

Zimbabwe political & dialogue brief - no. 3

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Several key analysts and internationally acclaimed experts from Zimbabwe and South Africa will provide key insights and analysis of the situation in the country. These analysts can not be mentioned by name as they live and work in Zimbabwe; with the current levels of repression in Zimbabwe by state agencies it is no longer possible to freely express opinions of the nature that will be presented here. Their names are known to the Africa Interactive editorial team.

I. INTRODUCTION

SADC's recent initiative to intervene in Zimbabwe through the agency of South Africa, ZANU-PF's decision to combine parliamentary and presidential elections in March 2008, and its endorsement of President Mugabe as its presidential candidate in the elections introduce new dynamics to the evolving situation in Zimbabwe. They open a window of opportunity for establishing the conditions for free and fair elections in eleven months, ushering in the possibility for a new political direction to help resolve the present crisis and re-launch the country on the path to recovery. However, they could also allow President Mugabe more room for manoeuvre to strengthen his hand and prolong his rule, leading to a drastic deterioration of an already disastrous situation.

ZANU-PF's endorsement of President Mugabe's candidacy for the 2008 elections pre-empted his retirement at the end of his current term in March 2008 and the formation of a Transitional Government of National Unity for the period 2008-10, although time will tell whether this is apparent or real. Under the circumstances, it would be essential to create the conditions for free and fair legislative and presidential elections in 2008 for Zimbabwe to overcome its present political stalemate, economic meltdown and international isolation by implementing a political, security and economic reform programme in tandem with the lifting of sanctions and the extension of an economic recovery assistance package calibrated to progress in the reform agenda.

The fundamental aim should be to bring about radical change in the internal political and economic management of the country so as to ensure democratic governance, rule of law, respect for human rights, and free press.

This brief note seeks to signal the Way Forward in view of the evolution of the situation during a first round of consultations in Harare, Gaborone, Pretoria, London and Brussels. It is intended to provide an update on the positions of the principal actors, a synopsis of the reform agenda, an appraisal of the risk attached to the current situation and recommendations on the way forward.

II. CURRENT POSITIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS

2.1 MDC

In a show of unity, the two MDC factions have adopted a joint strategy outlining a possible way forward to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis. Their joint roadmap presents a set of conditions necessary to hold free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections in 2008. These demands include a new constitution, the repeal of repressive laws, a new voter's roll, an independent Electoral Commission, demilitarization of state institutions, and international monitoring of the parliamentary and presidential elections.

With the launching of MDC-ZANU-PF dialogue under the SADC initiative, the MDC proposes the immediate appointment of a Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General to more directly and concertedly engage the International Community, reinforce President Mbeki's mediation effort

and ensure the success of the negotiation process. Given the less than 11 months remaining before the elections, the MDC wants a specific time frame and clear benchmarks established for the negotiations.

The MDC propounds that any financial or economic stabilization package should be availed only upon the holding of free and fair elections and meeting the conditions agreed by all parties during the negotiations; that the lifting of sanctions should be calibrated to tangible progress made by the ZANU-PF government in implementing the political reforms agreed during the negotiations, paving the way for internationally monitored democratic elections; and that sanctions should not be lifted until after the holding of elections that meet the conditions agreed at the negotiations. In the event that ongoing progress in the negotiations under the SADC initiative is constrained by time, the MDC is prepared to see the postponement of the elections from their scheduled March 2008 deadline to sometime later in the same year.

2.2 ZANU-PF/ Mugabe

ZANU-PF factions have apparently failed to force President Mugabe to retire at the end of his current term in March 2008. Contrary to earlier expectations, it seems that they were either outmanoeuvred or forced to make a deal. Having successfully bulldozed the party's Central Committee's (CC) endorsement of his candidacy, Mugabe currently appears to hold the cards in the succession battle within the party. But, he is also wary of the party factions working to undermine his campaign for re-election in 2008.

In line with the CC resolution, which also pushed for the endorsement of Mugabe's candidacy, the securocrats - members of the military, police and intelligence services with firm struggle credentials - leading the ZANU-PF government and plotting Mugabe's exit are now pushing for constitutional amendments to increase the number of seats in parliament and the senate seats allocated on a system of proportional representation during the next parliamentary elections. The constitutional amendments will also have a clause stating that, in the event of a president retiring, resigning or dying in office, Parliament will elect a new president to serve the remainder of the term. In Zimbabwe's case, if Mugabe wins next year's election and chooses to step down, the new president to be elected by Parliament will serve until 2013.

The securocrats plotting a safe exit for Mugabe and stringing along the SADC initiative to fend off international pressure still want to go it unilateral. They would work to scuttle the negotiations at an opportune time and go into elections with cosmetic changes, such as the repeal of repressive laws, at a very late stage in the process to minimize their impact on the outcome. Under this plan, Mugabe would stand in and win the election and step down in December 2008 at the party's annual conference. He will then call on ZANU-PF parliamentarians to elect his anointed successor, for which Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and Rural Housing Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa are the front runners.

The increase in parliamentary seats is intended to create a strong patronage network to ensure the election of Mugabe's favoured candidate and neutralize the strength of the Mujuru faction and the opposition, if it comes to parliamentary voting. The newly elected leader will then form a government of national unity and lobby SADC, the AU, and the IC to endorse or acquiesce in such a transitional post-Mugabe arrangement.

ZANU-PF's game plan seems to engage in the negotiations under the SADC initiative without conceding to a new constitution before the elections arguing, instead, for its adoption by the new government to be formed after the elections. There is a strong view within Mugabe's camp that they will lose both parliamentary and presidential elections held under a new constitution, leading to the collapse of their exit plan. They would agree to drop POSA and AIPPA at a late stage in the talks, nearer to the elections, aware that such a delayed repeal will be of little material benefit to the opposition.

The danger with Mugabe's plan is that if the constitutional amendments are effected now, they would undermine the SADC initiative agenda in which the issues of the constitution and the elections are at the core. In a way, Mugabe has already signposted his way forward by announcing that he will increase the number of seats in parliament and amend the terms of a new president if a vacancy were to occur before the end of a term.

2.3 ZANU-PF / Mujuru Camp

After being outflanked at the CC meeting, the Mujuru camp has gone back to the drawing board and is working with ANC leaders and other liberation parties in the region to help persuade Mugabe to step down by the end of the year and allow a new candidate to be chosen. Aware of Mugabe's plan, however, they are also working flat out to solidify their support in ZANU-PF structures countrywide and cooperating with Tsvangirai's MDC faction to ensure that they can lead a new breakaway formation if Mugabe pushes an unpopular successor in parliament. They are also keeping in close contact with Mbeki, shedding light on the manoeuvres to derail the SADC initiative underway in ZANU-PF.

2.4 SADC/ SA Mandate

SADC has mandated President Mbeki to mediate the Zimbabwe crisis. Drawing from previous experience in which his initiative was prematurely scuttled, Mbeki is preparing to bring the political actors to the table. He has begun his mandate in a non-structured way. His strategy is to talk to the ZANU-PF government, the two ZANU-PF factions and the two MDC factions on different platforms. He intends to bring the players to the table after formulating a common position on the way forward. Local Government and Provincial Affairs Minister Sydney Mufamadi and Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad will be helping Mbeki while Tanzania's President Kikwete will deal with Mugabe's personal concerns pertaining to the international community (IC) and, critically, with his financial and physical security, if he were to retire.

SADC's initial plan was to pave the way for Mugabe's exit and hold elections without him. But, this was complicated by Mugabe's rush to get endorsement for his candidacy and certain constitutional amendments. He got his candidacy endorsed to ensure that SADC will not ship him out if the issue remained unresolved as negotiations began. Mugabe moved strategically to have a say on his successor if SADC prevails on him to step down. He will then be able to exit under his own terms. Mugabe is selling the idea of wanting to step down after a year if he wins and allow parliament to choose a successor.

Contacts between ANC and ZANU-PF senior leaders are currently underway to try and persuade Mugabe to retire by December 2007 and allow the party to elect another candidate to stand in the elections. This partly explains why the Mujuru camp is lying low at the moment apart from having failed to oust Mugabe at the last month's CC meeting. SADC believes it will be difficult to have credible elections if Mugabe is a candidate. To succeed, the SADC initiative must preclude Mugabe stage-managing the process. The dialogue must produce a new constitution and an overhaul of the electoral laws to create the conditions for free and fair elections.

2.5 The International Community

As a confidential Foreign and Commonwealth Office document signifies, there is already an emerging consensus on a principles-based approach to guide future donor engagement with Zimbabwe and enhance coordination. The principles reflect already adopted regional (AU, SADC, and NEPAD) commitments and approaches to good governance and are consistent with the elements of the reform agenda. They include full and equal access to humanitarian assistance, commitment to macroeconomic stabilization, restoration of the rule of law, commitment to the democratic process, and respect for human rights and internationally monitored free and fair elections. This constructive framework for engagement could enable the IC to leverage the SADC

initiative, contribute to successful negotiations and accelerate implementation of the reform agenda.

III. THE REFORM AGENDA

3.1 Political Reforms

The imperative to end the present crisis, re-launch the state and restore its international support requires undertaking basic constitutional and political reforms designed to ensure free and fair elections in 2008 and establish democratic governance and the rule of law conducive to the political and economic renewal of the country.

Such a reform must include:

- **A New Constitution:**

The SADC initiative must operate to disable all attempts at unilateral amendment and enable the successful negotiation of an accord on a New Constitution. Already available drafts can help speed up its drafting, with the current Parliament ratifying it in time for the elections.

- **An independent Electoral Commission:**

The dialogue must produce accord on the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission to oversee the preparations, conduct and outcome of free and fair elections.

- **Security Sector Reform:**

The negotiations must yield agreement on a comprehensive SSR to demilitarize the state apparatus, depoliticize the security services and democratize the functioning of government institutions.

- **Repeal of Repressive Laws:**

The POSA, AIPPA and all repressive laws must be repealed forthwith to allow all parties equal opportunities and a level playing field in the preparations for and the conduct of free and fair elections.

3.2 Economic Reforms

A national economic and land reform programme, accompanied by the gradual lifting of sanctions and the generous injection of international relief aid and development assistance, would be necessary to lift Zimbabwe out of its worsening economic crisis and put it back on the road to recovery. The economic recovery programme, including land reform, should operate to achieve macroeconomic stability, poverty eradication, food security, as well as rapid and sustainable socio-economic development.

- **Development Assistance:**

Rapid disbursements of development assistance in the form of balance of payments and budget support, linked to macro-economic and monetary reforms, would help reverse currently huge and worsening levels of fiscal and trade deficits and restore general price and exchange rate stability conducive to economic growth and improved well-being.

- **Land Reform:**

A rational programme of land and agricultural reform would help redress the historical injustice of colonial expropriation, address the associated issues of equity and fairness, correct the effects of recent mismanagement, stimulate agricultural production, promote food security and contribute to rural development.

- Relief Aid:

Increased extension of equitably distributed relief aid would provide for emergency food needs, rehabilitation of the poor, displaced or repatriated populations, and the gradual revival of their productive assets.

3.3 International Re-engagement

With the inauguration of a new political dispensation and the initiation of a national recovery programme, the international community (UN, EU, US, IFI, partner countries) should support the process with a comprehensive package of humanitarian, financial, and institutional capacity building assistance whose actual disbursement would be linked to timelines and benchmarks in the political and economic reform agenda. Preparatory work already undertaken by the donor community towards this end constitutes a major step forward. However, continued effort is needed to achieve consensus on the appropriate timing for the commitment and the benchmarks for the disbursement of the resources to ensure maximum positive impact on the negotiations and the reform process.

IV. RISKS ATTACHED TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

4.1 Mugabe Subverting the SADC Initiative

There is a risk that Mugabe could renege on his agreement to dialogue, fail to seriously engage in the negotiations or stall accord on the reforms and ultimately subvert the SADC initiative, as he did with the SA brokered talks in 2004. Mugabe might string along Mbeki for a time, pull out of the talks, and go it alone. He could also allow some cosmetic changes, hold elections, win and promise to retire after a year, handpick a successor to form a government of national unity and try to sell the new arrangement to SADC, African leaders and the rest of the IC. While this process may see Mugabe's exit, it could retain the core structures of an authoritarian ZANU-PF government and win regional acquiescence and appeasement.

4.2 Intensification of Repression

President Mugabe may intensify the ongoing systematic and brutal repression of the opposition in a desperate gamble to cling to power at any cost, thereby nipping the SADC initiative in the bud, with its dire consequences for Zimbabwe and the region.

4.3 SADC failing its Mandate

There is also the risk of SADC's weakening of political will or stamina to vigorously pursue its mandate to effectively mediate the negotiations, unwillingness or inability to make hard decisions at critical moments in the process, acquiescing to ZANU-PF's resistance to any key element(s) of the reform agenda, etc.

4.4 Inadequate International Leverage

The IC could fail to reach a consensus as to the appropriate timeframe for its commitments and the flexible disbursement of its assistance package and forfeit its leverage for change in Zimbabwe, particularly with regards to a possible ceremonial role for Mugabe during the transition.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The IC must support the SADC initiative as a timely opportunity to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis by enabling the ZANU-PF – MDC negotiations to create the conditions for free and fair elections and produce the necessary reforms in the political and economic management of the country designed to ensure democratic governance, rule of

law, respect for human rights, and free press. A pledge to lift sanctions upon the holding of free and fair elections and the inauguration of a democratic government would encourage good-faith negotiations and implementation of the reform agenda.

5.2 The SADC initiative must draw up and declare or discretely pursue a roadmap with a timeline and benchmarks for the negotiations and the implementation of the reforms to ensure transparency and allow for timely intervention of key partners to help resolve obstacles or hiccups that may arise during the negotiations.

5.3 In the event that the SADC initiative fails to deliver due to ZANU-PF resistance or subversion, the IC must intensify all-out political, economic, diplomatic and legal pressure on the regime that can be agreed upon and implemented in concert, including by the region.

For further information see the Zimbabwe Crisis Platform website on http://www.africanews.com/site/page/zimbabwe_crisis_platform