



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on December 1, 2007

Ian Smith and the Fall of Rhodesia

It is easy to conclude that Smith must have been a racist, having been the leader of a white-minority government in the majority black African nation of Rhodesia. Such labeling, however, obscures the convoluted politics of the Smith era. Perhaps more significantly, it also serves as a smokescreen to cover the tragedy and bloodshed that would otherwise not have occurred absent U.S. and international meddling in Rhodesia's affairs.



The story of Ian Smith and Rhodesia, obscure as it might seem, nevertheless remains relevant today. For the present generation, "regime change" as it has been pursued in Iraq is a new and radical phenomenon. While the Iraqi example remains noteworthy for the direct use of American military power to bring about the change in the country's ruling regime, it is by no means the first time that the United States has, following United Nations directives, involved itself in the affairs of another nation in order to bring about a fundamental change in that other nation's government. In a sense, the seeds of Iraqi regime change were planted in the African nation now known as Zimbabwe during the era in which it was known as Rhodesia.

Colonial Days

The son of Scotland-born parents who emigrated to Rhodesia in the late 19th century, Ian Smith was born in a small Rhodesian mining town in 1919. At the time known as Southern Rhodesia, the colony was part of Britain's overseas empire. When England went to war in 1939, Smith joined the Rhodesian squadron of the Royal Air Force and became a fighter pilot. He was shot down over Italy, after which he joined with the anti-Nazi partisans, made his way across the Alps to allied lines, and went right back to combat flying again. At war's end, he returned home as a war hero, started raising cattle, married, entered politics and became prime minister of the British colony in 1964.

One year later, while the Belgians, French, Portuguese, and other European nations were abandoning their colonial possessions in Africa to native-born rulers who often had both communist sympathies themselves and Soviet communist support from abroad, Smith felt the same fate was about to befall his country. Speaking for the government he now led, on November 11, 1965 he declared independence from Britain, claiming a need to reject "the doctrinaire philosophy of appeasement and surrender," then



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prevailing and insisting that Rhodesians were not about "to sell their birthright." This was a controversial and nearly unique move, and one that earned Rhodesia the enmity of the British. The only other outright declaration of independence from Great Britain had occurred in America in 1776.

Surrounded as Rhodesia was by Marxist petty tyrants in Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia), Tanzania, and Mozambique, Smith was determined to take his country down a different path. Most of Africa had already become Marxist when international insistence that there be "one man, one vote" elections throughout the continent resulted in "one man, one vote, one time" victories for communist-favoring despots. One after another, these criminals as political leaders destroyed their opposition — literally — and made sure there would be no future elections. The United Nations wasted no time recognizing all of the new communist-supported regimes while imposing sanctions on newly independent Rhodesia. The United States dutifully followed suit with unconstitutional grants of taxpayer money in the form of foreign aid to UN-favored nations and joined in the campaign to isolate Rhodesia. Following a pattern that was developing in the rest of Africa, it seems likely that had Smith's government in Rhodesia been pro-communist, it would surely have been tolerated, and perhaps even praised.

Then, as now, controversy stemmed from the political power wielded by the nation's minority white population. Under legal limits put in place in the 1920s by the British colonial government, property and education requirements resulted in a minority white government in the country. It was widely believed and expected, however, that increasing prosperity and educational opportunities would result in eventual racial parity in the government.

There is some evidence that this process may, in fact, have been underway in Rhodesia. Compared to other newly independent nations in Africa, Rhodesia was an island of sanity and productivity in the middle of a sea of oppression and want. Black citizens of Rhodesia had access to better education, housing, health, and economic conditions than any of their "liberated" neighbors. The nation that had earned the reputation as southern Africa's bread basket was full of farms and ranches that were marvels of productivity. Tourism, especially visits to the world famous Victoria Falls, also fueled its economy. Even critics of the Smith government admitted that enrollment of blacks in high schools had soared. As a result, many of the nation's black citizens were advancing in professional and public service careers. Smith's supporters pointed to Rhodesia's military being three-fifths black and her police force three-quarters black. Change, it seems, was underway. But change and advancement through peaceful means wasn't given a chance.

Under constant diplomatic pressure and eventually feeling the effects of UN-imposed isolation, Rhodesia was soon targeted by revolutionary terrorists. Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) based in Zambia received its support from Soviet Russia. Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) operated out of Mozambique with aid from communist China (now the ruling party, ZANU-PF still receives immense support from communist China). During the years of their terrorist campaigns, the two revolutionary groups murdered thousands, mostly blacks, in their determined efforts to undermine the Rhodesian government.

In 1976, backed by British leaders and the "world community," U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger summoned Smith to Geneva and gave him a heavy dose of power politics. If Rhodesia would not agree to immediately allow majority rule, Smith was told, her oil supplies would be cut off and more sanctions would be imposed. Friends of the Rhodesian leader would later insist that the man aged 10 years during the week he spent in Geneva. One year later, a group of black Rhodesian leaders, including two



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members of the Rhodesian parliament, made plans to come to United States in order to tell of their support for the Smith government. They got as far as Germany and found that the State Department would not allow them entry into the United States.

Under intense pressure, Smith reluctantly agreed to hold new elections and the winner turned out to be Bishop Abel Muzorewa, a moderate, who became the nation's new prime minister. He and Smith came to America hoping that Kissinger's demands had been met. But Carter administration heavyweights led by Cyrus Vance, a Kissinger ally in the Council of Foreign Relations and Trilateral Commission, ignoring the election results, demanded that Nkomo and Mugabe be given places in the government. So-called "peace talks" in London followed in 1979 with the result that the two leaders who had been lobbying shells and conducting forays into Rhodesia, killing thousands, were now part of the government.

By 1980, Mugabe had taken charge completely and Nkomo disappeared, after having been charged, based on evidence planted by Mugabe's regime, of planning a coup. He was driven out and fled to London, saying: "nothing in my life had prepared me for persecution at the hands of a government led by black Africans."

Independence under Mugabe earned recognition by the world community and all previous sanctions against Rhodesia were dropped. Forgotten was the fact that the nation's new leader had been in jail from 1964 to 1974 for terrorist activities. Also pushed into the memory hole was the description of the nation's new leader by John Burns of the New York Times as "a Marxist ideologue whose guerrilla forces, in their brutality against black and white civilians, had few counterparts in modern warfare." But Mugabe was overwhelmingly accepted by the outsiders who had decided Rhodesia's fate.

The U.S. Enforces UN Sanctions

The demise of independent Rhodesia can be traced to the array of sanctions placed on the infant nation by United Nations Security Council resolutions. Of course, much of their effect would have been minimal had the United States not led in the enforcement of those UN mandates. Why our nation participated in the campaign against the Smith-led government deserves examination.

A little-known portion of the United Nations Charter explains what occurred. When the U.S. Senate placed our nation in the UN in 1945, it did so by ratifying the UN Charter. Article 25 of this document states in its entirety: "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter." (The Charter has never been amended.)

Any careful reading of Article 25 leads inexorably to the disagreeable conclusion that the Charter, especially Article 25, trumps the U.S. Constitution. By agreeing to be a member of the UN, our nation has consented to enforce decisions handed down by the Security Council, some of which in the case of Rhodesia mandated sanctions and boycotts against the infant nation. Despite having no business meddling in the affairs of another nation, our nation did take the lead in suppression of the freedom of this small country. Had it not done so, Rhodesia would likely still exist.

In 1950, identical submission to the UN led to U.S. involvement in Korea, a conflict that has never been settled as evidenced by the tens of thousands of U.S. forces still posted in South Korea. The current struggle in Iraq supplies another example of our nation enforcing UN Security Council resolutions. It's as if whenever the UN says "Jump," our leaders respond by asking "How high?"

Two major conclusions can be made: 1) Our leaders' willingness to submit to the UN Charter indicates that they are delivering our nation to the UN, not that the UN is taking over; and 2) it is long past the



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time when the United States should withdraw from the UN.

Zimbabwe Today

Fast forward now to 2007, and note that Rhodesia/Zimbabwe has degenerated from a bread basket to a basket case. Under Mugabe's tyrannous rule, Zimbabwe has become a pariah state. Prosperous farms have been seized, divided into smaller lots, and given to people who don't know how to farm. There is no free press. White citizens and black opponents of the government alike have seen their properties confiscated and have fled, mostly to South Africa. Opposition leaders have been silenced, arrested, and jailed. Mugabe has fixed elections in his favor, crushed dissent, and driven the nation to economic ruin. The government currently admits to 4,500 percent annual inflation, and observers in neighboring nations predict the figure will soon reach 100,000 percent. In late November, the government itself announced that it could no longer even calculate the rising inflation rate because of the rapidly declining value of the currency.

Today, Zimbabwe's shops are virtually empty, unemployment has skyrocketed, and many of the people are struggling to survive without water, electricity and transportation. Even bread is scarce. "If I don't get the bread today, who knows, maybe I won't be able to afford it tomorrow," a woman in a bread line told the French journal *Le Monde diplomatique*. A black market has emerged and it alone is keeping starvation from being the fate of thousands. Such are always the results of unfettered socialism of the type the U.S. helped foist on Zimbabwe. Yet Henry Kissinger, the man most responsible for the U.S. intervention under the UN in long-gone Rhodesia, is still venerated as a great statesman in the United States and throughout the world.

Unlike large numbers of Rhodesians, Ian Smith stayed on in his native country and continued farming. In 1996, his book *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal* contained his predictions that the country would suffer economic decline and hardship. Adding a postscript in 1998, he summarized, "I told you so. History records that my predictions have materialized."

In 2004, Smith declared, "There are millions of blacks who say things were better when I was in control. I have challenged Mugabe to walk down the street with me and see who has the most support. I have much better relations with black people than he does." To the very end, he insisted that charges that his government was racist and unlawful were totally incorrect. Instead, he claimed that his leadership had been beneficial to all Rhodesians.

Smith suffered a stroke and died in a clinic on November 20th in Cape Town, South Africa. Ironically, the man who never intended to leave his home country had to go to a neighbor country for medical help. One week later, Mugabe's announcement that he would attend the annual European Union-Africa summit meeting in Portugal provoked an angry response from British leader Gordon Brown. Pointing to Zimbabwe's ruined economy, rigged elections, and suppression of opposition, Brown said he would boycott the gathering if Mugabe would be welcomed. The British leader's antipathy to Mugabe just happened to be more than 30 years too late.



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