least somewhat better pathways towards partial democracy. And shouldn't we be encouraging investors to steer their resources and attention to those countries and basically trying to put pressure on Zimbabwe to know that it's not going to get the kind of investment or other help that you allude to until it's made the big changes that Dewa and Piers and Michelle and you have already been advocating?

AMBASSADOR WARD: Michael, that is one possible course of action and I would agree that the United States should continue to encourage investment and trade with those African economies that have liberalized, that are liberalizing, that are opening up toward the outside. And to be sure, possibilities for investment and trade with Zimbabwe are limited. They're limited by law. We can only do so much. The sanctions apply to persons and organizations, but not to the entire economy, but they are a limiting factor and they're certainly a chilling factor on policy.

But, for example, in the area of agriculture there has been some limited land reform. Some farming is looking more positive than it had been. There may be opportunities there. You know, not for the faint of heart, but if we take a hands-off policy, sort of waiting for things to get so bad that positive change occurs, that may translate into even more difficulties for the people who already -- as Michelle has pointed out, the majority of people living in terrible poverty.

When I was involved in the humanitarian world, we had our largest feeding program in the world in Zimbabwe, at one point feeding 10 percent of the population. That's a terrible situation and we should look for

opportunities to relieve suffering in the economic area.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Michelle, if I could just pass the baton to you to pick up the policy discussion where George has left it and where you left it a few minutes ago, and any big idea or recommendation you would have for the Biden administration or other international bodies or countries.

AMBASSADOR GAVIN: Yeah. Well, as I said, I wish I had, you know, a clear roadmap for how banding together with Zimbabwe and civil society we can all effect change, and I don't.

I would say that, you know, relative to your kind of hypothetical, I don't think this is a case where the people of Zimbabwe are somehow unaware of the problematic nature of their government, of the kind of pariah nature of their state or where more deprivation is sort of needed to, I don't know, create some kind of uprising. I mean, these are people struggling to get enough food to survive each day, now dealing with this horrible third wave of COVID. And given everything that Zimbabweans who remain in the country have already given to try to make things better and the prices that people have paid, I'm, I think, very much with George in that if there are opportunities for investment that could provide some more opportunity for Zimbabweans without running afoul of these illicit networks of enrichment -- and that's a very thin slice, right, of what might be possible in Zimbabwe -- then that's worth doing.

I am of the view that it's true that many of the governments of Southern Africa are distracted by other problems, but that there might be merit in a more robust effort to link up the civil societies of these states in support of reform in Zimbabwe. So, there are some very strong civil society actors throughout Southern Africa, who see clearly the pain the Zimbabwean people go through, experience the migration and, you know, are living with Zimbabwean communities who've left the country in search of some better opportunity, and who have some vision really for the nature of governance and respect for human rights in Southern Africa writ large.

And I think it might be worth finding ways to support those civil society organizations to have some demand-driven call for Southern African governments to be less sort of laissez-faire as their neighbor still kind of is in this constant downward spiral. I do think that that has some merit.

I think that the prospect of generational change in Zimbabwe is really important. It used to have one of the best education systems on the continent. That has been completely dismantled by poor governance, but there are still a tremendous amount of human capital in Zimbabwe. And finding ways to connect with young Zimbabweans to empower them and support them, so that there's kind of a cadre of young people ready to steer their country in another direction when opportunity comes, also makes some sense over the long term.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Pragmatic steps, not pie-in-the-sky, so very welcome.

Piers, your thoughts about, again, whatever policy levers by whichever bodies that you would want to focus in on and emphasize. Love to hear your thoughts as well.

MR. PIGOU: Thanks, Michael. And thanks for the other speakers and the useful set of points that have been put on the table.

And it makes me really want to emphasize that we are operating in this part of the world in the context of often binary narratives that talk past each other. If you engage with policymakers inside Zimbabwe, you often would think that you're speaking about two very different countries. From within the country and from those attached to the government and so forth, they present themselves as a government that is certainly engaged in reform. And we've heard this narrative over a number of years.

But what's missing, it seems to me -- and this is where civil society both in Zimbabwe needs to be strengthened and I think that this relates to the cross-cutting regional issues that Ambassador was just talking about, because they relate to challenges of governance around institutional integrities that capture these kinds of things -- is that what we need is I think a more granular and technical discussion around the reform framework that the Zimbabwean government itself has put on the table, both in terms of what it promised to do when it came to power after the removal of Mugabe, but since then.

I mean, periodically, Harare produces a framework of reform programs that this is what it's done in the electoral area, this is what it's done around economic reform, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And what we don't see, as I said, is this more technical or granular engagement with those issues, which could help us kind of reduce the range of misrepresentations and the lies that are in play in those discussions.

And I think, you know, often these are around issues that the government don't want to engage with, but these are -- it's kind of a comfort blanket for them not to engage in. And, in fact, if we throw kind of broadsides against the Zimbabwean government without really getting into the nitty-gritty of these issues, and also balancing those between areas where we do see some incremental progress, but around areas where there are still massive deficits, we're going to be stuck on the outside throwing barbs (phonetic), seeing barbs being thrown at each other.

Now, this also relates to the regional talent. And we have to navigate concerns that the region have about the politics of exceptionalism that are often placed on Zimbabwe. People say, well, why is Zimbabwe getting so much attention around its violations? Look at Mozambique. That's far worse in terms of what goes on in terms of governance violations and corruption, but it doesn't receive the kind of attention and negative press that

Zimbabwe gets.

And in that context we also have to navigate sovereignty politics in the region. SADC is not going to jump in and make robust interventions in places like Zimbabwe. And these are also areas where we need to get our grappling hooks in to get conversations going. And regional civil society are key players in that and certainly they need to be supported in that.

So, you know, I'd like us to see how we can be innovate about actually getting some constructive conversations going with key constituencies within the region and how we support that process. So, that's the area I think that we could really start to build. It's not revolutionary quick change. It's going to be incremental and it's going to be uneven in terms of the kind of developments, but I do think there's space there. I do think there's options that we can promote.

MR. O'HANLON: So, even working with elements of the government?

MR. PIGOU: Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think that there are elements within the Zimbabwean government that still are trying to operate. I mean, bearing in mind, you know, you have what's left of one of the better civil services in the region. Not everyone is up to their necks in corruption. And there's kind of a politics of opportunism and survival that's in place for many people who are stuck in this situation, you know, who are hostage to this environment, hostage to the venalities of key political players.

And we do need to do this in a way where the real problems around the cartel concerns that have been profiled in this discussion are properly identified and addressed. And they're not going to be changed overnight, but we need to know who are the key players? Who's supporting them inside the country, but also outside the country? Who are the key South African businesspeople, for example, who are working with Zimbabwe in scaffolding these kind of cartel structures?

So, we need a much clearer understanding of the political economy, who's winning, who's losing, who's playing what roles.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Dewa, back to you. And I'm sure you've got thoughts in addition to the specific cases that you've identified, the specific abuses that you want to shine a spotlight on and reform, I wonder if there were any other recommendations that you would offer.

MR. MAYHINGA: Thank you so much, Michael, and I want to agree with Ambassador Gavin on the need for support to civil society and for the linkages with regional civil society groups. As we see that the Zimbabwe authorities are cracking down on activists inside Zimbabwe, they are weaponizing the law to try and

silence completely activists from within the country. So, there is need for greater support to civil society.

We are also looking at the context of a severely weakened opposition. We need to look at that, also, and alternative media.

Mnangagwa came into power on the back of promises for change in terms of ending corruption and human rights abuses. So, on this one I want to agree strongly with Piers that we need to expose, identify, and expose the massive corruption that is happening because this would not be supported across the kind of people who really want to know who the key players are. And those that are responsible for massive corruption and human rights abuses should be punished appropriately.

If the authorities are failing in Zimbabwe, then in a similar vein to recent actions targeting individuals, like Kudakwashe Tagwirei; targeting individuals who are leading current farming versions, like (inaudible) is leaving the impression of the farm that (inaudible) the human rights lawyers for Malunga. That needs to be identified. So, there is need to support this kind of crusade, support alternative media, and also to support a program of action that exposes the needed reforms ahead of elections. Because as we speak, the electoral field is not level. The environment is not conducive for the holding of credible free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. So, 2020 might as well as be a repeat of the previous election, so there is need to expose these fault lines and push for reforms.

And we also know that because of the cartels that are there, and the deals with the different groups and massive corruption, there is a lot of disgruntlement, even within the ruling establishment. So, there is need to expose further who the individuals who are benefitting are and why this is undermining development in Zimbabwe.

The (inaudible) government has been big on propaganda when claiming that it is -- the economy has failed because of the so-called sanctions. So, it is also important for the U.S. Government and others to clearly point out what kind of assistance has been offered to Zimbabwe and what kind of support is there, what kind of investment is there, so that it becomes clear that the source of the challenges have to do with the abuses, with the lack of rule of law, respect, as well as with the massive corruption. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So, we have now the final element of our conversation today, which will be to bring in audience questions. And then I'm going to ask each of you to respond to whichever one or two you might find the most relevant to your expertise or that really hits a chord with you. And, in fact, I'm going to summarize them and distill them into just two or three broad questions. We've got about seven or eight, but they're in some categories.

And I'll go with the same order we started with. So, Dewa, in a second I'll go to you and ask for not

only your responses, but any concluding thoughts as we wrap up this fairly efficient and quick hour. But, again, I'm very grateful for all of your insights.

So, one set of questions concerns high-level politics in Zimbabwe. A simple question, would you consider the new leadership already to be a dictatorship? And maybe say a few more words about the 2023 elections. Are they just going to be, as best you can tell, as, Dewa, you were just discussing, at risk of being sort of a rubber stamp for a non-free and fair election?

An offshoot to that or a related question from the audience has to do with opposition and political parties in Zimbabwe. And a number of you have spoken about civil society, but what about the official political opposition? And is there more we can do to strengthen that? So, that's a second big question building off of the question about dictatorship versus democracy and 2023.

A third category of questions had to do with the security forces. And there have been some deaths at the senior levels in recent months. There's also been a questioning and, you know, I'm curious based on what Piers just said about the strong elements of civil society, there have been some uncertainties about whether the security forces are fundamentally corrupt? You know, however much there may be a problem at one layer or another of leadership, is there still a strength within the ranks of the security forces? Are there good leaders that we could try to somehow favor or ask the government to try to promote? So, this set of questions had to do with the overall structure and characteristics of the security forces and whether there are good people therein that we can somehow as an international community work to try to raise up in some fashion.

And then finally, I think I've done justice to most of the questions. Let me just very quickly look to see if there was anything further. And no, I think that you've already either answered the other questions or that I've touched on them.

So, let me leave it there with politics, dictatorship versus democracy; opposition, political parties; and the strength or lack thereof of the security forces, as well as any concluding quick remarks. If I could give each of you the floor for two to three minutes, that would be wonderful. Dewa, starting with you, please.

MR. MAYHINGA: Thank you so much, Michael. Zimbabwe, I would calculate, is in a military dictatorship. I think of Myanmar, what's happening there. So, the military is in charge and this became obvious with the coup in 2017. And now the military is in charge of all key institutions, directly or indirectly with -- Mnangagwa is the sort of front and civilian face. So, it's a military dictatorship that is there that is weaponizing the law to control and also targeting selected activists to shut down the dissenting voices.



And this is happening when the opposition is severely weakened because there was a process of purging or removing members of Parliament from the Parliament who belong to the opposition. So, now the ruling party's (inaudible) is a solid two-thirds majority, which it is now using to change the law, including the constitution, to strip the judiciary of all its powers. So, this is what is happening now on the ground.

And we know that the leadership of the security forces remains problematic, highly partisan towards ZANU-PF, and extremely politicized and also responsible in the main for human rights abuses. But at the middle level, middle to lower ranks of the military, there could be hope that they are not necessarily part of those benefiting. But we also certainly have seen that the military has been recruiting, so there are fresh recruits.

And there is also a move to revive what is called the National Youth Service, which is really a brigade that has been used to commit violence around elections. So, that's a huge concern as we go towards the 2023 elections that there will be extreme violence. The electoral field is not level and, quite frankly, will not deliver a credible free and fair election unless there are significant reforms, including electoral reforms, including institutional reforms, and also including measures to ensure that the security forces are removed from politics and from civilian affairs in Zimbabwe. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Piers, same set of questions to you, my friend.

MR. PIGOU: Well, you know, I mean, I'm of the distinct opinion that -- and, you know, I concur with much of what Dewa said in that, but we're not going to get the kind of reforms and shifts and changes that we all would perhaps ideally like to see. The calculus of those in power remains the retention of power. And to do that by, to a certain extent, putting lipstick on the frog to present an image of reform and change and keeping a kind of light under that hope in some respects.

I mean, our fundamental challenge is how do we shift the calculus of those in power when the context is such a symmetry of influence and power? And we see the state of the opposition movement, which the main opposition -- which certainly the MDC Alliance, whose name is even being challenged at this stage and potentially is going to be usurped by a minor party that appears to be doing the bidding of the ruling party at the moment, that we see that despite being still a popular party, most broadly it is really struggling to get out of the starting blocks. And many people feel that it's going to be obliterated in these forthcoming elections.

So, it kind of feels like we're locked into this kind of cycle of despair and déjà vu around elections and so forth. And, you know, are we going to be having the same conversation in another five years' time?

You know, this is a country which is hostage to the politics of fear, and this ranges from president to

peasant at the end of the day. And I think the challenges really are for us to start a building-block approach that really allows us to lock down in each of these areas how we can build civil society and democracy from below, supporting incidents (phonetic), but also at the policy level, at the technical level, to be more equipped to engage in an arena where the ruling party ZANU-PF is open to engagement in some respects.

And I think that their bluff needs to be called on a number of areas. But I think that we need to explore opportunity notwithstanding the range of challenges that Dewa has set out and the objective that appear to be clear. But there are no easy answers in this situation and I think we should prepare ourselves for a very long haul.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. A sober message, but not entirely without hope. Ambassador Gavin, over to you.

AMBASSADOR GAVIN: I'll be very brief because I want to hear what Ambassador Ward has to say, too. But, look, I don't think, given what we see today, there is any chance that the next election is going to be a free and fair exercise where there's a real opportunity to see the will of the Zimbabwean people expressed. But I don't think that that means you sort of write off trying to continue to work on these governance issues before, during, and after election cycles.

I would say that, you know, what we've seen in terms of the exploiting of divisions within the opposition, the deliberate undermining and manipulation of the MDC, we've also seen parallels in the way that this government has dealt with parts of civil society, where there have been efforts to co-opt members of civil society, to pit them against one another, to sow suspicion and discord. So, any kind of threat, any challenge, any independent entity that emerges that's able to in any way hold the state accountable, right, comes in for a very targeted campaign of kind of having their credibility sacked and weakened.

And I do think one of the things we should do is try and learn from this. Right? Try and learn from this repeated exercise that we see the state and security and intelligence services go through and try and build some resilience around it.

And really, I completely agree with Piers, think about the long game. Think about this young generation, ensure there's some opportunity that they be socialized in examples beyond political violence. Right? If all you know is a politics of fear, it's very hard to be a part of building a different state. So, exposure, exposure, exposure for young people not all of SADC operates this way. And I realize it sounds like very distant and soft, but I do think it's an important part of how we go forward.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you. And Ambassador Ward, over to you for the final wrap-up.

AMBASSADOR WARD: Well, thanks. I'll be brief. I agree with the points that have been made.

But at some point, change is going to happen in Zimbabwe. We don't know and we don't know how. That points up the importance of the work of the U.S. mission in Harare. There are those, it's been pointed out, in the government, in the security forces, certainly in civil society who want to do the right kinds of things. We ought to be identifying them, helping them where we can without tagging them with the negative association that might be made with the U.S., but doing everything we can to promote their work.

That can be done through exchange programs. It can be done through our active development assistance program. It could also be done through partnerships in education. Our universities have learned a lot in the past couple of years about distance education through the Internet. And with the deterioration of the Zimbabwean education system, why not try to promote a program of university education online for the many, many students who are desiring such education?

So, my closing point would be to maximize hope for the future by cultivating the deserving people, people in the younger generation who want to make progress, who have democracy as a goal, and simply want to be free to live productive lives.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, thank you. I know we all wish the best for the people of Zimbabwe. And I want to thank George Ward, Michelle Gavin, Dewa Mayhinga, and Piers Pigou for helping today to illustrate where things stand and what might be done in Zimbabwe.

I also want to thank my colleagues Abigael Ajuma, Adam Twardowski, Dan and the superheroes on the communications side of things with Zoom in the studio. But most of all, thanks to everyone who joined us today with the conversation. And our very best wishes to the people of Zimbabwe and for their future.

So, without further ado and with best wishes for the rest of the summer or whatever season it may be where you now live, thank you. Signing off from Brookings and have a great rest of the day.

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