



## Zimbabwe and the Ethics of Economic Warfare

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The question of whether firms such as Anglo American should invest in Zimbabwe is, argues Joe Egerton, a case for a proper reflection rather than knee-jerk opposition. Applying St Thomas Aquinas's principles for waging a just war to the application of economic sanctions reminds us that our objective must be what is best for the suffering people of Zimbabwe.

As Robert Mugabe establishes himself as dictator of Zimbabwe by a campaign of murder and torture, the world has reacted with anger and outrage.

The main – in fact the only – victims of the current rulers of Zimbabwe are the people of Zimbabwe. The immediate victims are those who have opposed Mugabe and their families. “Opposed” may mean no more than failing to support. Some have been murdered, some beaten. The country is no longer growing enough food to feed everyone. The rulers, their supporters and their families are not starving – yet. It is probable that before they face mild privation, tens or hundreds of thousands will die.

This immediately faces the rest of the world with difficult choices. There is no obvious right answer.

Some people are talking of the possible use of force – for instance, Paddy (now Lord) Ashdown<sup>1</sup> – following in the footsteps of an earlier Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe who suggested bombing Ian Smith. Others are urging severe economic sanctions. Some sanctions have already been agreed by the European Union and UN – mainly a sanction regime aimed at individuals prominent in the regime. A quick Google search reveals that sanctions have in fact been in place for years without much obvious effect. On the other hand there are powerful voices supporting sanctions. For instance, the treasurer of



the opposition MDC is running a vigorous campaign aimed at encouraging multi-national companies to pull out of Zimbabwe<sup>2</sup>. And this campaign is commanding considerable publicity. Tesco has just announced that “while the political crisis persists there” it will no longer source its products from Zimbabwe<sup>3</sup>. The company’s statement said it could not ignore “the growing consensus in the international community –

including from UK politicians on all sides – that further action must be taken to maximise the pressure for change”. And “Outrage over £200m UK investment in Zimbabwe” was the front page headline of the *Times* of Wednesday 25 June 2008, reporting the reaction of individuals, companies and organisations to being told that Anglo American, the London-based mining giant, is to invest \$400 million to build a platinum mine in Zimbabwe.

Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman, is quoted as saying “Such an investment could only bolster this discredited evil regime ...If Anglo American goes ahead with this, it will be the worst PR mistake in their history and the biggest PR disaster imaginable.”

The chairman of the Commons Business and Regulatory Reform Select Committee (Mr Peter Luff MP) was quoted as saying: “This is a curiously bad investment. Robert Mugabe may interpret this move as a vote of confidence in himself. How can a

company possibly satisfy itself that this investment will be truly ethical in its nature at this moment? Zimbabwe will change and those who will be seen to have supported the old regime may in the long term pay a heavy price for that decision.”

Mr William Hague, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, was quoted as saying: “No British or international company should in any way help to prop up the regime, whether by an investment in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe or by any kind of dealings with it.”

The common feature of all these comments is that they rely on the rhetorical device of equating investment in Zimbabwe with investment in Mugabe. This rhetorical blurring is at odds with the careful drawing of distinctions that in the thirteenth century generated a definition of just war that has commanded widespread respect. The full passage is quite short.<sup>4</sup> St Thomas Aquinas briefly argues that in order for a war to be just, three things are necessary:

- (i) the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged;
- (ii) a just cause, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault;
- (iii) the belligerents’ rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil, and not some improper motivation<sup>5</sup>.

Given the widespread use in recent times of sanctions as instruments of international coercion and, more importantly, the number of innocent people who stand to be harmed by their improper use, there is every reason to subject the imposition of economic sanctions to the same stringent criteria as the declaration of war.

St Thomas’s first point requires that decisions for war and peace must be taken by a sovereign with authority to wage war. In expanding this point, he makes it plain that only a sovereign, and not private individuals, may wage a war. Unless under proper authority, private individuals are expressly

prohibited from taking up the sword – and in the modern world, that plainly has to include inflicting economic as well physical harm.

The requirement that action must be authorised by a properly empowered authority – in our world, the government (with approval of Parliament), the EU or the UN – must cast quite serious doubt on the legitimacy of various threats and pressures currently being put on companies. Only a properly authorised government, acting under both national and international law, should seek to dictate the actions of companies with investments in Zimbabwe. (A company may of course reach its own conclusions and act on them.) In this context, it is highly unsatisfactory that the Foreign Office should brief the media that it is seeking to put pressure on Anglo American and other investors. The Foreign Office needs, in consultation with other countries, to determine the right course of action and then (with, if necessary or appropriate, the approval of parliament) to give directions.

It is also unsatisfactory that big investors should engage in secret discussions with companies which clearly do cause policy changes; again, the owners of a company may well wish to make their views clear at an AGM, but it cannot be right that a 5% owner use its power to compel action in conformity with some “principle” it holds but is not prepared to justify in public. Such an investor is in effect usurping the power that ought properly to be used either by the owners collectively or by the government.

St Thomas’s second requirement implies a prohibition on inflicting harm on innocent parties and his third insists that those waging war must do so to put right evils, not just take revenge. The second is thus a very serious obstacle to waging war, whether by economic or military means. Lainez, successor to St Ignatius of Loyola as Superior General of the Society of Jesus, developed this point; he argued publicly that it was no longer possible (this was in the sixteenth century) to wage a just war because the injuries inflicted on innocent women and children had become so great. This is an antecedent of twentieth century arguments against

carpet bombing and, later, nuclear weapons. Before commencing economic warfare, we are required to answer the question: “who will be hurt?” There is an obvious application to Zimbabwe. Nobody would, I hope, suggest that a nuclear strike on Harare could possibly be justified – even if it killed Mugabe and his accomplices, it would kill and maim countless thousands of innocent people. Exactly the same criteria apply to economic sanctions. If successful, they would destroy the already crippled Zimbabwean economy, with horrific consequences for innocent people.

Consider this parallel. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1945, Hitler ordered the wholesale destruction of factories, power plants, waterworks and bridges across Germany. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1945, Bormann gave instructions for the implementation of these orders. He also ordered the mass movement of population from areas about to be occupied. The armed services, led by the Chief of the General Staff, Guderian, refused to carry out these orders and worked with Speer to frustrate their implementation by the Nazi gauleiters. The carrying out of these orders, wrote Guderian, “would have resulted in a catastrophe on a gigantic scale.”<sup>6</sup> Guderian was not even put on trial at Nuremberg; and Speer was sentenced to imprisonment, not death. Should the rest of the world seek to destroy what remains of the Zimbabwean economy in order to bring down Mugabe?

How can we move forward? William Hague has called for “examination of conscience”. He is obviously right. Everyone involved – whether a Minister, an MP, the chief executive of Legal & General, the chief executive of Anglo American, the leaders of the opposition in Zimbabwe and indeed all of us as responsible voters and probable economic stakeholders through pensions and other investments – needs to engage in a reflection on what is the best decision that can be made. And implicit in Mr Hague’s formulation is at least a possibility of there being an objectively best decision.

An examination of what is the right course is perhaps a task that should fall to the Commons Business and Regulatory Reform Select Committee.

Its chairman has, as is set out earlier, taken a strong position. This should not present a problem if that position is treated as one of the two alternatives that need to be tested and challenged – the other alternative of course being that (subject to strict audit and transparency) multinationals should be encouraged to invest in Zimbabwe to save its people from the dire consequences of its appalling dictator. Evaluation of carefully-defined alternatives has a precedent in the method of St Thomas – who developed answers to questions by bringing into conflict the strongest arguments for and against a defined position. Taking the two alternative choices and looking at the argument for and against each is suggested by St Ignatius as a way of answering the question what to do in difficult circumstances. Many extremely effective and ultimately persuasive Committee reports have emerged from this sort of process, because the committees have pursued an enquiry into what is the best available way forward, rather than merely seeking a “consensus”.

In our culture, with its high level of disagreement on many ethical principles, it is particularly important that the debate should be in an open forum. The Select Committee system is well suited to that, with its commitment to public hearings. Anglo American, for instance, would obviously have to contribute information, but equally those who call on it to withdraw would have to set out their position – and both sides would be questioned. The Committee could invite the MDC to appear before it.

In conclusion, we might all remind ourselves of the advice that St Ignatius gives right at the start of the Spiritual Exercises: “every good Christian is to be more ready to save a neighbour’s proposition than to condemn it. If they cannot save it, let them inquire how they mean it; and if they mean it badly, let them correct them with charity.” Such an approach will not produce the conflict that makes such a good story for journalists; but it might produce the best available result for the people of Zimbabwe.

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<sup>1</sup> The Times, 24 June 2008

<sup>2</sup> The Times, 27 June 2008

<sup>3</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7482383.stm>

<sup>4</sup> St Thomas Aquinas On A Just War:  
ST IIa IIae Q40.

In order for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged. For it is not the business of a private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Moreover it is not the business of a private individual to summon together the people, which has to be done in wartime. And as the care of the common weal is committed to those who are in authority, it is their business to watch over the common weal of the city, kingdom or province subject to them. And just as it is lawful for them to have recourse to the sword in defending that common weal against internal disturbances, when they punish evil-doers, according to the words of the Apostle (Rom 13:4): "He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil"; so too, it is their business to have recourse to the sword of war in defending the common weal against external enemies. Hence it is said to those who are in authority (Ps 81:4): "Rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner"; and for this reason Augustine says (Contra Faust. xxii, 75): "The natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority."

Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Wherefore Augustine says (QQ. in Hept., qu. x, super Jos.): "A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly."

Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil. Hence Augustine says (De Verb. Dom. [\*The words quoted are to be found not in St. Augustine's works, but Can. Apud. Caus. xxiii, qu. 1]): "True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good." For it may happen that the war is declared by the legitimate authority, and for a just cause, and yet be rendered unlawful through a wicked intention. Hence Augustine says (Contra Faust. xxii, 74): "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such like things, all these are rightly condemned in war."

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS.i.SS\\_Q40.SS\\_Q40\\_A1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS.i.SS_Q40.SS_Q40_A1.html)

<sup>6</sup> Heinz Guderian, Panzer General, Classic Penguin 2000, page 424