



Situation Report

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Author: Chris Maroleng¹

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Contact: asap@iss.org.za

Zimbabwe's 2005 Elections: Overture or finale?

Introduction

There are now some three weeks to go before Zimbabweans go to the polls to elect a new parliament on 31 March, and most observers agree that the outcome is almost certain to be a comfortable victory for the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). There is also general consensus among the majority of commentators that whatever the official position taken by such observers as are permitted to view the process, “free and fair” elections in the current context are impossible.

These conclusions are based on a number of factors. The organisational weaknesses of the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which has been exacerbated by the party's delays in deciding whether to participate in the elections, is surely an important factor.² The existence of legislation placing severe restrictions upon the political activities of opposition campaigners — such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) — ensure that the electoral process is heavily weighted in favour of ZANU-PF before a single ballot is cast. Even more significant have been increasing reports of political violence and human rights violations perpetrated largely by members or supporters of the ruling party.

This is not to argue that all is well within the ruling party, however. The period leading up to the elections has been marked by open controversy about the future leadership of ZANU-PF, and by public revelations of factional rifts in its ranks. Though such disputes have long been a feature of ZANU-PF's history, their latest manifestations surfaced clearly when President Robert Mugabe was persuaded to adopt the principle that the vacant second vice-presidency should go to a woman, a decision that triggered public reaction from several party bosses. The subsequent selection of Joyce Mujuru to the vice-presidency was widely interpreted as signalling a victory for a party faction led by her husband, retired general Solomon Mujuru, sometime head of the Zimbabwean Defence Force, and a defeat for Emmerson Mnungagwa, who had long been touted as the man most likely to succeed Mugabe in the presidency.

Sources close to the ZANU-PF have reported the infighting to be the worst to have occurred in this party since it came into government and Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980. One other consideration, which is particularly pertinent to this paper, is how the outcome at the polls will affect the balance of power within the governing party. The trajectory of events within ZANU-PF will undoubtedly have more of a direct impact on the path Zimbabwe will hopefully take towards recovery or, worse still, further turmoil and decline, than the outcome at the polls in March.

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The second vice-presidency

By way of explanation, it is essential to provide some analysis of ZANU-PF's internal dynamics, which will provide an insight into the possible political alliances to be forged after the elections. We should also emphasise that while ethno-linguistic and regional factors play an important role in the emergence of internal party divisions, these are by no means rigid and deterministic.

Over the years, and particularly in the light of the earlier conflict between ZANU and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), many external commentators had focussed attention on the care taken by President Mugabe to ensure a measure of power-sharing between the Shona and the Ndebele. This tended to obscure the historical competition within ZANU-PF itself, by factions deriving some of their legitimacy from their association with linguistic sub-groups of the Shona and with their provincial bases.³ Thus, many of the prominent members of Mugabe's inner circle hailed from Mugabe's Zezuru sub-group who occupy the Mashonaland Central, East and West provinces.⁴ Solomon Mujuru, who has seldom adopted a position of public prominence, though he has often been accorded the sobriquet of party "kingmaker", is also of Zezuru provenance.

The contest for influence within the party has also seen another Shona sub-group, the Karanga, playing an important role. Mnangagwa's faction represents the Karanga, who come mainly from Masvingo and Midlands provinces, and the late Eddison Zvobgo also enjoyed much support from among this group.

It was the issue of Zimbabwe's second vice-presidency that provided the immediate issue for a public rift. This post had been left vacant for more than a year following the death of Vice-President Simon Muzenda on 20 September 2003. The advanced age of Joseph Msika, the first vice-president, makes him an improbable successor to Mugabe, thereby increasing the importance of the second vice-presidential post. In addition, Mugabe's announcement in May 2004 that he would not seek re-election in the presidential elections of 2008, added to a sense of anticipation prior to the ZANU-PF conference in December 2004.

It was therefore widely believed that the appointment of the new vice-president would indicate who Mugabe preferred to succeed him and therefore ultimately take over his post in the party and government.⁵ In fact, such an indication "could have prematurely ended the heated succession debate by giving glimpses into the candidate President Mugabe would want to occupy the most powerful office in this country when he retired".⁶ More ominous for the ruling party, was the fact that Muzenda's death had left open a power vacuum in the deeply divided Karanga faction and province of Masvingo where the veteran politician had acted as a stabilizing force, ensuring that infighting in Zimbabwe's most populous province did not get out of hand.⁷

President Mugabe acted very cautiously and refrained from filling the vacant vice-presidential post until the December 2004 party congress, just over a year after the death of Muzenda.⁸ In what has been dubbed "the night of the long knives", the Mujuru faction had stepped up the pressure for a woman candidate at the helm of the party in order to block intra-party rival Mnangagwa's candidacy.⁹

Mugabe's endorsement of Joyce Mujuru's candidacy on the very eve of the congress came as a severe shock for Mnangagwa and his supporters, and they were lured into making a false step. At a meeting in Tsholotsho they came together with other younger elements in the party to frame what became known as the Tsholotsho Declaration, expressing their implied criticism of Mugabe's choice by demanding that a younger candidate replace Vice-President Msika.¹⁰ In fact, observers noted that the Tsholotsho meeting was nothing less than an attempted "palace coup" – one in which all positions in the presidium would be filled by Mnangagwa and his supporters.¹¹

Their temerity was rewarded by the loss of party positions at politburo, central committee and provincial levels, in what may yet prove to be fatal to their political careers. A number of these “rebels” were also subsequently charged with providing confidential information to foreign powers, and others found themselves excluded and sidelined at the primaries for ZANU-PF’s parliamentary candidates. A number of Mnangagwa’s associates also fell victim to an anti-corruption purge in which Solomon Mujuru played a key role at Mugabe’s behest.

ZANU-PF’s war of attrition

The aborted ‘palace coup’ planned in Tsholotsho has opened serious cleavages within the governing party. Most of the prominent members of Mugabe’s inner circle and allied Mujuru faction hail from the Zezuru sub-group while the Karanga, led by Mnangagwa’s faction, have been marginalised. In fact, the Mujuru faction has consolidated its advantage over the Mnangagwa camp by forging alliances with influential Ndebele politicians such as John Nkomo (ZANU-PF Chairman) and Dumiso Dabengwa, former minister of home affairs and former commander of ZIPRA. It has reinforced this bond with reminders of Mnangagwa’s involvement in the Matebeleland atrocities of the early 1980s, the *Gukurahundi*.¹² Further damage was done to Mnangagwa’s faction by adverse press reports about his alleged role in the looting of diamonds and other resources from the Democratic Republic of Congo during Zimbabwe’s intervention in that country’s war, an adventure openly opposed by Mujuru at the time.¹³

Moreover, the anti-corruption campaign launched by the Mugabe government must also be seen in this light. The vast majority of those that have been implicated in corruption scandals were indirectly linked to Mnangagwa, including three directors tied to ZANU-PF companies, Dipak Padya, Jayant Joshi and Manharlal Joshi, who have fled to the UK.¹⁴ In August 2004, the government seized a mining empire owned by Mutumwa Mawere, a businessman who built his business empire with the aid of Mnangagwa’s political patronage. It should also be noted that Solomon Mujuru is a key member of the committee probing ZANU-PF companies.

Apart from Mnangagwa and his supporters, the other casualties in this intra-party war of attrition appear to have been the younger “populists”, attempting to represent themselves as the more youthful revolutionary succession to Mugabe. These include the fiery former information and publicity minister, Jonathan Moyo, the agriculture minister, Joseph Made, and the justice minister, Patrick Chinamasa. This faction astutely exploited its control of the media to wage an unrelenting media war against both the Mnangagwa and Mujuru factions, as well as on Msika, Ntahan Shamuyarira, and John Nkomo.¹⁵ Their marginalisation opens the way for a post-election realignment of the party to adopt a more pragmatic approach to Zimbabwe’s economic crisis, blame for which may then be conveniently diverted from the person of the president himself and on to the malign and self-serving efforts of “evil counsellors”, now uprooted from a party returning to its true liberationist roots. The re-emergence and reappointment of a number of veterans from the Chimurenga years would support this view.

The election of Joyce Mujuru has been hailed as a positive step in grooming a moderate leader as Mugabe’s possible successor, although some view her as “a pawn in men’s political game”. The elevation of John Nkomo (ex-ZAPU and a Ndebele) in the future to replace Msika is considered a consummate step in ushering in a moderate leadership within ZANU-PF, one committed to political and economic reform. Key to all of these developments has been the continued influence of Mujuru over key elements in the armed forces and intelligence communities. His ability to deliver this support, to secure Mugabe’s future and that of his successor, cannot be overestimated.

The South African diplomatic position, described in media circles as “quiet diplomacy”, has surprised if not disillusioned many observers who for one reason or another expected a stronger stance from Pretoria vis-à-vis developments in Zimbabwe. These expectations should not come as a surprise since South Africa's ‘African renaissance’ doctrine places the promotion of “new leadership, resurgent African economies, more democracy and a significant new role for Africa on the world political stage” as the fundamental vectors of this country's policy on the Continent. Former President Nelson Mandela's words written in 1993 are to this effect telling,

“[Democracy] ... is especially important in Africa, and ... [South Africa's] concerns will be fixed upon securing a spirit of tolerance and the ethos of [good] governance throughout the continent. There cannot be one system [of democracy] for Africa and another for the rest of the world. If there is a single lesson to be drawn from Africa's post-colonial history, it is that accountable government is good government.”¹⁶

In line with the *Renaissance* approach and central to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme (a key vehicle of South Africa's foreign policy) is a commitment by African leaders to take joint responsibility for, among others,

“Promoting and protecting democracy and human rights in their respective countries and regions, by developing clear standards of accountability, transparency and participatory governance at the national and sub-national levels”.¹⁷

In fact, NEPAD's own “Democracy and Political Governance Initiative”, whose purpose is to contribute to strengthening the political and administrative framework of participating countries, in line with the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights and promotion of the rule of law, clearly states that:

“It is now generally acknowledged that development is impossible in the absence of true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance. With the New Partnership for Africa's Development, Africa undertakes to respect the global standards of democracy, which core components include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers' unions, fair, open, free and democratic elections periodically organised to enable the populace to choose their leaders freely”.¹⁸

How then can we explain the incongruence that exists between the articulation of principles on one hand and South Africa's approach to the multi-faceted crisis in Zimbabwe? Is “quiet diplomacy” merely a diplomatic nicety to obscure an obvious bias in favour of ZANU-PF – a bias that so strongly undermines South Africa's credibility?

While there may well be obvious reasons why an ANC-led South African government would be inclined to support ZANU-PF, historical links being paramount within this logic, a closer examination of both parties reveals deep seated ideological and policy differences. It follows that if the claims of historical linkages and ideological similarities are insufficient, the reason for South Africa's quite diplomacy must lie elsewhere.¹⁹

What is more likely is that Pretoria's policy of “quiet diplomacy” (constructive engagement more precisely describes South Africa's foreign policy), has been based on the theory that reform could best come from within the ruling party, as the armed forces have clearly positioned themselves on its side.²⁰ Some have in fact suggested that South Africa seeks to use its diplomatic clout to reduce outside pressure on Mugabe while concentrating on encouraging the ZANU-PF to change from within. MDC leaders, especially the party secretary general, Welshman Ncube, who led the MDC negotiating team, tend to support this view.²¹

In fact, it appears that the South African government anticipated that the Mnangagwa faction would ultimately win the succession struggle within ZANU-PF, an assumption that prompted a particular focus on creating avenues of influence within this faction. However, the ousting of the Mnangagwa faction following the Tsholotsho meeting described above, together with the arrest of the South African spy circle connected with the Mnangagwa camp have led to growing mistrust of the South African government by the core ZANU-PF, Zezuru-Mujuru faction. The MDC has also voiced its concern in this regard.

Whether South Africa's foreign policy circles have been able to adapt to this apparently sudden change in the political fortunes of ZANU-PF's party barons remains, therefore, a matter for conjecture.

A measure of reappraisal is probably under way, making for a degree of confusion in the signals South Africa is sending about its attitudes to political development in its neighbour. The recent criticism of ZANU-PF by ANC Secretary-General Kgalema Mothlanthe, the strongest so far from within the ruling party, shows a deep frustration at the course of events and growing discontent with Mugabe's policies within the ranks of the party. Yet, these statements do not necessarily represent a shift in policy, coming across as nothing more than a way of opening the debate within the party about what sort of pressure to be applied to move things on in Zimbabwe. This particular view is reinforced by recent statements by President Mbeki who virtually endorsed (in advance) Zimbabwe's parliamentary poll as free and fair,

...I have no reason to think that anything will happen...that anybody in Zimbabwe will act in a way that will militate against the election being free and fair...

President Mbeki was also asked how this was possible given that Zimbabwe was already contravening SADC's new electoral regime. The president answered,

...I don't know what has happened in Zimbabwe which is a violation of the SADC protocol. As far as I know, things like an independent electoral commission, access to the public media, the absence of violence and intimidation... those matters have been addressed...²²

This has led most observers to conclude that the final assessment of the Zimbabwean polls is likely to be based on political considerations as opposed to a genuine technical assessment of the electoral process (whether based on SADC's principles and guidelines governing democratic elections or not). This being the case, is South Africa's incongruence simply a reflection of its need not to be seen as breaking ranks with a number of heavyweight SADC counterparts?

The constitution agreed at Lancaster House in 1979 provided for a Westminster style system of government, with a prime minister heading the executive and a president as titular head. In 1987, the House of Assembly revised the constitution, replacing the office of prime minister with an executive presidency. In addition, two vice-presidential posts were created in line with the provisions of the Unity Accord. In 1989, the House of Assembly was enlarged to 150 seats – with the president directly appointing 30 of the 150 seats.

In 1990, the government amended the constitution so that future changes to it now require a two-thirds majority instead of the consensus previously needed. With only 120 seats to be openly contested during parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF only needs to win 90 seats to get the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution.²³ The current legislature, which resulted from the June 2000 elections, saw 62 of the 120 contested seats going to ZANU-PF and 57 seats to the MDC. The significance of this will be further discussed below in the sketching of possible scenarios.

The first and most likely scenario is that ZANU-PF wins an overwhelming majority. If ZANU-PF gains at least a two-third parliamentary majority (100 of the 150 seats in parliament), it will be able to amend the constitution without recourse to the opposition. It should be noted that the opposition have stood in the way of possible amendments since entering into the legislature after the 2000 parliamentary elections. Should the governing party achieve the two-thirds threshold it is anticipated that it would use the new parliament to amend the constitution to create a new post of executive prime minister, with Mugabe retiring to a largely ceremonial presidency and serving out his term in this role until it expires in 2008.

The idea of reverting to a largely ceremonial and symbolic presidency has long been mooted, including in discussions with the MDC. This, and the creation of a prime ministership to handle the important affairs of government would be a possible avenue by which to accommodate a continuing role for Mugabe as “Father of the Nation”, while permitting policy shifts to allow for some accommodation with the international community. This would create the sort of security guarantees that would allow the ageing president to gracefully exit the political scene in 2008. While some observers have pointed out that even in this scenario President Mugabe may have no intention of giving up his power to an executive prime minister, pressure from party strong men like Solomon Mujuru may force him into giving in. In this scenario, the retirement of Vice-President Msika and his replacement by John Nkomo could signify the incorporation at the highest level of a more moderate and policy-oriented leadership capable of transforming the current situation in a positive way.

In this scenario, the core Mujuru-Zezuru faction in ZANU-PF will most probably use the post election period to consolidate its position within the party and stabilize intra-party dissension by incorporating members of rival factions into their camp. In addition, this scenario could see a significantly weakened MDC invited into some sort of power-sharing or government of national reconciliation arrangement – strengthened by a two-thirds majority and a re-committed and united leadership, ZANU-PF would extend an “olive branch” to the MDC thereby proving that, it too, is capable of reconciliation. In this way, a post-election ZANU-PF would mollify its critics under the rubric of “the national interest”, though what effect it would have on the MDC’s future as a political party is moot. Nevertheless, there is also the possibility that the ruling party may decide to go it alone, using its majority to definitively crush all opposition, whether inside or outside the party.

The second and most unlikely scenario, for reasons mention earlier in this paper, would see the MDC walking away from the polls with an overwhelming majority of over two thirds of the votes. This situation could very well precipitate a constitutional crisis – it is likely that the MDC, which already has pending court cases challenging results of the 2000 parliamentary elections, would push for a vote of no confidence in the President. If this were to succeed, it would result either in an early presidential election or the dissolution of parliament by the President in an attempt to avoid a vote of no confidence. In the event that the President dissolves parliament we could anticipate the intervention of the armed forces in support of the president and ZANU-PF. This would be in line with the stance the armed forces took prior to the 2002 presidential elections. The manner in which the MDC would react to such an outcome could very well push Zimbabwe into a spiral of unprecedented violence.

Were the MDC only to win half of the seats, this would result in a “hung-parliament” where the opposition would not be able to gain the necessary two-thirds for a vote of no confidence. In this third scenario the MDC and ZANU-PF would use parliament as the “battle ground” effectively rendering this key institution useless. The impotence of the legislature would inevitably result in the executive attempting to circumvent parliament, relying instead on their executive dominance to govern. This scenario could dramatically worsen the democratic

deficit and probably entrench the governing party's autocratic tendencies, while simultaneously locking the MDC into a compulsive reactionary and unproductive cycle.

The final scenario would see the MDC retaining the seats it already has, while simultaneously refusing to recognize the elections as free and fair. This state of affairs would see Zimbabwe returning back to the *status quo ante*, with the ball firmly placed (yet again) in the court of key political players within ZANU-PF. This last scenario would probably create the conditions for the formation of a third political force drawn mainly out of civil society.

One of the striking features of the scenarios presented above is that none of them has the possibility of succeeding without the buy-in of all the key political actors. Therefore, the party that emerges victorious from the March poll may be of little consequence in resolving Zimbabwe's long standing crisis of governance if both ZANU-PF and the MDC are not committed to entering a new phase in their relationship, one which could foster broader positive interaction and policy formulation geared towards recovery.

- 1 Chris Maroleng is a researcher at the African Security Analysis Programme, Institute for Security Studies.
- 2 For a summary description of the various ideologically oriented policy perspectives within the MDC see C Maroleng. *Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change: Briefing Notes, Situation Report*, African Security Analysis Programme, Institute for Security Studies, 3 May 2004. And C Maroleng, *Zimbabwe: The MDC's Electoral Boycott*, in *African Security Review*, Vol 13 No 3, 2004.
- 3 See in this regard S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni. *Dynamics of the Zimbabwe Crisis in the 21st Century*. *Africa Journal of Conflict Resolution*, No. 1/2003. The late Masipula Sithole, in his book "*Struggles-within-the-Struggle*" captured some of the contradictions and ambiguities within the Zimbabwean nationalist movement by saying "African nationalism and the liberation struggle proved to be intolerant of pluralism, dissent and different opinions, and tried to foster a mono-dimensional definition of the struggle based on the interpretation of dominant petit-bourgeois nationalist leadership". In his now famous words, the Zimbabwean nationalist movement was a "revolution that ate its own children", and one where "revolutionary justice" was used to eliminate others. See in this regard M Sithole. *Struggles within the struggle*. Rujeko Publishers, Harare. 1999.
- 4 Zimbabwe has ten provinces: Harare, Manicaland, Masvingo, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Midlands and Bulawayo.
- 5 See in this regard C Maroleng. *Fiddling While Zimbabwe Burns*. ISS Situation Report. 13 October 2003.
- 6 The Financial Gazette, ZANU PF in Succession quandary. 25 /09/ 2003.
- 7 See C Maroleng. *Fiddling While Zimbabwe Burns, Situation Report*, African Security Analysis Programme, Institute for Security Studies, 13 October 2003. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the various factions in ZANU-PF just after the death of Vice President Simon Muzenda.
- 8 Fortunately for President Mugabe, Zimbabwe's Lancaster House-drafted constitution placed no time bound obligation on him to appoint a second vice president. Almost as if adding fuel to the fire, during May 2004 President Mugabe announced that he would not seek re-election in 2008 and might retire before then, adding that he was having difficulty identifying his successor.
- 9 It should be recalled that on 5 September 2004, the ZANU-PF Women's League congress passed a resolution urging that a woman fill the vacant vice-presidential post. Zimbabwe's First Lady, Grace Mugabe, endorsed the resolution, which was taken as an indication the president himself might be supportive. On 22 November 2004, ZANU-PF announced it was nominating Joyce Mujuru, minister for water resources and infrastructural development for the position.
- 10 Under the terms of the ZANU-PF/ZAPU Unity Agreement of 1987, one of the two vice presidents must come from ZAPU (a Ndebele) and the other from ZANU (a Shona). This power-sharing arrangement disadvantaged ambitious Ndebele like the ZANU-PF chairman, John Nkomo, who wants to enter the race for the presidency. Because the second vice-presidential slot is already occupied by a former ZAPU stalwart, Msika, the vacant position was predetermined to go to a Shona.
- 11 In this regard, Peter Kagwanja argues that the Karanga faction, headed by Emmerson Mnangagwa "felt that it is their tribe's 'time to eat' since the Zezurus have since independence controlled most of the national cake". P Kagwanja, *Zimbabwe's March 2005 Elections: Dangers and Opportunities*, in *Zimbabwe: Imagining the Future*, C Maroleng (ed), ISS Monograph, Forthcoming, 2005.
- 12 *Gukurahundi* was the name given to a military counter insurgency operation in the south western half of Zimbabwe against so-called ZAPU dissidents in the 1980s. In this counter-insurgency operation the army slaughtered over 20,000 people in Matabeleland alone. The now disbanded North Korean trained Fifth Brigade carried out this operation. See in this regard Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *Breaking the Silence Building True Peace: A report into the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980 – 1988*, Legal Resources Foundation, April 1999.

- 13 *Mail & Guardian*, "The Fight for Higher Office", 27 August 2004.
- 14 Efforts to extradite them have been unsuccessful. Foes in ZANU-PF privately accuse Mnangagwa of masterminding their exit.
- 15 "ZANU-PF Chiefs in Dirty Media War", *Zimbabwe Standard*, 18 July 2004. This media war has contributed to a disturbing loss of faith in democracy among Zimbabweans, according to a recent study by Chikwanha, Sithole and Bratton entitled "The Power of Propaganda".
- 16 N R Mandela, *South Africa's Future Foreign policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72 No 5, November-December, 1993.
- 17 The New Partnership for Africa's Development, October 2001, p 12.
- 18 Op cit, p 19.
- 19 B Kagoro, The pitfalls of the South African policy of silent diplomacy towards Zimbabwe, unpublished paper, 2003.
- 20 In this regard, the press conference given by the heads of the Zimbabwean armed forces on the eve of this country's presidential elections in 2002 should be recalled. At that press conference, the Zimbabwean armed forces made it clear that they would not salute a president without "liberation credentials" – implying therefore that they would not recognise Morgan Tsvangirai if he won that election.
- 21 W Ncube, *Zimbabwe Compliance: The Litmus Test for SADC Protocol on Democratic Polls*, *New Zimbabwe.com*, 13 August 2004.
- 22 *Sokwanele Press Release*, *Sokwanele's response to statements made by President Mbeki*, 4 March 2005. See also Zimonline article, *Mbeki's Zimbabwe election claims shot down*, 7 March 2005. <http://www.zimonline.co.za/headdetail.asp?ID=9206>.
- 23 The Economist Intelligence Unit. *Zimbabwe EIU Country Profile* 2001.