



## Well-Targeted Sanctions Remain a Useful U.S. Policy Tool: The Case of Zimbabwe

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Dr. Todd J. Moss  
Chief Operating Officer and Senior Fellow  
Center for Global Development  
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Thank you Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Markey, and other members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate being invited to testify again before the Subcommittee and the opportunity to highlight ways the United States can more effectively pursue its objectives in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region of growing economic and national security importance. I proudly served in the State Department under Secretary Condoleezza Rice and continue to work closely on U.S.-Africa policy as a researcher at the Center for Global Development.

I have three points about the utility of U.S. sanctions, and one clarification. I will conclude by highlighting each point using the troubled case of Zimbabwe.

First, **sanctions are a visible and potent political signal from the world's most powerful nation.** Financial and travel restrictions can be a public declaration against tyranny and an affirmative statement of American values. If you steal elections, you don't get to send your children to school in Boston. If you rob public coffers, you don't get to invest in California real estate. If you mistreat your own people, you don't get to seek medical care in Houston hospitals. If anything, this forceful statement that the United States will not turn a blind eye to the most oppressive, violent, and kleptocratic regimes is not used enough. For example, it is time for serious consideration of adding sanctions to political leaders in the Gambia.

Second, **well-crafted and aggressively executed targeted sanctions can have a significant impact on influencing the decisions and policies of regimes and bad actors.** Both financial sanctions implemented by the Treasury Department and travel sanctions imposed by the State Department can have direct traceable effects when policymakers have clear concrete objectives in mind and the intelligence community is given the time and means to identify financial levers and vulnerabilities. However, for such sanctions to be effective, they must be imposed within a broader strategy that includes other levers of power. Sanctions are one pressure point, but they must be accompanied by unambiguous diplomatic messages and through alliances with other powers that share our objectives. Congressional action can be motivating, but overly-prescriptive legislation can be blunt and static, which can undermine smart policy by reducing the scope for future action.

Third, **regime change is the wrong metric for success.** Critics may complain that sanctions do not work if a target regime survives. Yet no one claims, nor should anyone expect, that sanctions on

their own will bring down a regime. Sanctions complement—rather than replace—other diplomatic, economic, or military tools.

Finally, there is often **confusion between targeted financial or travel sanctions and the exclusion of rogue regimes from the international financial system**. Some governments, like Cuba, have voluntarily opted out of the IMF, the World Bank, and other international financial institutions. Others, like Somalia or Eritrea, are unable to access finance from these organizations, not because of specific U.S. sanctions, but because of their own record of nonpayment.

I'll conclude by outlining how these points matter for U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe.

The current legislation, the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001 (ZDERA) states: “It is the policy of the United States to support the people of Zimbabwe in their struggle to effect peaceful, democratic change, achieve broad-based and equitable economic growth, and restore the rule of law.” ZDERA includes a sense of Congress that the President should implement travel and economic sanctions against individuals responsible for violence and the breakdown of the rule of law.

First, **U.S. sanctions have been a powerful signal of U.S. policy in support of democracy**. When introduced, ZDERA attracted strong bipartisan support in Congress. The bill was co-sponsored by senators from across the political spectrum: Bill Frist, Jesse Helms, Russell Feingold, Joseph Biden, and Hillary Clinton. The actual executive branch sanctions advocated by ZDERA were not directed at the country as a whole, but aimed at specific individuals, barring them from holding assets in the United States, traveling here, and doing business with U.S. entities. As of 2016, none of the key conditions contained in the original ZDERA legislation—restoration of the rule of law, free and fair elections, and depoliticization of the security forces—have been met either in letter or in spirit. Thus, sanctions should remain in place on Zimbabwe for the time being.

Second, U.S. policy objectives have not been achieved as the country has yet to experience peaceful democratic change, broad-based economic growth, or the restoration of the rule of law. But it is a mistake to judge the lack of progress as a failure of sanctions *per se*. **Zimbabwe's morass continues primarily because of a highly entrenched abusive regime** that has shown little regard for the basic welfare of its own citizens, combined with unhelpful regional dynamics.

While recognizing the lack of progress, before removing sanctions, we must ask whether such a change will advance U.S. policy goals or play into the hands of the regime. It is true that the ruling cabal cynically blames sanctions rather than its own failures. But will eliminating a false excuse lead to a better outcome? More specifically, if sanctions are lifted, what happens next that helps the country on a path towards democracy? Is it credible to argue that removing U.S. sanctions at this time will change Zimbabwe's internal dynamics in a way that bolsters the forces for democracy, much less force Robert Mugabe to stand down? In my view, **lifting U.S. sanctions at this time will merely strengthen Robert Mugabe and the military circle around him** by providing a major propaganda victory. Mugabe will claim that the regime has vanquished the country's imaginary imperialist oppressors and has now received a formal American endorsement of his undemocratic rule.

Third, **sanctions could be much more effective in Zimbabwe if they were embedded in a broader strategy that included other tools of U.S. power**. The United States has generally

disengaged from Zimbabwe in recent years, leaving our policy little more than sanctions plus humanitarian assistance. A forward-leaning strategy could employ a range of support for democratic forces, more aggressive diplomacy, and utilize the sanctions list more creatively to selectively encourage positive behavior and increase U.S. influence in a post-Mugabe transition. This absolutely must include continuing to collect information on those who one day should face charges of war crimes and/or embezzlement.

Finally, the issue of targeted U.S. bilateral sanctions is separate from arrears clearance and access to new lending at international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. ZDERA calls for the United States to exercise its shareholder vote against debt relief or new loans to Zimbabwe until the stipulated conditions have been met. As the recent letter from Chairman Corker to Treasury Secretary Lew makes clear, **it is premature for the United States to support any new lending to the Government of Zimbabwe, absent clear and meaningful reforms.**<sup>1</sup> Preconditions should include ensuring basic political freedoms, accountability for missing diamond revenues, and official acknowledgement of gross human rights violations committed by state agents, such as the Matabeleland massacres in the 1980s and, just fifteen months ago, the abduction and probable murder of human rights activist Itai Dzamara.

Until the Government of Zimbabwe has met the ZDERA criteria and shown unequivocally that it is on an irreversible path to true reform, it is not yet time for the United States to abandon its targeted sanctions. In fact, the U.S. government should be preparing specific targets and options for further ratcheting up pressure, which could be deployed on a timely basis as needed. More broadly across Africa, sanctions will continue to be a practical and symbolic tool for U.S. policymakers, provided they are carefully targeted, deployed among a set of other policy tools, and not expected to serve as a substitute for other actions.

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<sup>1</sup> “No New Lending to Zimbabwe without Meaningful Reform,” Letter from Senator Corker to Secretary Lew, January 29, 2016 <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/corker-no-new-lending-to-zimbabwe-without-meaningful-reform>