Robert Gabriel Mugabe

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Robert Gabriel Mugabe, born 21 February 1921, has served as executive president of Zimbabwe between the years 1987 and 2017. Previously, Mr. Mugabe and his political party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), won the British supervised independence elections held in 1980 which conferred him as prime minister, a post which he retained until he transitioned to the position of executive president (BBC, 2017).

The Lancaster House Agreement, signed on 21 December 1979, created the Republic of Zimbabwe, which dismissed the unrecognized state of Rhodesia, unilaterally proclaimed by Ian Smith—the prime minister of Rhodesia (The Guardian, 1979). While unrecognized, Rhodesia maintained a unique status in the British Empire as it held extensive autonomous powers, acknowledging a dominion status was never granted (Wood, 2005).

Subsequent to Zimbabwe becoming a recognized and independent state, Mr. Mugabe commanded the respect of his nation—a nation with a successful free-market economy, a developed infrastructure and plentiful natural resources. Mr. Mugabe has been praised by numerous African leaders as a revolutionary for dissolving British colonialism and white minority rule in Zimbabwe. For example, he was recently praised by the Malawi President Peter Mutharika, citing Mugabe as the "last remaining hero of African nationalism" (The Herald, 2017).

Notwithstanding the above, Mr. Mugabe’s long-standing rule was not without controversy. For example, undoubtedly, Zimbabwe’s land reform programme is, arguably, the single most controversial matter which attracted vast world-wide attention. The origin of the land reform programme can be traced to the Lancaster House Agreement which sought to alter the ethnic balance of land ownership, noting in the early 1980s land ownership in Zimbabwe was predominately owned by White Zimbabweans of European ancestry. The land reform programme can be viewed as an endeavor to redistribute Zimbabwe’s land more equitably between Black Zimbabwean subsistence farmers and their white counterparts. Acknowledging the land distribution programme merits a considerably lengthier text, this issue has conceivably contributed to dividing Mr. Mugabe’s staunch supporters into two factions—those in favor of how Zimbabwe has implemented the land reform policy and those who vehemently oppose its implementation.

Nonetheless, today, 21 November 2017, marks the end of an era which Mr. Mugabe contributed to shaping—the contributions, contentious or otherwise, to the country of Zimbabwe, the Southern Africa region and the African Continent. Certainly, the images of citizens of Zimbabwe dancing in the streets, celebrating the resignation of Mr. Mugabe is somewhat antipodal of Zimbabwe’s independence celebration activities on 18 April 1980 with Mr. Mugabe becoming Prime Minister of Zimbabwe and a concert performed by the reggae legend Bob Marley.

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1 Mr. Mugabe resigned on 21 November 2017 as executive president of Zimbabwe.
2 Arguably, proponents of Mr. Mugabe viewed the transition to the post of executive president as a means of consolidating his political clout. Opponents of Mr. Mugabe, conceivably, viewed the transition to executive president as means to bestow absolute power to himself as head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
3 Rhodesia or the Republic of Rhodesia was an unrecognized state in southern Africa from circa 1965 to 1979, commonly referred to as the antecedent to the Republic of Zimbabwe.
4 Dominion status refers to an autonomous country in the British Empire and British Commonwealth. In the post Second World War era the term was used to describe independent nations that kept the British monarch as their head of state.
Literature Consulted


